

# THE 10-STEP APPROACH TO LOBBYING THAT REALLY WORKS



Over the last 12 months, ALIA has been involved in lobbying campaigns for government, public and TAFE libraries across Australia. We have been told that our involvement has had positive benefits, and in two cases – both NSW public libraries – we have clear evidence that our 10-step approach to lobbying really works.

In the case of Rockdale City Council, in February, the presence of ALIA members in the Council chambers at a crucial vote about the future of a brand new library helped ensure the \$16 million development would go ahead – by the slim margin of seven votes to six. In the case of Goonellabah Library, part of Richmond Tweed Regional Library, in June, the actions of ALIA members in support of the community helped avert the closure of this small but highly valued community asset.

Here's how we developed our 10-step approach to the threatened Goonellabah library closure, in the hope that this will show how straightforward lobbying can be.

## Step 1 – Find out what's happening

We were alerted to the situation in Goonellabah by two highly active ALIA members in the region. We'll avoid using names here, but once we knew that the library was under threat of closure, we checked the newspaper coverage and social media stream, spoke to local contacts and talked to senior library leaders in NSW. They told us that if Goonellabah library were to close, it would be the first time in more than 15 years that a public library in the state would have shut its doors without an alternative opening in its place.

We checked our facts. For example, we looked at local bus timetables and worked out how long it would take someone to travel from Goonellabah to Lismore (the nearest library) by public transport. Checking maps and images gave us more insight than simply reading the text on the page. We found out about the council's community plan, the objectives of which seemed to be directly opposed to the closure of the library. We also looked at what was happening around the area, and noted that nearby Byron Bay had opened its fabulous new public library only a few months before.

## Step 2 – Script the basic story

This initial investigation told us what was happening. It also gave us the issues in a broader context and explained how closure would not only affect the local community, but also potentially impact on other libraries, where councils were looking to make significant spending cuts. We were then able to put our script together – the issues, how they affect the local community, how they affect other stakeholders and therefore the Association's position.

## Step 3 – Develop key messages

Our key messages for Goonellabah were:

- The saving isn't worth it – "all for an annual saving of \$84 000, less than 1% of Council's multi-million dollar budget".
- It goes against the community plan – "if the council truly wants a safer, happier, more inclusive community, it should look to invest in its library, not close it down".
- The community needs the library – "Goonellabah has high levels of disadvantage and low literacy levels", "it may well be senior citizens who take the biggest hit – and more than 15% of the population is over retirement age".
- Council has funds – "Council has spent a significant sum on scoping the redevelopment of Lismore Park – a distant pipedream – while proposing to close a much valued community facility".
- This is an investment for the future – "just at the point when new families are moving into the area, it would remove a vital part of the community infrastructure".
- This is not only a local issue, it affects the whole of NSW – "if Goonellabah library were to close, it would be the first NSW library in more than 15 years to shut its doors without a new library opening to take its place".

## Step 4 – Map the audience

The local community was lobbying hard and had set up a petition through change.org. One of the councillors who opposed the closure had established a Facebook site. The *Northern Star* newspaper was following the story closely and was clearly aligned with readers who wanted the library to remain open. The councillors were divided, with five opposed to the closure and six in favour. We made contact with several of the councillors who wanted the library to stay open, to let them know that we would be adding our voice to the community lobbying.

## Step 5 – Build the platform for the call to action

We had just released a story about libraries being a better investment than gold, based on a return on investment study funded by state libraries and public library associations around Australia. This gave us the figure of approximately \$3-worth of community benefits for every \$1 invested.

Our call to action was based on the community's existing mechanics. "If you would like to help save Goonellabah library, sign the petition and visit the Facebook page; attend the Extraordinary Council Meeting on Tuesday 25 June, commencing 6pm, in the Council Chambers, 43 Oliver Avenue, Goonellabah".

## Step 6 – Put this all together in a campaign strategy

We had a campaign strategy with a timeline, key dates and plans for escalating the activity if that proved to be necessary. At all times, we were in touch with library colleagues in the surrounding area to make sure that our involvement helped rather than hindered an outcome that would be positive for the community, the state, and for our profession.

## Step 7 – Develop materials

From the return on investment study, we had an infographic (right) which we used to good effect. We developed a media release and an open letter to the Mayor, which also acted as our submission to the council consultation.

## Step 8 – Develop opportunities

We contacted the council and arranged to speak at the meeting on 25 June. We prepared a script to be delivered at the council meeting and we took copies along to the meeting to give to the two journalists who were covering the story at the media table.

## Step 9 – Implementation

Our media release and open letter to the Mayor generated coverage in the *Northern Star* and also led to interviews with several local radio stations. The media interest was an important factor in persuading councillors that the closure of the library was overwhelmingly opposed by the community.

Our speech at the council meeting appealed to councillors' commitment to the community, "Once a library has closed, it is a thousand times harder to reopen it. Imagine your successors sitting here in this Council chamber





in 10 years' time, with the equivalent of a \$6 million dollar proposal in front of them for a new library. How are they going to find the cash? What are they going to say about the councillors before them, who closed the library and made its resurrection nigh on impossible?

"I would ask you to think about your legacy to this community. When you leave office do you want to do so knowing that you have helped support and keep open a vibrant community hub? Or do you want your legacy to be: seniors isolated in their own homes, young people with nothing better to do than hang around the shops, and young children denied the basic literacy building blocks they need to succeed in later life."

## Lobbying isn't rocket science.

to review our approach and learn from the experience. For example, the community's change.org petition was a great way to garner support and we'll definitely factor that into our future lobbying activities. It also reinforced the fact that successful lobbying is all about Association members working together, because together we are definitely stronger and more confident than we would be individually.

You can see from this very topical example that lobbying isn't rocket science. It requires energy, clarity, confidence and a dash of psychology, but ALIA members have all of these things. Lobbying is another example of how membership of the

Association makes a positive difference.

We would love to hear about your advocacy success stories. Please let us know if you have a story you would be willing to share with other members at [advocacy@alia.org.au](mailto:advocacy@alia.org.au).

### Step 10 – Monitor and evaluate

The Goonellabah library closure was averted and we joined in the celebrations with local community representatives, but we have also taken the opportunity

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