

The Small but Powerful **Guide** to Winning Big Support for Your Rural Library

Tips and tools you can use from the ALA Rural, Native and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds Committee in collaboration with the ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services and The Campaign for America's Libraries

When Platte County, Wyo., sought a librarian in the early 1900s, its advertisement read:

“Must be able to get along with western people, ride and drive, as well as pack a horse, follow a trail, shoot straight, run an automobile and be able to rough it whenever necessary.”

We suspect Mabel Wilkerson, who got the job, also had to keep her library afloat financially. Some things don't change . . .

You can do it

Securing support is an ongoing challenge for libraries of any size. It can seem particularly daunting in rural communities with many needs and few resources.

But small also can be an advantage when making your case for support. For starters, you probably know everyone in the community and can easily drop in on the newspaper editor, mayor or council leader.

Advocacy is about persuading funders and other decision-makers to give you the support you need. It begins with the people who believe in libraries—you, your staff, board members, Friends, volunteers and users.

To be successful, you must work together to make a clear and compelling case.

You have the POWER. This tip sheet will help you use it.

Three rules for winning support

One

Never assume that others understand what the library does or what it takes to do it. Use every opportunity to educate them.

Two

Ask! Research shows that even people who don't use the library appreciate its role and wish to support it.

Three

Don't do this alone. Your message is most powerful when others speak up for you.

Steps to success

Making your case for support is all about getting organized and focused. The best way to do that is to keep it simple.

The first thing you need to do is clarify what it is you want to happen. Is it a new building? More computers? To ward off a budget cut? Secure a budget increase? The more specific you can be, the better.

The next step is to identify what it will take to turn your goal into reality. What are the library's strengths? What obstacles do you face? What are the opportunities? Potential benefits? Risks?

1. Don't wait for a crisis. Start now.

Advocacy works best when the library has a track record of excellent service and a reservoir of community goodwill to build on. You may not have the nicest building or biggest collection, but you can become renowned for your excellent service.

Greet everyone who comes in the library. Learn to speak the language of those you seek to serve. Promote a sense of ownership with displays of culturally relevant materials. Sponsor literacy, employment and other classes that address community needs. Develop partnerships with other organizations.

2. Build your team.

You will need a core group of supporters to help strategize.

Start with your library's trustees, Friends and/or biggest fans—your users. Try to find people who both believe in the library and are well connected in the community.

3. Make an action plan.

Even if you think you don't have the time, make time. What will your team have to do to achieve the goal? The plan is your roadmap to success. It should identify key strategies and tasks (outreach, publicity, fundraising, volunteers, etc.), deadlines and budget. See the **Small Is Powerful Online Toolkit:** www.ala.org/rural/advocacytoolkit.htm.

4. Have a clear, memorable message.

You will need a simple, powerful message, one that is easy to say and remember—about 10 words. And you should use it consistently in publicity materials and presentations. The more you use it, the more likely people are to “get it” and act.

Examples:

“Our community/college/reservation deserves a 21st century library.”

“Kids need libraries as much as they need schools.”

You will also need three supporting messages or talking points and a few good statistics, stories or examples to build your case.

Success!

5. Target your audiences.

Be specific. Who needs to hear the message? To whom do they listen? It's hard to reach everyone. Identify those whose support is most critical and make them your highest priority. Key public officials, parents and seniors are typical target audiences for libraries. Don't forget to include your internal audiences: staff, board members, Friends and volunteers.

6. Identify strategies.

How will you deliver the message to the people you want to reach? Who will deliver it? Timing is critical, especially if budget cycles are involved. Your action plan should identify specific strategies, a timetable and who is responsible. **The more times and the more ways you deliver the message the more impact it will have.**

7. Practice word-of-mouth marketing.

Good old-fashioned word of mouth is still the most powerful form of communication. But to be effective, it needs to be done consciously and consistently. And it is most effective when others do it for you. Don't just tell people. Ask them to "Please tell your friends."

8. Have an enthusiastic, articulate spokesperson(s).

A message will only take you so far. You also will need a spokesperson who can deliver it with passion, who is comfortable and skilled in that role. That may or may not be you. While you know the library best, it is often better to have a supporter be the front person.

9. Evaluate constantly.

Don't wait until it's over. Keep an eye out for what's working and what's not. Are you getting positive media coverage? To how many groups have you spoken? What kind of feedback are you getting from people who come into the library? Ask representatives of your target groups whether they know about your campaign. Keep a checklist and make adjustments as needed.

