

Tips and tools you can use from the ALA Committee on Rural, Native and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds, the Association for Rural & Small Libraries and the ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services

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

When Platte County, Wyoming, 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...

Securing support is an ongoing challenge for libraries of any size. It can seem particularly daunting in small and rural communities with many needs and few resources. But small can be powerful when making your case for support.

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

### **1. Don't wait for a crisis. Make yourself essential.**

Advocacy works best when the library has a track record of excellent service and a reservoir of goodwill with the community. You may not have the nicest building or biggest collection, but you can become renowned for your excellent service. Learn to speak the language of those you seek to serve. 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 or biggest fans. Try to find people who both believe in the library and are well connected in the community. Research shows that even people who don't use the library appreciate its role and wish to support it. Always remember to ask for support.

### **3. 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 will “get it” and act.

*Examples:*

“Our community deserves a 21st Century library.”

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

Develop three supporting messages or talking points and a few good statistics, stories or examples to build your case.

### **4. Target your audiences.**

Be specific. Who needs to hear the message? To whom do they listen? It's hard to reach everyone, so 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.

### **5. Identify strategies.**

How will you deliver your message to the people you want to reach? Who will deliver it? 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.

### **6. 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.”

### **7. Have an enthusiastic, articulate spokesperson.**

A message will only take you so far. You will also 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.

### **8. 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.

### **9. Don't stop.**

Make an ongoing effort to keep your community informed of how the library contributes to the community 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.

## Go where the people are

Every library—no matter how small—has many opportunities to deliver its message. Posters, bookmarks and flyers are great publicity tools, but too often they end up sitting inside the library. Consider these venues and opportunities the next time you want to share your message:

- Grocery store
- Co-op
- Community 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

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.

## Win friends and influence decision-makers

The library must make its case like anyone else. Community leaders are bombarded by many competing needs. Your goal - make it easy for them to understand and support the library.

- 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 fact sheets or other handouts.
- Elected officials listen when voters speak. Get your supporters to speak out at meetings and budget hearings and church and community meetings. Encourage them to send brief letters based on their own needs and experiences.
- 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.

## Speak successfully

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 from library services.

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."

- 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.

### *Words from the wise: 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's and adult programs. All this information is needed to sell or market your library and make your case."*

*-Glenda Stokes, Librarian, Spiro (Okla.)  
Public Library*

- 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...and wait for the questions.

### Make the most of media in all of its forms

Newspapers, radio and TV outlets 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, religious 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.

- Start by asking them questions. What kinds 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.

- Provide ideas for local columnists (“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.

### Build powerful 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.

- 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.

#### Words from the wise: Demonstrate value

“When we wanted our levy to pass, we stuck to our message of ‘the value of the library,’ letting customers know how much each item they checked out would have cost them if they had purchased it and not borrowed it from the library.”

- Susan Pieper, Director, Paulding County (Ohio) Carnegie Library

## Annual Report

An annual report provides comprehensive information on an organization's activities throughout the preceding year. Annual reports provide community leaders and other interested people with information about the library's activities and performance. 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 include goals, objectives, positioning, key messages, 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.

**Key Message:** Our community deserves a 21st century library.

## Talking Points

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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 70%.
- 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 20 materials. If they had to buy those materials, it would have cost \$350.

## Stories/Examples

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.

Technology, especially new social media technologies, have significantly changed organizations' abilities to connect with members of their communities. Listed below are strategies for utilizing technology for the benefit of the library.



### Web Site

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Perhaps one of the most basic but useful technology tools for libraries is a basic library web site. In addition to providing access to collections, information on upcoming programs and directions to the library, the web site can serve as a link to other web-based initiatives such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The essentials for any web site—a phone number, address, contact names (with phone numbers and e-mail addresses where applicable), a calendar of events, a list of services and hours of operation.

For some small libraries, simple is not only better, it's essential. For a simple but effective library web site, consider WordPress (<http://wordpress.com/>) to create a library blog which can be enhanced to create a more robust site for your library. WordPress is easy to update and can be enhanced with plugins for a calendar, submit a question form, request a book form and more. WordPress can even incorporate content from libraries' Facebook and Twitter accounts.



### Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com>

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With over 500 million users, Facebook has become one of the largest communities in the world.

Facebook allows organizations to create "pages" to share their information with Facebook members who choose to connect with them. The average Facebook user is connected to 80 community pages, groups or events.

Facebook pages can be created and managed from a personal account—but only the official representative of an organization should create a page. From a Facebook page, organizations can share news and updates, post pictures and videos, publicize events and cultivate a network of "fans."

Even more important, Facebook users can share information about your page with other users, increasing your reach and expanding your community of supporters.



### Flickr

<http://www.flickr.com>

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Flickr is an image hosting web site that allows users to share personal photographs and host images for use in other social media tools.

Libraries can utilize Flickr to help them share the vibrancy and breadth of activities that take place in a library through pictures.

By uploading pictures to Flickr, libraries can share the library experience with funders and members of the media and easily re-display the photos on the library website and Facebook page or link to them on Twitter.



