



**Vermont  
Library  
Association**



# From Advocate to Activist

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Vermont Library Association 2021

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EveryLibrary



## EveryLibrary | 501(c)4 Political Action Committee

- Election Days and Negotiations
  - Support for Legislative Agendas
  - Outreach and Activism to the Public
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## EveryLibrary Institute - 501(c)3 Research and Policy Think Tank

- Research Agenda
- Training Programs
- Programmatic Partnerships and Coalitions



Vermont  
Library  
Association



# *Taking Inventory*

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What Inspired or Moved  
You at VLA 2021?

While I am not on the committee....

- How do we want to treat people?
- What kind of place do we want to live in?
- What are library-shaped solutions to problems?
- How can our libraries and our association anticipate and create the new / next normal?

## *VLA 2021 Conference Agenda*

What are your (personal and professional) hopes?

- Put Our Ethical Principles into Action
- Create More Interesting Libraries
- Help People Thrive
- Support Prosperous Places
- Stop Duplicative Services
- Make Something New and Wonderful

*Understanding  
Your Own Agenda*

- Coming through COVID, policymakers, elected officials, voters, and philanthropic funders want to see their money go to effective programs and competent staffing in ways that deliver results.
- They want to support programs and projects that can be measured and justified through data as well as stories.
- They are looking for the right way to apply funding and resources - whether taxes or philanthropy or grants - to solve problems.

*What Funders  
Want Now*

- Austerity mindsets lag economic growth
- Highly volatile budget situations lead to conservative spending plans
- The “One Time Money” excuse
- Town and campus budgeting was never rational before COVID....

## *Disrupted Budgets and Noisy Political Processes*

What do you want to change?

What do you want to create?

And how do you pay for it?

*Inspired to Act*





# *Inspired to Act*

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What Do You Want to Get  
Funded?

# *Advocacy or Activism*

A Theory of Change model for  
library leaders

- Most library trainings and seminars conflate advocacy and activism - to the detriment of both.
- Advocacy is a long game.
- Activism is quick.
- Understanding what you want to accomplish should drive your approach.

# *Theory of Advocacy*

If your advocacy framework  
assumes an adversarial situation  
then you have a real problem.

- Education
  - What are libraries capable of today?
- Orientation
  - Who are librarians and library workers today?
- Ideation
  - What could a shared solution look like?
- Identification
  - What resources do we need in place to authentically collaborate?
- Activation
  - When will we both commit to a collaboration?

## *Advocacy is....*

A process that creates partnerships and coalitions around a common cause or concern.

Advocacy is a long-game.

It is focused on building relationships through an understanding a shared-values framework, purposefully aligning missions, and finding ways to realize a common vision for either people or a place.

# *Theory of Activism*

If you are not willing to be focused on your own self interest or use an active voice, all you are is hopeful.

- Based in Shared Values
  - It affirms or offends a belief
- Focused on Shared Identity
  - It builds community
- Has Integrity
  - It is honest in its motivation and authentic in its goals
- Directs Activity
  - It uses verbs and speaks in the first person
- Organizes Supporters
  - It identifies, cultivates, and empowers

## *Activism is....*

Strident actions that ask for -  
and expect - a change.

Activism is quick.

It is intended to move people who are otherwise inactive or unaware about an issue or idea into action by eliciting a personal response based on a shared values-system, an ideology, or a shared identity.



# *Political Frames*

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What Do You Want to Get  
Funded?

Funding for libraries is a political decision.

Directly or indirectly, how we choose to tax ourselves and what values are expressed in our budgets, policies, and programs are fundamentally political in nature.

*Political Decisions*



## Three Political Narratives

- Progressives
- Conservatives
- Libertarians

"Three Languages of Politics" by Arnold Kling

*The stories we like  
to tell ourselves*

My heroes are people who have stood up for the *underprivileged*.

The people I cannot stand are the people who are *indifferent* to the oppression of women, minorities, and the poor.

*Progressive*

My heroes are people who have stood up for *Western values*.