10. Don't stop.

Make an ongoing effort to keep your community informed of how the library contributes and what it needs to provide the best possible service. It is much easier to win support when key officials and community members understand its importance and are enthusiastic.

I became the head librarian of a small, rural library in Southeast, Okla., some 14 years ago. When I came here the library had been the same way for years. It was almost a dungeon.

After I got my feet wet and learned a lot about the town and the people, I started to work toward gaining the trust and respect of the area citizens. I joined the Chamber of Commerce and became one of those folks who was always there and ready to help in any way.

In my library I started to talk to all the customers, telling them to have a good day and building friendships with people who visited our library. I made each and every one of them feel welcome.

As time went by and they knew me and knew I was working toward making our library the hub of our community, I started upgrading our library and asking the community to help. They responded and we added a small room on the back of our library.

I applied for and received several grants to host a day camp for children. I partnered with the local Head Start, used their facility and had a record number of participants.

With all of this going, I started a campaign to remodel our library. I visited with local people, merchants, bank officials and various business people. I did indeed win and we redecorated our library. We painted, installed new blinds, carpet, ceiling tiles and did beautiful scenes on our walls. I am so proud of the facility now and to know the people and customers backed me in the whole project. Now I am working on enlarging our meeting room and my long-term goal is a new building.

I am working every day to provide quality library service to a small town with many below the poverty level and many who haven't even used a library. I keep the library in the news and before the public to keep them informed about our library and the programs we are hosting to help the community.

This is life in rural America and I am glad I am here to serve these wonderful customers. Spiro is part of the Southwestern Public Library System. Our director is Wayne Hanway, and I owe him a lot of the credit for my success.

—Glenda Stokes, Librarian, Spiro (Okla.) Public Library

Sample message sheet

Key Message

Our community (town/school/college/reservation) deserves a 21st century library.

Talking Points

- The library is a great resource and a great value for our community. (Benefits)**
 - It's the only place in town where people of all ages go to learn and enjoy.
 - We introduce children to the joy of reading and help with their homework.
 - We save time and money by helping people get materials they need for health, business, leisure and other needs.
- Our library is bursting at the seams. (Problem)**
 - We have people waiting two hours to use the computers.
 - We have to turn children away from programs.
 - People constantly complain about the noise.
- We have a plan to renovate and expand the library. (Solution)**
 - We will create more space for computers and add wireless technology.
 - We will add a meeting room for community groups.
 - We will enclose the children's area, add a quiet area and teen space.

Statistics

- Since this library was built, the number of residents has grown 10 times. The number of library cardholders has grown ??.
- More children participated in the library's summer reading program than in Little League baseball.
- Last year our library users checked out an average of ?? materials. If they had to buy those materials, it would cost \$\$\$??!

Stories/Examples

Last week a man and his wife came in. He had just been diagnosed with a rare health condition. We were able to obtain information and put him in touch with a specialist about 200 miles from here.

One mother told me that the library is about the only place her whole family goes together. She said, "We love family nights. And we can always find something to read. It's the one place we can afford and we all enjoy. I don't know what we would do without it."

Call to Action

We need your support.

- We have an opportunity to apply for a state grant.
- We need to raise \$50,000 in matching funds.
- We ask that you give and encourage our town council, your friends and neighbors to support a bigger and better library for our community.

Words from the wise

Start with service.

"People need to know we will do whatever is necessary to get the information they need."

—David Ongley, Director
Tuzzy Consortium Library,
Barrow, Alaska

Create a welcoming atmosphere.

"I tried hard to woo former customers back and make the library inviting for newcomers. This was accomplished by several things including unlocking the doors well before designated library hours began and encouraging customers to drop in, drink coffee and talk about library services."

—Leslie Langley, Director
Wister (Okla.) Public Library

Do your homework.

"Be prepared to answer questions about costs. Also gather statistics for the use of your library. When people asked me 'Why do we need a library?', I had the statistics to show the number of people who visited our library in a year's time, our circulation, the number of children and adult programs. All this information is needed to sell or market your library and state your case."

—Glenda Stokes, Librarian
Spiro (Okla.) Public Library

Be visible.

"Be a part of the local parades, help at the local food drive (always wearing your name tag that says the library you work for), set a booth up at your local fair, etc....BE OUT THERE! Not just the director... all staff!"

—Jana Ponce-Wolfe, Director
Parker (Ariz.) Public Library

Make the library the heart of your community.

