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## ***Library Advocacy in a World Community***

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### **Introduction**

As I have traveled around the world giving training sessions to librarians and library stakeholders about the importance of library advocacy, I have been struck by one commonality: we all struggle to gain sufficient support for our libraries. Whether one is located in Madrid, Spain; Córdoba, Argentina; Athens, Greece; or my hometown of El Paso, Texas USA, there never seem to be enough resources to fully promote library services and literacy to our communities. The American Library Association (ALA) and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) have partnered to create the Campaign for the World's Libraries, a valuable tool for anyone attempting to generate more support for her local library.

During these library advocacy training sessions, I generally cover three major topics:

1. The state of global advocacy for libraries
2. How the Campaign for the World's Libraries can be an effective tool for global advocacy, and
3. An Introduction to advocacy planning, using the Library Advocate's Handbook.

When thinking about library advocacy, it's important to know what you want to accomplish through your advocacy campaign. Do you want to gain support for a new library facility? Pass a tax referendum? Increase your library's overall budget? In order to think through what you want to accomplish effectively, it sometimes helps to dream a little, envision what your library will look like when you have accomplished your goal.

So, let's imagine what the library of the future might look like, based on an account from the book *“A Library for All Times,”* and published by the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs.

“It is night time in Malmö, Sweden in the year 2010. Even

though it is after midnight, lights shine through the windows of the big library. For the past few years it has stayed open round-the-clock. Plenty of people are here. Self-service is now fully integrated, but there are staff in every section of the building to help with questions, advice and consultations. Why do people come to the library in the middle of the night? Set work schedules have not only changed, they have disappeared. More and more people are working from home. The number who study has multiplied many times over.”

“To get access to reading space, advisory services, equipment and collections, people have to be prepared to come at odd hours of the day. But still they all study, to improve their qualifications and learn new things...Work and study! The library is needed more than ever.”

The book goes on to state that John Naisbitt was right in his book *Megatrends* (1982) when he coined the term “high tech, high touch.” This means that the more high technology distances us, the more important human and social contacts become—such as those one can make at the library.

So let’s ask ourselves: does the Library in Malmo present an accurate picture of libraries in three, ten, even twenty years from now? What are some future library trends that we might envision?

As a Past-President of ALA, it is exciting to talk about the future of libraries from the perspective of our Association. I have identified four areas that I feel encompass the most important trends that are now emerging:

- New Technological Developments
- Library & Community trends
- Lifelong Learning Opportunities
- Enhanced Sustainability

## **The Library and Community**

For the purposes of this session, our definition of “community” is more than the city or campus your library serves. A community is a group with common interests, one that shares items or ideas in common—and one that could transcend the physical boundaries of your own city, campus, or school. Now let’s talk about trends in our libraries and the communities we serve.

The study *Falling Through the Net* revealed some other interesting facts about how our communities are changing, and the impact that changing demographics can have on computer and Internet use in libraries. For example, the study showed that Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders have the highest level of home Internet access at 56.8%. African Americans and Latinos have the lowest level at 23.5% and 23.6%, respectively. Unemployed and certain minority groups (African-Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders) are more likely to use public libraries for Internet access. In El Paso, which is 80% Hispanic, we have certainly observed wide usage by Latinos as well.

And, it should be noted that the Latino or Hispanic population is now the fastest growing minority in the United States. In El Paso, which has a population that is 80% Hispanic, this

translates into nearly 500,000 Internet users a year! Think about your own community, and the changes you have seen there in recent years—changes in demographics, the economy, size and other changes that could affect your ability to provide library service.

At the same time that our communities are experiencing changing demographics, we are also experiencing some major cultural and societal changes, many of which occurred after 9/11. Some might say we are facing the very erosion of democracy, with the debate over the USA Patriot Act and continued challenges to intellectual freedom. ALA members have challenged the Patriot Act on many levels, and have supported members of Congress in their attempts to pass new legislation that will restore our nation's right to privacy in the library.

To make matters worse, library closures that first occurred in Salinas, California and Bedford, Texas rocked the library world as unthinkable. I am pleased to say that both libraries were able to raise enough funds to remain open, but these situations made us realize how important it is to advocate for libraries even when times are good.

So how can libraries respond to the changes in our communities? Some trends we are seeing from a national perspective:

- **The Library as a Community Center**—I believe there is still much truth to the term “high tech, high touch.” We are seeing that the more high technology distances us, the more important human and social contacts become—and the more people seek these at their local library. People come to the library to hear an author speak, view an art exhibit, watch a movie, listen to a story, or have their picture taken with Clifford, the Big Red Dog!
- **The Library as a Cultural Institution**—“*A Library For All Times*” refers to the Library as “the showroom of the knowledge society, where everything is available for demonstration, and whose products, media of grand scope, more and more take on a virtual form. So that users will not drown in this information colossus, the library plays an active editorial role and devises and presents search menus and materials around themes, in exhibits and its own multimedia productions.”
- **Sophisticated market research**—We are learning more about our communities than ever before, through surveys, focus groups, and “smart” web sites.
- **Renewed outreach programs**—Even in this era of library budget cuts, outreach is not dead! We simply need to be creative, foster effective partnerships with outside agencies, and not try to do everything ourselves.

