

ADVOCACY INSTITUTE AT ALA MIDWINTER MEETING 2008 REPORT

For the first time, I attended the American Library Association (ALA) Midwinter Meeting held in Philadelphia, PA. On Friday, 1/11/2008, I attended the Advocacy Institute Pre-Conference which was coordinated by the Office for Library Advocacy and the Advocacy Institute Task Force of the ALA Public Awareness Committee, in cooperation with the Public Information Office, the Association for Library Trustees and Advocates, the Chapter Relations Office, the Committee on Legislation and Friends of Libraries USA. Below is a summary of the presentations throughout the day:

Carol Brey-Casiano, Director of the El Paso (TX) Public Library, spoke of their advocacy efforts at El Paso and covered a number of points summarized below from "The Advocacy Action Plan Workbook," which was distributed at the meeting. The entire booklet is available at:
<http://www.ala.org/ala/advocacybucket/workshopguidefall06.pdf>.

Determining the key issues and setting your goals

Creating strategies for developing your message

Know your audience:

- What groups are most supportive of the library?
- What key decision-makers would you like on your side?
- What other groups do you want to reach with your message?
- Why are your issues important to them?

Determine your key message:

- What is the most important thing you want others to know?
 - The key message should be:
 - Something you can say in conversation, interviews or presentations
 - Easy to say—no more than 15 words
 - Used consistently
 - Created with the audience in mind to spark a feeling

Develop your talking points:

- What examples support your key message—use at least 3 stories

Coalition Building was addressed by Peter Pearson, Executive Director of the Friends of the St. Paul Public Library. He spoke about their grassroots efforts which led to the creation of the Saint Paul's Friends group and library foundation. Here are the main points that impressed me from Mr. Pearson's presentation:

- √ Develop a work plan for advocacy – know who's going to do what
- √ Library Director, staff, trustees, and friends all need to advocate for the library—but best resource to tap for advocates is the friends group.

- √ All advocacy efforts should be done under the approval and guidance of the Library Director.
- √ Local officials and other legislators need to hear a united voice.
- √ Know your officials and, if possible, have one contact for each.
- √ Know your budget process so you can start early to spread your message.
- √ Most officials and legislators read their local newspapers—use them to get your stories out.
- √ When giving public testimony, have different speakers express the message from different angles.
- √ Overall, advocacy needs to be methodical and constant and is a long-term process.

Marci Merola, Interim Director, Office for Library Advocacy, ALA; and Megan Humphrey, Manager, Campaign for America's Libraries spoke about how promoting the library and creating public awareness is fundamental to advocacy. There are a variety of methods available via the ALA website and below are some samples:

Strategies for Getting the Message Out

Basic Tools: Newsletter; website; promotional materials (i.e. bookmarks, book bags, program flyers, membership materials); newspaper articles, letters to the editor, op-ed pieces; radio; television coverage; presentations. See all these tools as relationship building opportunities.

Website Tools:

ALA Advocacy Tools & Publications:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issues/toolsandpub/toolsandpub.htm>

Campaign for America's Libraries – see PR Tools & Resources:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/pio/campaign/campaignamericas.htm>

Facts & Figures for Libraries in general:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/ors/statsaboutlib/statisticsabout.cfm>

Lobbying Tips

The afternoon session consisted of breakout groups, and I attended the one regarding Lobbying which was moderated by Sally Reed, Friends of Libraries USA (FOLUSA) and Andy Bridges, Communications Director, ALA Washington.

Meet with the person who can make a difference

Tie in your issue to the issues that are important to them and let them know your issue is important to their constituents.

Where possible, offer a match to the money you are asking from them.

When meeting with legislators, leave an in-depth packet of information with an Executive Summary on top of the key points. Be sure to include real life stories or any newspaper articles to support your point.

Always follow-up a meeting with the legislators by calling or sending a letter to thank them for their time and seeing if there are further questions.

Faxed messages are most effective with legislators!

Try to make your legislator look good.

Overall, the Advocacy Institute was worth attending and full of information that will prove helpful as we continue to develop our Advocacy program at WLS.

Respectfully submitted,

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