"The library is undoubtedly the busiest place in town. Even though we do not have a community room, several organizations use our small space periodically—writers groups, the Red Hats, literacy training and school tutoring. We conduct three children's programs, host a 1st Friday Adult Lecture each month, and offer free computer classes and periodic art classes."

—Pat Garrett, Director
Capitan (N.M.) Public Library

Reach out.

"I went door to door with a Hispanic widow who had lived there 30 years. By seeing her, residents were reassured I was not the IRS. I handed out flyers in Spanish. How did I know who was Hispanic in town? I used the water meter list from City Hall."

—Jo Ellen Ringer, Librarian
Notus (Idaho) Public Library

Get others to speak for you.

"Find someone who is of importance in the community who is approachable, a 'people person' who supports the library. These people can make a big difference!"

—Melissa Davis, Community Relations Coordinator, St. Clair County Library System, Port Huron, Mich.

Say thank you.

"If anybody donates anything, I send a thank you note, even if the item is going straight to recycling. The day the kindergarten teacher was quoted in the school newsletter as saying that she can always tell the children that go to library storytime, because they start ahead of the rest, I sent her a balloon bouquet."

—Clancy Pool, Branch Manager
St John (Wash.) Library

Telling your library's story

Go where the people are

"It's easy. Use the 3 Bs to get the word out: bars, beauty shops, barber shops"

—Liz Cashell, Director, Henry County Library, Clinton, Mo.

Posters and bookmarks are great publicity tools, but too often they end up sitting inside the library. If your library has a bookmobile, you can use it as your very own traveling road show. Home delivery is another prime opportunity to deliver your message one-on-one. Volunteers may also go door-to-door to distribute materials, collect signatures and enlist other support.

Every library—no matter how small—has many opportunities to deliver its message. Here is a short list. Make your own list and use it to get the message to your target audiences.

- Post office
- Grocery store
- Co-op
- Town/community/tribal or native meetings and events
- Church bulletins
- Football/other sports programs
- Parades
- County fairs
- Community/tribal celebrations
- Parks/recreation centers
- Schools
- Doctors' offices
- Coffee shops
- Restaurants
- Rallies

How to win friends and influence decision-makers

"I try to attend council meetings and give positive progress reports throughout the year, rather than just once at budget time. Rather than whining about how little I get, I thank them for what they give and what they do."

—Rudi Denham, CEO, Stormont Dundas & Glengarry County Library, Cornwall, Ont.

The library must make its case like anyone else.

Legislators, administrators, public officials, tribal and native leaders are bombarded by many competing needs. Your goal should be to make it easy for them to understand and support the library.

Tips

- Don't wait until budget time. Attend meetings. Provide brief monthly or quarterly reports. Call or drop by to chat. Be clear about what you are asking. Link the library's message to their concerns, e.g. poverty, economic development, technology, preservation of native cultures.
- Talk about the library's successes and possibilities, as well as its needs. Provide a fact sheet/other handouts.

- Elected officials listen when voters speak. Get your supporters to speak out at meetings and budget hearings, also church and community meetings. Encourage them to send brief letters based on their own needs and experience.
- Invite decision-makers to the library so they can see for themselves how well used it is, what you do and what the needs are. Also arrange for them to tour other libraries so they can see the possibilities.
- Keep them informed. Maintain a VIP list and send the library's newsletter, annual report and other items of special interest.
- Thank them. In person, in writing—and in public—whenever possible.
- Stay on good terms. Even if they don't support you this time, they may the next.

Speaking successfully

"Be sincere, be brief, be seated."

—Franklin D. Roosevelt

You don't need to be a great speaker, but you do need to be convincing.

Whether you are speaking to an elected official or in front of a group, remember that they are people too with families and constituents who look to them for leadership. Also remember that you are on an important mission—not just for the library—but for everyone who depends on it and could potentially benefit.

Advocacy is about persuasion. To be successful, you need to touch hearts, as well as minds. The best way to do that is to speak sincerely and with passion. Sharing your enthusiasm will spark theirs.

Be prepared to deliver your key message and a call to action, e.g., "I urge you to approve this very important funding." Or, "Please tell your friends and neighbors that the library needs their support."

Tips

- Share real-life stories and testimonials that your audience can relate to.
- Focus on community needs. Use examples that your audience understands, e.g., seniors need large-print books; students need more computers; community groups need a place to meet.
- Paint a positive picture. Talk about the library's successes, not only its needs. Focus on benefits more than problems.
- Open strong and end strong. Look out at your audience and remember to smile.
- Be brief—10 minutes max plus questions.