Probably the most important point to note is the growth of grassroots library advocacy around the world! During my ALA Presidency, we worked tirelessly to create a worldwide network



of advocates, helping librarians around the world to share ideas, resources and more. The Campaign for the World's Libraries made it possible to create a global advocacy effort that began in 2001 as a collaboration between ALA and IFLA.

### Global Advocacy Takes Root

In 2002, I gave one of the first international trainings for the Campaign for the World's Libraries as part of “Las Jornadas,” the Annual Conference held by AMBAC, the

Mexican Librarians' Association, in Monterey, Mexico. In 2004, the President of AMBAC at that time, Saul Armendariz, invited me to present a training for the library leaders library associations throughout Mexico and Central America.

One of the best tools you have as a library advocate is this Campaign, which in the United States is called The Campaign for America's Libraries and has been in existence for 8 years now. It is very easy to join.

### **The Campaign for America's Libraries—Where It All Started**

The ALA Campaign was created in response to research conducted by ALA that shows:

- Libraries are popular, but taken for granted.
- Libraries are ubiquitous, but not often visible.
- Libraries are unique, but facing new competition.

To date, 20,000 libraries have been involved in the Campaign for America's Libraries in all 50 states. New public awareness-building toolkits and materials have been created specifically for 5 different types of libraries and librarians. Tens of millions of people have heard the message about the value of libraries and librarians through partnerships and media relations efforts.

The Campaign Objectives include:

- Increase awareness and support for libraries.
- Increase the visibility of libraries.
- Communicate why libraries are both unique and valuable.
- Update the image of libraries, librarians, and all library staff for the 21st century.
- Bring renewed energy to the promotion of libraries and librarians.
- Bring the library message to a more diverse audience.

This Campaign has goals that are internal to the profession as well:

- It is useful to all types of libraries.
- It provides a mechanism to share public relations, marketing and advocacy "best practices" within the library community.
- It brings together all ALA promotions into one unified brand; @your library.
- It promotes a quick response to emerging issues such as library funding cuts.
- It promotes the contributions of library staff.



## Campaigns for Other Types of Libraries

There are now campaigns available for five types of libraries, each with its own toolkit and other resources to assist with implementation.

The Academic and Research Library Campaign was launched in April 2003 by the Association for College & Research Libraries (ACRL), a Division of ALA, to promote the value of academic and research libraries and librarians. There is a toolkit, a Web site, and a discussion list to assist in implementing this campaign. To find out more, visit the ALA Web site.

The School Library Campaign was launched in October of 2003 by the American Association of School Libraries (AASL), another Division of ALA, to promote the value of school library media specialists, programs and centers. It also features a toolkit, Web site, and discussion list. To find out more, visit the ALA Web site.

In September 2004, the Public Library Association (PLA), a Division of ALA, launched the Public Library Campaign, with the goal to make “the library card the most valued and used card in every wallet.” Comedian George Lopez served as the spokesman for this Campaign when it first launched, and there are many bi-lingual resources available in both English and Spanish. To find out more, go to ALA’s Web site.

Then in November 2006 the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC) launched the Kids!@ your library Campaign, with a special song by Bill Harley composed especially for the Campaign entitled “So Much To See, So Much To Do @ Your Library.” There is a new logo for this Campaign, a toolkit and a tip sheet available at the ALA Web site.

ALA has also developed new tools and resources to help small rural libraries (with populations under 10,000) conduct advocacy and outreach efforts in their communities. For more information, go to the ALA Web site.

Some other new toolkits that will be coming soon include YALSA @ your library, a new Campaign developed by ALA’S Young Adult Division. A toolkit for tribal libraries is also planned, as is one on “Tips for Transforming Libraries and How Libraries Transform Communities.”

## Resources in Spanish/Recursos en español

ALA has developed some great advertisements and other resources for this Campaign that are available both in English and Spanish, which can be used to promote libraries to Spanish-speaking library patrons around the world. They are colorful and slick, developed for use in local, regional and national magazines and other publications.

The first advertisement reads, “The future is @ your library...so make sure your library has a future.” It goes on to say, “libraries can’t help our children if they are closed.” To find out how to support the fundraising efforts of your library, and how you can promote the services of the library, contact your local library.

The second advertisement reads “Books. Magazines. Compact Discs. Videos. Databases. Special collections. Research services. Libraries provide access to everyone—regardless of your age, ethnicity, income level, language, or place of residence.”



The third advertisement reads “Imagine going to your library and not finding anyone there to help you. Support higher compensation for librarians and library workers in our country.”

All three ads state that they provide “A message from the Campaign for America’s Libraries.” However, these ads could easily be adapted to campaigns in other countries.