### Twitter

<http://twitter.com>

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Twitter is a microblogging service that allows users to send and read "tweets"—text-based posts of up to 140 characters.

Users can follow and be followed by other users, creating a network for sharing information. As of 2010, Twitter has over 100 million registered users, with new users registering at a rate of 300,000 per day.

Libraries can use Twitter to connect with followers, sharing information on upcoming events, highlighting new materials in their collections or putting out a call for support. In addition to text, "tweets" can include hyperlinks pointing users to more information or the library's web page—hint: tools like Snip URL (<http://snipurl.com/>) or bitly (<http://bitly.com>) can turn long URLs into shorter URLs that fit into a tweet. Twitter can also help libraries track issues in their community of users.

Technology can be an important topic for library advocacy—both libraries’ need for technology and the public’s use of technology in libraries.

Two studies—the American Library Association’s Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study and the University of Washington’s U.S. IMPACT Public Library Study—provide valuable data that rural and small libraries can use to talk about technology in meaningful and persuasive ways.

The University of Washington’s U.S. IMPACT Public Library Study, sponsored by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Washington State University, released the report, “Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Public Libraries,” in 2010. Among the key findings:

- From 2009-2010, 45% of the 169 million visitors to public libraries connected to the Internet using a library computer or wireless network.
- 44% of people in households living below the federal poverty line (\$22,000 a year for a family of four) used public library computers and Internet access; 61% of young adults (14-24 years of age) in households below the federal poverty line used public library computers and Internet for educational purposes; and 54% of seniors (65 and older) living in poverty used public library computers for health or wellness needs.
- More than 32 million visitors reported using library computers for a variety of educational activities: doing their homework, searching for and applying to GED and graduate programs, completing online courses and tests and even applying for financial aid.

The American Library Association’s Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study report, “Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, 2009-2010,” compiles significant information on library technology use and funding, including data from rural libraries. Among the findings:

- Virtually every U.S. public library provides public access to computers and the Internet, and two-thirds of libraries report that they are the only free public connection in their communities for these services.
- 75% of public libraries report an increased use of public access workstations and 71% report an increased use of library wireless internet access.
- Rural libraries report an average of 9.2 public access workstations, but 55.9% of libraries report that there are fewer public Internet workstations than patrons who wish to use them.

For more information from “Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries,” please visit the U.S. Impact Study page at <http://tascha.washington.edu/usimpact/>.

For more information from “Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, 2009-2010,” please visit <http://www.ala.org/ala/research> and click on “Public Library Funding and Technology Access.”

### Interested in Sharing Information from this Toolkit?

This content may be used and/or adapted by libraries, librarians and other educators for nonprofit training and educational purposes, including the development of derivative works.

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For permission to reuse content for any profit-revenue-generating project, please contact the Office for Literacy and Outreach Services at [olos@ala.org](mailto:olos@ala.org).

## Resources

### ALA Office for Literacy & Outreach Services

<http://www.ala.org/olos>

Click on Rural, Native and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds for advocacy, best practices, publications, funding and other resources.

### Association for Rural & Small Libraries

<http://www.arsl.info>

Open to librarians, support staff, governmental officials, trustees, friends of libraries and people interested in the growth and development of rural libraries.

### American Indian Library Association

<http://www.ailanet.org>

A membership action group that addresses the library needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

### Association of Bookmobile and Outreach Services

<http://www.abos-outreach.org>

Resources include reports and other publications to support bookmobiles and outreach services.

### Small Is Powerful Online Toolkit

<http://www.ala.org/ruraltoolkit>

More tips and tools, including a sample action plan, tips for creating the message, answering hard questions and more.

### ALA Office for Library Advocacy

<http://www.ala.org/ola>

The Office for Library Advocacy provides tools and publications to help you advocate for your library. Includes information on ALA Presidential advocacy initiatives, including Frontline Fundraising and Frontline Advocacy.

### @ your library®- The Campaign for America's Libraries

<http://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 Public Information Office

<http://www.ala.org/pio>

Provides tools and resources for libraries of all types, including sample publicity materials in English and Spanish, a Communications Handbook for Libraries, an Online Media Relations Toolkit and more.

### ALA Washington Office

<http://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 follow District Dispatch, ALA Washington Office's blog, which covers events in Washington from the library perspective.

### Citizens for Libraries: The Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations

<http://www.ala.org/citizensforlibraries>

Information, resources and tools for trustees, advocates, friends and foundations.

### ilovelibraries.org

<http://www.ilovelibraries.org>

Articles, quotes and facts about libraries as well as calls to action and opportunities to get involved.

### Kids! @ your library® Campaign

<http://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.

### Public Library Association

<http://www.ala.org/pla>

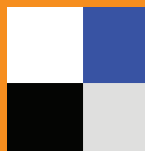
Look under Issues & Advocacy for campaign toolkits and resources for public libraries.

### WebJunction

<http://www.webjunction.org/rural>

Resources, articles, workshop materials and discussions that focus on libraries that serve small communities.

### OLOS Resources on Delicious



Interested in more resources? See OLOS's annotated list of resources on Delicious:

<http://www.delicious.com/alaolos/rural>

# ALA American Library Association

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