Basic tools

Make the most of media (whatever that may be)

“Become very good friends with the local newspaper writer. Remember them on holidays and special occasions.”

—Jana Ponce-Wolfe, Director, Parker (Ariz.) Public Library

Newspapers, radio and TV may be few and far between where you live. If so, you will need to look for other opportunities such as newsletters (print and electronic) published by schools, local governments, churches and community groups.

If you do have local media, don't hesitate to approach them. Many newspapers with small staffs welcome news items and columns that you write. Local talk shows may be looking for topics of interest to discuss.

Remember that even very small publications/stations take their role seriously. Whatever you can do to make their job easier will make your job easier.

Tips

- Start by asking them questions. What kind of stories are they looking for? When is their deadline? Do they prefer hard copy or email?
- Expect to be asked hard questions—especially if money is involved. Be prepared to answer and don't take it personally.
- Be prepared to give “sound bites” or “quotable quotes” that make your point, along with examples and statistics.
- Learn how to write a good basic news release starting with the most important information and ending with the least. Use simple sentences and keep it brief.
- Take advantage of letters to the editor and guest columns to make your case.
- Feel free to suggest feature stories about various services, perhaps on a quarterly basis. You may even be asked to write them.
- Send public service announcements to your local radio station. These brief announcements (about 70 words) are aired free of charge for nonprofit organizations.
- Send items to a local columnist to include (“Did you know you can get audio books—for free—at the library?”) or consider writing your own column.
- Remember to thank them—especially for coverage that is above and beyond.

Annual Report

A basic tool for telling your library's story, it should be brief, attractive and reinforce the library's key message. Make sure it gets into the hands of funders and other key stakeholders.

Business Card

Don't forget the obvious. Be sure to include the library's URL and hours. Give it out as often as you can.

Communication Plan

A plan will help you get a bigger bang for your buck. Elements are: goals, objectives, positioning, key message, target audiences, strategies for delivering the message and evaluation.

Fact Sheet

A good way to present key points quickly. Keep narrative to a minimum. Use bullets to highlight key facts/statistics. Shorter is better—no more than two pages. Use with public officials, community groups, reporters or anyone who wants information—fast.

News Release

Newspapers and other media welcome a well written news release and will often run it “as is.” Start with the most important information and end with the least. Be sure to cover the 5Ws (Who, What, When, Where, Why)—and H (How). Keep it short—one page if possible.

Public Service Announcement

Free space for ads may be available from local newspapers and radio stations. Ask about availability and guidelines.

Website/Blog

Both can be useful tools for providing timely information, especially to those who might not come into the library. The trick is to keep them simple and current.

For tips, strategies and more tools, see the American Library Association's Communications Handbook for Libraries at www.ala.org/commhandbook

Get branded

What do McDonald's, Target and Starbucks have that libraries don't when it comes to their public image?

They all have a brand so well known that all it takes is the glimpse of a golden arch, a target or a mermaid for instant recognition.

Libraries now have their own brand—@ your library®—thanks to ALA's Campaign for America's Libraries, a multi-year public awareness and advocacy initiative. It makes sense to tie into this campaign with its growing national visibility. You are free to adopt this brand as your library's logo or use it as you see appropriate.

Here are a couple of examples developed for small and rural libraries. You can download them in the *Small Is Powerful Online Toolkit* at www.ala.org/rural/advocacytoolkit.htm

The heart of your community is

@ your library®
The Campaign for America's Libraries

We're here to help

@ your library®
The Campaign for America's Libraries

You're always welcome

@ your library®
The Campaign for America's Libraries

Turn up the power with partnerships

Getting other organizations to lend their support will strengthen your library's case.

Ask schools, churches, businesses and other community groups for their endorsement. Encourage their members to join in sending letters, testifying before public officials, giving money or other support.

Tips

- Identify potential partners. Which have goals compatible with yours? Which represent audiences you want to reach?
- Pick up the phone. Ask your contact to lunch or coffee.
- Explain what you are trying to accomplish and ask for advice. Be clear about what kind of support you are seeking. Listen.
- Provide a fact sheet/other background materials. Ask what you need to do to move your request along and follow through.
- Be sure to provide updates, thank them and recognize them for their support.

More help online

We know you don't have a lot of time to sit around and read, so we've kept this guide to the point. For more tips and tools, see the *Small Is Powerful Online Toolkit* at www.ala.org/rural/advocacytoolkit.htm

Share your questions, successes, challenges and observations on our electronic discussion list for rural libraries.

