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EVERY MEMBER AN ADVOCATE

THIS MEANS YOU!

Your guide: ten steps to successful advocacy

During 2010, ALIA has been running free (for members) *Every Member An Advocate* workshops around the country. Events have taken place in Adelaide, Brisbane, Cairns, Canberra, Darwin, Hobart, Melbourne and Sydney, and the last three workshops will be held on 15th and 16th of November in Perth.
Sue McKerracher of The Library Agency has presented these workshops for ALIA. Here she summarises her top ten steps towards successful advocacy for your library.

1 Think about it

We're all driven by our 'to do' list and something like advocacy is often well down the page. We don't make time to develop our advocacy plan because there are so many more pressing issues with fixed deadlines attached. So, the first thing we need to do is to make time to think about advocacy and to set out a simple plan. If you're on your own in a special library, this has to be a solo activity, but it is so much better if you can gather a group of colleagues and work on this together. Here's a starter list of questions to ask yourself:

What position would you like to be in three years from now?
For most of us the answer would be something along the lines of "secure, valued, well-funded".

What position are you starting from?
Think about a scale from under-funded, under-valued and insecure through to well-funded, valued and secure. Where are you currently on that scale? This will give you a sense of how much ground you have to make up.

What are the obstacles you face?
These could include individuals who don't understand what you do, the organisation and the challenges it faces, and the wider political, economic, social and technological landscape (otherwise known as a PEST analysis).

What are the opportunities and factors in your favour?
Again, these could be PEST-driven, or they might include a supportive management team, an expanding organisation and a growing need for library and information services.

From this you can derive the 'who, what, where, when, why and how' which will be the basis of your advocacy plan. It helps to keep a record, but don't feel you have to write a weighty document. Keep the paperwork to a minimum and your plan short, simple and achievable.

2 What will make people sit up and take notice?

We know what a great job library and information professionals do, but we can't assume that there's a universal understanding of the need for, and benefits of, libraries. Non-users are likely to think of library and information services in terms of books. They are less likely to think of librarians gathering the latest information for researchers in so many specialist fields – health, government policy, the law – and they are unlikely to be aware of the savings to the organisation, for example by negotiating subscriptions to journals and e-resources through the library.

Motherhood statements about providing information and knowledge, inspiring creativity, and promoting social inclusion are good and true, but for advocacy purposes, they need to be supported by some convincing facts.

3 Gathering the evidence

Ideally, you should develop messages to demonstrate that people like the service you provide, that they use the service you provide, and that this delivers a positive financial benefit to the organisation or the community, even taking into account the cost of providing a library and information service.

We need to find creative ways of proving that library and information services provide a good return on investment in order to protect our current position and improve our security of tenure in the longer term.

It will be no news to anyone that people in general think libraries are a good thing, but that doesn't cut much ice with an organisation that is looking for

There are

1480+
public library service points

That's nearly twice the number of McDonald's restaurants in Australia

ways to cut costs. If your evidence is based on feel-good statements, it is time to consider gathering some hard facts to support the fact that you are indispensable and worthy of further investment.

The good news for public libraries is that a great deal of work has been done in the area of assessing economic value, and it is reasonable to state that public libraries return at least $3 for every $1 invested in them. Find more information about this on the ALIA website **http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy**.

There are also reports about the economic return of academic libraries. One of the latest and most comprehensive from the Association of College and Research Libraries in the US can be found here **http://www.acrl.ala.org/value/**. However, special libraries are so individual that each has to find its measure. One of the ways that has emerged out of the *Every Member An Advocate* workshop is for library and

9.9 million,
nearly half the population of Australia, are library members

information professionals to ask library users how much time they have saved them by finding the necessary documents and references. In a health situation, for example, the time and cost saved could equate to the employment of a full-time nurse.

4 Creating collateral

Just as it is important to document your advocacy plan, it is also important to note down your evidence and turn it into useful materials. Create a fact sheet and use this as the basis for a script for you and your colleagues for any presentation opportunities you may have. Develop an 'elevator pitch' – a 15-second description of your library and information service that will impress any senior people you find yourself next to in the lift, or the coffee queue. Attach the fact sheet (updated as necessary) to every appropriate report and budget submission. Also draft a 'boilerplate', a single paragraph summary with links and contact information that can be used as the sign off for any letter or document. This is ALIA's media release boilerplate:

Australian Library and Information Association

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional association for the Australian library and information services sector. It seeks to empower the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. ALIA represents the interest of 6,000 members, the profession and Australia's 12 million library users.

http://www.alia.org.au

It's said that people need to hear the same thing six or seven times before it sinks in, so don't be afraid to repeat yourself.

5 Friends and supporters

Advocacy works best if there are a number of voices all saying more or less the same thing. This carries so much more weight than a lone voice.

Library users can provide an army of advocates, and recent retirees from the senior management team are often vocal allies, no longer confined by the constraints of employment within the organisation.

What works especially well is to have unexpected and influential partners in place. ALIA has done exceptionally well in collaborating with Google and Yahoo! to form the Safer Internet Group to lobby against ISP-level internet filtering. By sourcing partners outside the library and publishing world, the Association has achieved considerable impact with government.

An added advantage is that friends and supporters are often better placed to make use of social media to advocate for your library. Where you and your colleagues may be barred from setting up a Facebook account or blogging and tweeting about the library's achievements, your users won't face the same restrictions.

