

ELECTED OFFICIALS ARE PEOPLE, TOO: PRACTICAL ADVOCACY TIPS

Trustee Training Week – South Central Library System
Madison, WI

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AGENDA

- Regular Policy Review & Communication Is Critical
- Speaking the Language of Elected Officials
- The Importance of Data Use in Advocacy
- Relationships and Community
- Storytelling For Memorable Conversations
- Taking care of yourself/library staff – creating self-care routines NOW
- Create an action step for your library based on today's presentation
- Questions!

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POLICIES

Specifically, library policies approved by the governing body and implemented by staff in order to accomplish the library's mission.

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CORE POLICIES TO REVIEW/REVISE ANNUALLY

- Collections Development policy
- Program and/or Display policy
- Circulation policy
- Patron Behavior policy
- Social Media policy

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PRACTICALITIES FOR LIBRARY TRUSTEES REGARDING POLICIES

- To help make communicating about policies easier for Trustees, consider creating a Policy Matrix (example on the NH State Library LibGuides Censorship page: <https://nhsl.libguides.com/censorship>)
- Don't let policies become the item that is easy to push off to the next monthly board meeting.
- Every trustee should be able to communicate intelligently about the core library policies in place – and the only way to ensure that is to make policy review/revision a regular monthly board meeting task.

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POLL!!

When was the last time your collection development policy was REVIEWED or REVISED by your governing board, with the action recorded in the official minutes?



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COMMUNICATION ABOUT POLICIES IS KEY!

Have you shared key policies with:

All library staff (yes, pages, custodians, guards)
 School staff/admin
 School governing body
 School PTA/Booster Club
 Town/City/County governing body
 Other town/city departments
 Friends/Foundation
 Influential community non-profits
 Other?

Consider a Crisis Communications Strategy or Plan....implement **BEFORE** a crisis

- Who shapes messaging?
- Who is direct liaison with press/public?
- Who creates messaging points for different stakeholder groups (teachers; school admin; library staff; Friends members; Board members)?

ALA Crisis Communication Plan template:

<https://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org/tools/files/content/Crisis%20Communication%20Planning.pdf>

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DATA COLLECTION & SHARING

We need to understand the data and be ready to
 share snippets of the data, but **NOT COMMUNICATE**
ALL OF THE DATA

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KNOW YOUR LIBRARY'S BASIC STATS (BUT ONLY SHARE ONE AT A TIME!)

- Be ready to speak to ANY significant budget changes compared to the previous year(s)
- Understand how the library's overall budget/personnel numbers have changed over the past 5 years (pre-COVID until now), and be able to articulate that clearly and factually
- Don't avoid the controversial issues in your stats – be ready with a plan about what to share if asked. Avoidance usually reads like dishonesty.

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ARTICULATE HOW YOUR LIBRARY FITS WITHIN THE MUNICIPAL BUDGET


- The library is ____% of the overall municipal budget
- The library's annual tax impact is \$____ on an average \$____ family home
- The library's portion of the proposed FY __ tax rate is ____ cents out of \$1.00

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QUESTION/SHARING

How many participants know the percentage of their library budget within the town or county budget?

“The Library is ___% of the overall municipal budget.”



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KNOW HOW YOUR LIBRARY COMPARES TO OTHER LIBRARIES

Use the most recent annual Public Library Data Statistics you can find (HINT: contact your state library to access this data!)

Example: Sort the information to compare your library’s total budget and materials budget to libraries in the same population range as your community.

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SPEAK TO NATIONAL TRENDS

- Library Journal public library budget survey 2023
<https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/research>
- Pew Research Center
<https://www.pewresearch.org/>
(put “Library” in search bar)
- Institute of Museum & Library Services
<https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation>
Ex. – Social Well-being research impacts

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SPEAKING THE LANGUAGE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE

Nothing is worse than two individuals talking about public money and using different terminology or worse – acronyms!!

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COMMUNICATION IS KEY!

