

Doing What You Do

Erica Ruscio



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Earlier this year, ALSC’s Public Awareness Committee published the *Championing Children’s Services* toolkit to help libraries expand their advocacy efforts. It features eight program ideas, each centered around a different “Because Statement.” For instance, the first Because Statement is, “Because child readers become grown-up leaders.” The corresponding program suggests, “Invite your stakeholders to attend the Summer Reading/Learning Program kick-off. They can simply attend the event or you can give them a more active role.”

But what exactly is a stakeholder? You probably have a good idea of who they are—parents, children, teachers, library staff, and volunteers. But what about other stakeholders who have some sort of power to affect change in your community or in your library? When you advocate to these stakeholders—such as library board members, town or city government members, or taxpayers who vote on budget increases—you are advocating up. Essentially, you are sharing what you do and why it is important so that you can get more resources to continue doing what you do.

However, not every public library system is the same, so there is no *one way* for youth services library staff to advocate up. Some public libraries are the only library in a small town. Others are large, urban libraries with multiple branches. A library’s stakeholders and how they’re reached will depend on how a community and its libraries are organized. Here are two example programs from ALSC’s Advocacy and Legislation Committee to get you thinking how your library might apply the ideas in this toolkit, and more generally, how your library might step up its advocacy game.

Because Storytime Is a Key Building Block to School Success

Corresponding program idea: Invite stakeholders to observe or participate in a storytime.

Alexandria, VA, has a population of approximately 150,000 and is located right outside of Washington, DC. Alexandria Library consists of one central library, three branches, a local history branch, and a law library. While the library director answers to the library board, most library funding comes from the city and is determined by the city manager, city council, the vice-mayor, and the mayor.

At the end of January, Diana Price, the Central Library youth services manager, invited the vice-mayor to read a pre-chosen book for a storytime to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Beatley Central Library building. Several factors made this visit successful. First, the vice-mayor was invited to a specific event, rather than just a general storytime. That gave her a concrete deadline for accepting the invitation, as well as a set date to add to her busy schedule. Moreover, because special events often draw larger crowds, she had a strong incentive for participating. Price says the vice-mayor really enjoyed participating in storytime. “She got to promote herself with a really cute photo op. We loved having her and being

able to show her the benefits of storytime programming, and her photo op also advertised us.”

Because Libraries Are Constantly Evolving

Corresponding program idea: Seek out opportunities to showcase to stakeholders all that you do.

The Illinois Prairie District Public Library is a rural library district that serves 22,000 people with six branches serving eight townships in Woodford County, IL. Some branches serve populations as large as three thousand, while others serve populations as small as four hundred. With the exception of one brand-new building and a renovation in process, the district has aged facilities—converted banks, restaurants, and furniture stores—with limited capabilities.

Despite this challenge, in the past two years the library has rolled out STEAM programming for each branch. Before bringing

the idea to the board of trustees, however, Joel Shoemaker, the library’s director, knew he needed to start small. He says, “Pitching this wild idea to a board of trustees who were very comfortable with the old-school transaction of checking out books and only recently accepted DVDs as a replacement for VHS wasn’t necessarily easy. But we were already making paper crafts. Why not add circuit tape and LEDs?” He approached the board only after some initial success. After seeing photographs of young patrons involved in the initial STEAM programs, as well as local newspaper coverage, and social media coverage by patrons, the board was in favor of requested budgets to support the development of STEAM programs.

What Because Statements might you use to highlight your library’s importance as you connect with community stakeholders this summer? &

Access the Everyday Advocacy toolkit at www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy/speak-out/alsc-championing-childrens-services-toolkit.

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