6 Making your case

Ask your friends and supporters to provide some evidence of their interest in and commitment to your library online, through social media, and in the real world with letters and quotes which they are happy for you to include in reports, grant applications and budget submissions.

Record positive comments from library users about the benefits to them and their satisfaction with the service, and pepper these throughout reports, add them to posters and notices, feature them on your web pages.

Use your email signature to let people know what's happening in the library and how well you are performing. If the email signature itself has to be in a house style, there should still be nothing to stop you adding a line of type as part of the sign off after your name.
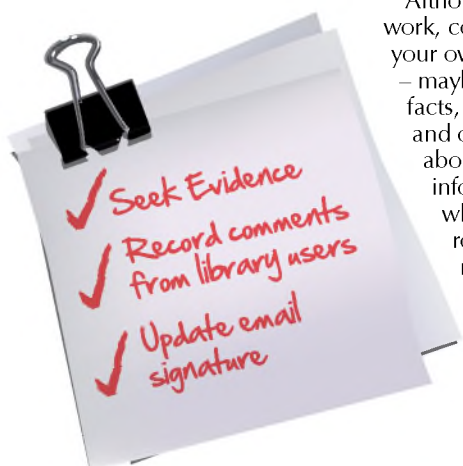
Although it is extra work, consider producing your own annual report – maybe eight pages of facts, pictures, quotes and other information about your library or information service, which you can send round to the senior management team and distribute to other important influencers.

✓ Seek Evidence
✓ Record comments from library users
✓ Update email signature

7 A calendar of events

Advocacy is about being visible, and a lively calendar of events is one way to achieve this. ALIA provides a series of opportunities during the year, such as Library Lovers' Day and National Simultaneous Storytime. Library & Information Week in May is a flexible event that can apply to any library and information setting.

While ALIA-initiated occasions can form the backbone of your calendar, it's important to consider the agenda of your target audience. If there is a special anniversary, a high profile visit, or the launch of a major initiative, help celebrate it in your library. Show the organisation, council or government department that you support their strategic goals.

These events provide a useful opportunity to persuade people who don't usually come into the library to pay a visit and it's far easier to impress non-users when you have them on the spot than it is at a distance.

AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC LIBRARY FACTS

- 1402 public libraries
- 78 mobile libraries
- More than 110m library visits
- More than 9.9m library members - 46% of the population
- Nearly 41.5m items to use and borrow
- More than 11,600 computers for public use

It costs $882.3m to run Australian public libraries but they return at least $2.6b-worth of community benefits.

WA
232 public libraries
More than 9.5m library visits
Nearly 1m library members – 43% of the population

NT
33 public libraries
More than 1.2m library visits
Nearly 70,000 library members – 31% of the population

QLD
324 public libraries
19 mobile libraries
More than 18.8m library visits
Nearly 2m library members – 45% of the population

NSW
372 public libraries
23 mobile libraries
More than 37m library visits
More than 3m library members – 45% of the population

SA
136 public libraries
7 mobile libraries
More than 11.9m library visits
Nearly 1m library members – 56% of the population

VIC
251 public libraries
27 mobile libraries
More than 28.1m library visits
More than 2.5m library members – 47% of the population

TAS
46 public libraries
More than 2.7m library visits
More than 142,000 library members – 28% of the population

ACT
8 public libraries
2 mobile libraries
More than 1.6m library visits
Nearly 172,000 library members – 49% of the population

EVERY MEMBER AN ADVOCATE

8 Using the media

Many of the library and information professionals who attended the *Every Member An Advocate* workshops were unable to speak to the media, but if you are in the more fortunate position of being able to send out press releases to newspapers and online publications, it's a good way to raise the profile of your library.

You can also contribute to *inCite* and other library sector publications and it is good to be proactive with any internal newsletters and journals. In-house editors are usually only too pleased to have volunteers submitting news items and features.

The printed word still has incredible power so use the available media to advocate for your library.

9 Securing your advantage

While advocacy is a fairly subtle activity, it is possible to be too diffident and leave people unclear about what it is you are trying to achieve. Don't be afraid to be open about your long term aims and state them clearly at the appropriate moments. For example, at the end of a presentation you might ask a direct question, "I set out to show you the value of our library and information service. Have I done so?" It gives you some idea of how far you have gone along the scale towards your desired outcome.

10 Don't confuse advocacy with lobbying

In this feature, we have talked about advocacy rather than lobbying. The two are often mentioned in the same sentence, but they are different and require a different approach and tone of voice.

Advocacy is the continuous process of promoting positive messages about your library and information service. It is something that never stops. Lobbying is a much more specific activity, within a defined period, with a clear goal in mind.   The important thing to remember is that great advocacy creates a strong platform for lobbying initiatives.

For more advice, information and resources, go to **http://www.alia.org. au/advocacy**

How do public libraries compare?

Virtually every library has computers for public use, most offer internet access, and nearly all provide at least one form of IT training or support.

There are more visits to the library than there are trips to the cinema

109.6 million

84.7m cinema admissions in 2007, compared with **109.6m** library visits in 2007-2008

If tou're looking for a film for the night there are 290 blockbuster and 430 video ezy stores, compared with more than 1400 public library branches.

That makes them the primary source of online access for people without internet connections at home, school or work.

Annual public library expenditure per capita (excluding materials – new books, DVDs, etc) averages $34.98 – that's less than a family would spend on a trip to the movies