



Vermont
Library
Association



From Advocate to Activist

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



EveryLibrary Institute - 501(c)3 Research and Policy Think Tank

- Research Agenda
- Training Programs
- Programmatic Partnerships and Coalitions



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Taking Inventory

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

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

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

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

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

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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