To sign up: Send email to listproc@ala.org. Leave the subject blank. In the body type: subscribe rntloak [your first and last name]

Resources

ALA @ your library® Campaign:
www.ala.org/@yourlibrary
Promotion ideas, sample press materials, downloadable artwork and PSAs, tips and suggestions for National Library Week, Library Card Sign-up Month and more. Free and designed to be customized by your library.

ALA Office for Literacy & Outreach Services:
www.ala.org/olos
Click on Rural, Native and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds for advocacy, best practices, publications, funding and other resources.

ALA Advocacy Center:
www.ala.org
Look under Issues & Advocacy for tools and publications to help you advocate for your library, including the "Stand Up and Speak Out for Libraries" Action Kit and Library Advocate's Handbook.

ALA Public Information Office
www.ala.org/pio
Responsible for national promotions including National Library Week and Library Card Sign-up Month; media relations; public awareness; and PIO advocacy activities for the association. Provides tools and resources for libraries of all types, including sample publicity materials in English and Spanish, a Communications Handbook for Libraries, "Quotable Facts About America's Libraries," an Online Media Relations Toolkit and more.

ALA Washington Office:
www.ala.org/washoff
Check here for information on funding and other national issues of concern to libraries. The Legislative Action Center makes it easy to contact your senators and representatives. Also sign up for ALAWON, a free email newsletter.

American Indian Library Association:
www.nativeculturelinks.com/aila.html
Includes a tip sheet and brochure on "What You Can Do to Support Tribal Libraries."

ALA Library:
www.ala.org/library
Check here for resources and assistance in getting information you need.

Association for Library Trustees and Advocates:
www.ala.org/alta
See Issues & Advocacy.

American Association of School Librarians:
www.ala.org/aasl
Look under Issues & Advocacy for information about the @ your library® school campaign, an advocacy toolkit and other helpful resources.

Association of College & Research Libraries:
www.ala.org/acrl
Look under Issues & Advocacy for information and tools to help you promote your library, including the Academic & Research @ your library® Campaign and winners of the Best Practices in Marketing Academic and Research Libraries @your library® Award.

Association of Rural & Small Libraries:
<http://arsl.clarion.edu>
Open to librarians, support staff, governmental officials, trustees, friends of libraries and professionals from other fields.

Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services:
<http://abos.clarion.edu>
Hosted at Clarion University, resources include reports and other publications to support bookmobiles and outreach services.

Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship:
www.clarion.edu/rural
An array of resources on topics related to advocacy and marketing.

Free Clip Art:
<http://office.microsoft.com/clipart>
More than 140,000 images to download, including nature, agriculture, food, plants, people and many more from Microsoft Office Online.

Kids! @ your library® Campaign:
www.ala.org/kids
Check out tools, tips and ideas for reaching out to parents and children with the message "So much to see. So much to do @ your library®." Sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of ALA.

Return on Investment:
http://midhudson.org/admin/eco_impact.htm
One of the easier-to-do formulas for figuring how much money your library saves users. From the Mid-Hudson (N.Y.) Library System.

Small Is Powerful Online Toolkit:
www.ala.org/rural/advocacytoolkit.htm
More tips and tools, including a sample action plan, creating the message, answering hard questions and more.

Smartest Card @ your library® Campaign:
www.ala.org/pla
Look under Issues & Advocacy for the campaign toolkits. Sponsored by the Public Library Association (PLA), a division of ALA.

WebJunction:
www.webjunction.org/rural
Click on Advocacy for a wide variety of tools and tips directed at rural libraries.

What's Your Story?
Find it at the library:
<http://msl.mt.gov/WhatsYourStory/home.htm>
A good example of an ongoing marketing campaign to promote the value of libraries. Developed by the Montana State Library.

Note: Many state libraries have excellent information about advocacy and marketing on their websites.

Contact
American Library Association
Office for Literacy & Outreach Services
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
Telephone 800.545.2433 #4294
Fax: 312.280.3256
Email: olos@ala.org
Website: www.ala.org/olos

This tip sheet was made possible by a World Book/ALA Goal Award.

This tip sheet can be found at:
www.ala.org/rural
www.ala.org/tribal
www.ala.org/native

ALA American Library Association

@ your library®
The Campaign for America's Libraries



ALA's Office for
Literacy & Outreach Services
35 years
Supporting the Libraries of Underserved Populations