Internal communication (Trustees & Director)

- Use an annual Board calendar that includes all of the important municipal-budget related dates
- Have library trustees rotate responsibility for reviewing the latest selectboard/budget committee/school board minutes and reporting back on key issues to whole board.
- [League of Wisconsin Municipalities](#) and [Wisconsin Towns Association](#)

External communication (Selectboard/budget committee with Trustees & Director)

- How is your relationship with the Town/County Finance Director? Ask for assistance calculating the tax impact of the library's budget
- Make sure they are providing your board with the SAME materials that the selectboard/budget committee/county commission will have in front of them about your budget
- DO NOT USE LIBRARY ACRONYMS!

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THE TIME TO UNDERSTAND TOWN BOARD/COUNTY COMMISSION MEETINGS IS NOW!

Questions to ask:

- Regularity of meeting schedule
- Can public attend in-person or by Zoom?
- Are meetings regularly recorded and/or televised? Where are the recordings of past meetings located?
- When is public comment allowed in the meeting?
- Are the by-laws of the governing body posted online OR is the governing body part of state statute?


Resources:

- Your town web site
- Your county web site
- [Wisconsin Open Government Law and Compliance Guides](#)
- [League of Wisconsin Municipalities](#)
- [Wisconsin Towns Association](#)

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POLL!!

If you wanted to speak at a town board or county commission meeting, how are public comments handled?



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RELATIONSHIPS & COMMUNITY

What are the priorities in your community right now and who do you need to develop a better relationship with in order to communicate how the library supports those priorities?

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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS SHOULD BE A PART OF YOUR EVERY WORK DAY

Governing officials:

- Have you every asked to meet with your town manager, selectboard chair, or budget committee chair just to have a conversation centered on what they see the community priorities to be?
- Show that you understand and prioritize the municipal timeline for budgets by not scheduling library programs on important budget dates (public hearings, informational sessions, etc.)
- Watch/attend a governing body meeting that does not have a library agenda item!

Other Community Stakeholders:

- Identify other influential community members to have conversations with about their views (head of Planning board who used to be a selectman? President of the local Rotary/Kiwanis/Lions club?)
- Ask to speak to them to hear their views about community priorities (not to make an ask for support or money)
- After initial conversations, ask if you/your Board could get a few minutes at a community organization board meeting to share library/community priorities

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CHAT TIME!

Who do you need to communicate with in your wider community about how library priorities support community priorities **BEFORE** a crisis occurs?

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STORYTELLING

People do not change their minds due to statistics.
They change their minds due to an emotional
connection with the topic.

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STATS DON'T CHANGE MINDS – STORIES DO

- Start collecting stories from the community, library staff, or Friends volunteers on the impact of your library on community members
- Share one story with your Board at every regular meeting
- Write up a story that resonates with your board so they can share it within their spheres of influence.
- Template: ALA's [YouTube video "How to Tell a Library Story"](#)
- One stat and a story can have more impact than 5 minutes of stat presentation
- [How Stories Change the Brain article](#) from Greater Good Magazine
- [How Stories Connect and Persuade Us](#) from NPR

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TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF / YOUR STAFF

Create self-care routines for you/your staff
BEFORE a crisis occurs

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HOW CAN YOU REFILL YOUR CUP DAILY?

For Library Staff:

- Talk about the “what if”...what if a reconsideration form is submitted and it blows up on social media in the middle of your budget process, with patrons asking about it at the desk? How should that be handled? What do you want staff/trustees to think about NOW before that occurs?
- Brainstorm ways to support each other. This will look different for each person/group, and the only way to find out is to talk about it – either as a trustee group or encouraging your director to have the library staff talk about it together.

For You:

- Create a written reminder about why you love your role and put it in a prominent place in your living space/office.
- Solicit a friend to be “on call” if a crisis occurs for you related to the library. That way you have someone to call who is not associated with the library to listen so you can vent.
- Schedule in time each week to do the one thing you love to do in your library role. For most leaders, this only happens if you intentionally schedule time for it.

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PUT INFORMATION INTO ACTION!

What is one actionable take-away from this presentation that you can do for you/your library in the next week to two weeks? Be brave and share - the best inspiration usually comes from our colleagues 😊

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CONTACT ME!

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