## Funding for the Campaign

All funding for the Campaign for America’s Libraries is provided by ALA’s partners, which in 2007 were: IFLA, the National Baseball Hall of Fame, Dollar General, and *Woman’s Day* magazine. These partners provide nearly all of the financial support for the campaign as well as special programs to help promote the campaign. For example, the new program “Step Up to the Plate @ your library” was developed by ALA and the National Baseball Hall of Fame to encourage young people to

write about their favorite baseball book. Last year the program was promoted by baseball greats Ozzie Smith and Ryne Sandberg, with the grand prize being a trip to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

*Woman’s Day* magazine has had a long-term partnership with ALA, and in 2007 ran an essay contest entitled “How the Library Changed My Life.” Four women won the contest, which drew 1,500 entries. Their very moving entries were published in the March 2007 issue of *Women’s Day*. Also in 2007 Dollar General began its sponsorship of a grant program entitled “The American Dream @ your library” which provided grants for selected libraries to expand their literacy collections, programs and services for adult immigrants and English language learners.

## Examples of the @ your library trademark

There are many ways in which the @ your library trademark can be used to advocate for your library, and some of them can be seen in the examples that follow...Enjoy!

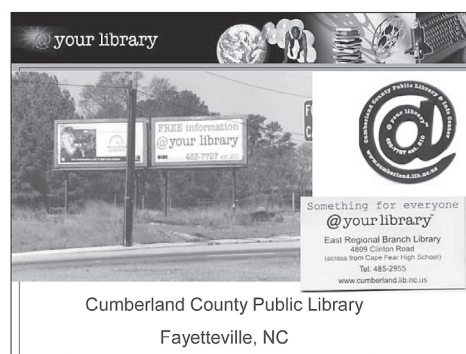
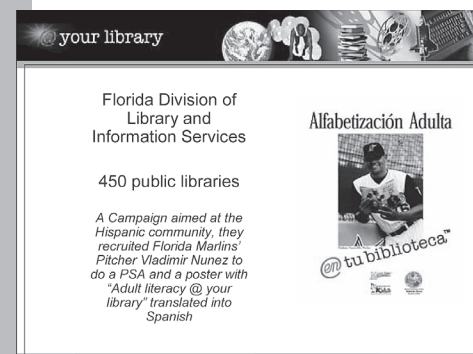
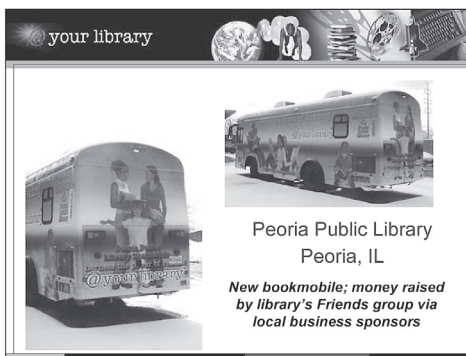
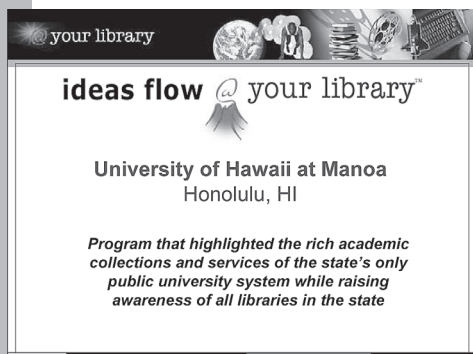
- University of Hawaii at Manoa Honolulu, Hawaii Program that highlighted the rich academic collections and services of the state’s only public university system while raising awareness of all libraries in the state.
- Maryland Library Association/Maryland State Department of Education - Three-year statewide @ your library campaign. Includes downloadable artwork and more.
- Florida Division of Library and Information Services - 450 public libraries. A Campaign aimed at the Hispanic community, they recruited Florida Marlins’ Pitcher Vladimir Nunez to do a PSA and a poster with “Adult literacy @ your library” translated into Spanish.
- “ASOCIACION MEXICANA DE BIBLIOTECARIOS, A.C. and ASOCIACION DE BIBLIOTECARIOS GRADUADOS DE LA REPUBLICA ARGENTINA - Campaña para Las Bibliotecas del Mundo.”
- Peoria Public Library, Peoria, Illinois - New bookmobile; money raised by library’s Friends group via local business sponsors.

## Conclusion

I find it so inspiring to work with library advocates around the world. The creativity, enthusiasm, and dedication I have encountered give me new hope, every time, that we can make a difference in our communities. From the librarians of El Salvador who started their own national “en tu Biblioteca” campaign to the school librarians in Greece who translated the entire *Library Advocate’s Handbook* into Greek, you have made it possible for more people, worldwide, to take advantage of the lifelong learning opportunities available from our libraries.

For those of you who would like to learn more about being a library advocate in your community, I encourage you to check out the latest edition of ALA’s *Library Advocate’s Handbook* (in English!) on the ALA Web site.

In this guide you will find helpful tips on building your advocacy network, developing your Advocacy Action Plan, telling your library story, dealing with the media, and working with legislators. An earlier edition is also available in Spanish, *Manual Para Promotores de Bibliotecas*.





This is a great basic guide for any advocate, which will help you plan for your next big campaign--or just practice good advocacy techniques. If you have questions or comments, please don't hesitate to contact me at [cbrey75@hotmail.com](mailto:cbrey75@hotmail.com). I look forward to hearing about all the advocacy work you are doing @your library!