The people I cannot stand are the people who are *indifferent* to the assault on the moral virtues and traditions that are the foundation for our civilization.

*Conservative*

My heroes are people who have stood up for *individual rights*.

The people I cannot stand are the people who are *indifferent* to government taking away people's ability to make their own choices.

*Libertarian*

What happens when you are variant from or at odds with your audience, your funding partner, or your decision-maker?

*You and your team*

*vs.*

*you and your audience*



# *Supporters and Partners*

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What Do You Want to Get  
Funded?

## *How people listen*

Four ways that people are wired to care about... anything.

- Compassionately Engaged
  - Populations and people
- Pride of Place
  - Interesting, thriving, and prosperous
- The Data Shows It
  - Data about outcomes as lens
- Concerned or Fearful
  - Focused on filling gaps

# *Why people listen*

Four factors that build parties and movements

“The Political Brain”  
by Drew Westin (2008)

- Shared Values
  - Does the campaign or candidate align with my deeply-held belief(s)?
- Shared Identity
  - Does the campaign or candidate represent me in some way?
- Personal Characteristics
  - Do I like the candidate or admire the campaign?
- Specific Policies
  - Will the candidate or campaign do what it says when I am not looking?



# *Who are the Allies of Activists?*

Why someone is motivated to act on behalf of an ideal

- Relational Supporters
  - “Knows” libraries and librarians
- Ideological Supporters
  - Aligned with what librarians and library workers do
- Aversion Supporters
  - Would like to avoid bad outcomes based on principals or ideals
- Access Supporters
  - Motivated by feedback, praise, or gratitude

# *Stories that Resonate*

Four potential approaches to root your campaign

- Stories of Success demonstrate your competency
  - Scale or replicate
- Stories of Failure demonstrate your integrity
  - Avert or fix
- Stories about people you care about
  - Find a common concern
- Stories about why you do what you do
  - Find a common cause



# *The Activist's Playbook*

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What Do You Want to Get  
Funded?

## Activist's Guiding Principles

- Must focus on identifying, cultivating, and empowering supporters
- Must not focus on building users
- Must ask for and allow actions
- Must allow people to participate as donors, volunteers, and do-ers

*Users are not  
necessarily  
supporters  
and  
supporters don't  
need to be users.*



# *Advocacy Principles*

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What Do You Want to Get  
Funded?

- “Marketing Tomorrow” builds use;  
“Marketing Yesterday” builds support
- Programmatic Partners are unactivated allies. They already share a mission.
- Coalitions are core to advocacy campaigns. Who else cares?
- You are the only expert on libraries and librarianship and you must define the negative
- No one will solve your budget or policy issue for you

## *Advocacy Principles*

Funding-Focused Partnerships and Coalitions are based on:

- Shared Values
- Common Mission
- Aligned Vision

*Coalitions are  
Focused on  
Funding or Policy  
Not Programming  
or Services*

- Economic Development
- Workforce and Re-tooling
- Early Childhood and Grade Level Reading
- COVID-Slide
- Housing and Food Security
- Safety and Violence
- Well-being

*Who Else Cares?*



Your “Book” Carries Your Values,  
Vision, Mission:

- Strategic Plan
- Building Plan
- Technology Plan
- Budget
- Annual Report

## *Coalition 101: Boards*

## Empowering Staff to Carry the Message:

- Your own values about libraries?
- Your own vision for your community?
- Why you do this work?
- What happens if you don't?

*Coalition 101:  
Staff*

Talk about Plan B and Plan A

- Plan A = what happens if we are properly funded or empowered
- Plan B = what happens if we are under-funded or disempowered

Then please stick to it.

*Experts Must  
Define the  
Positive and the  
Negative*

New Money only comes from four places: Reallocations, Outside Aid, New Taxes, or Cuts

New Policy or Legislation is introduced by an elected official but written by engaged stakeholders

*Rewrite the Budget*

*Write the Bill*

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Vermont Library Association | June 2, 2021



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