

Library Advocacy during Budget Season

Lori Fisher, Assistant State Librarian
NH State Library
10/14/2020 (Trustees) & 10/15/2020 (Directors)

Agenda

- What is library advocacy?
- Setting the stage – national and state considerations
- NH Library Laws – who is responsible?
- Necessary prep research
- Questions you may face from governing body members
- Sharing/discussion/Q&A (Most Important Part!!)

What is Library Advocacy?

Library Advocacy is turning passive support into educated action.

Reactive Advocacy: Responding to a crisis situation

Proactive Advocacy: Laying the groundwork and building the relationships for positive library support year-round

National situation 2020

- MarketWatch article [Congressional Budget Office projections 9/2020](#): budget deficit of \$3.3 trillion in FY20; \$13 trillion by 2030
- State budget updates: NH project 5-8% revenue decline for FY20, 11-15% decline for FY21: <https://www.ncsl.org/research/fiscal-policy/coronavirus-covid-19-state-budget-updates-and-revenue-projections637208306.aspx>
- Vermont State Library: [Considerations and Guidance for Responding to Budget Cuts](#)

National situation 2020, cont.

- Wire article, 10/1/2020: [Publishers Worry as Ebooks Fly off Libraries' Virtual Shelves](#)
- Library Journal article, 9/24/2020: [Budgeting for the New Normal: Libraries Respond to COVID-19 Funding Constraints](#)
- Bloomberg CityLab article, 6/24/2020: [Coronavirus Tests the Limits of America's Public Libraries](#)
- School Library Journal article, 5/18/2020: [Purchasing in Public Libraries Shifts to Digital](#)

New Hampshire situation 2020

- Article, "[How We Fund Public Services in NH](#)" by Phil Sletten (NH Fiscal Policy Institute). Article on NH Municipal Association web site.
- NHMA Basic Law of Budgeting 2020 – now available through [New Hampshire Municipal Association store](#) (town finance office might have too)
- NH Administrative Services issues state revenues update 10/7/2020: <https://patch.com/new-hampshire/concord-nh/new-hampshire-revenues-rebound-despite-pandemic>
- [NHMA Follow-up COVID-19 Financial Impact Survey, 8/31/2020](#)

American Library Association Resources

- Navigating a Challenging Budget Year:
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/navigating-challenging-budget-year-budget-crosshairs>
- Making a Budget Presentation:
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/making-a-budget-presentation>

NH Library Laws

NH RSA 202-A:6

The library trustees shall have the entire custody and management of the public library and of all the property of the town relating thereto, including appropriations held pursuant to RSA 202-A:11, III, but excepting trust funds held by the town.

NH RSA 202-A:11 – Powers & duties of library trustees

Prepare an annual budget indicating what support and maintenance of the free public library will be required out of public funds for submission to the appropriate agency of the municipality. A separate budget request shall be submitted for new construction, capital improvements of existing library property.



Local Prep Research – Basics

What are the top 3-5 issues facing your town?

Are there budget cuts being proposed for current FY20 and/or FY21?

Are the cuts fair across town departments, or targeted?

[Fair means collaborative approach is needed for advocacy, not an adversarial or defensive approach]

What issues are other departments in your town facing?

Local Prep Research – Basics

Reactive Advocacy vs. Proactive Advocacy:

Every Library Board of Trustees and Library Director needs to develop a culture of understanding about the major issues within their town, and work as a board to foster relationships with other boards, committees, and elected officials so that discussion of these issues relative to the library can occur.

Example – Review of BOS, School Board, and Budget Committee minutes

- Reactive: reviewing the last six months as budget is being drafted or telling the director to do this review and report back
- Proactive: assigning different trustee every month to review minutes and report back to full Board for discussion



Local Prep Research – Your Town

- **Encourage adaptation of certain behaviors/tools year-round** so that budget season isn't a crisis situation (Trustee calendar; review of other board/committee minutes monthly; library trustee/director appearance at key town events/meetings, etc.)
- **Behavior change takes time, and often modeling is better than telling.** This is particularly important for Boards – if more than one member of the Board is modeling the behavior, the chances increase that all will eventually do the same behavior.

Local Prep Research – Your Town

- **Library directors need an understanding of their library's town,** especially if they do not live in the town. Do your own research, and contribute to conversations from your perspective as a town department head during trustee meetings.
- **Consider doing a town-wide ONLINE & PAPER survey,** especially if you haven't undertaken one within the past year. While you might not have results in time for FY21 budget setting, being able to say that you are actively determining community needs regarding the library is important. Then make sure to follow up and share results of survey far and wide.



Local Prep Research – Your Library

- Stats are important, so make sure you have them ready. But they should not be the sole focus of the budget presentation.
- What were your top 3-5 service priorities since COVID began?
 - How can you demonstrate those priorities? Budget expenses? Staff time allocated to those tasks? Other?
 - How do these service priorities dovetail with town/community issues?
- Brainstorm with staff for stories (use 4 step outline) to use at budget meetings as well as share with library trustees to use

4 Step Story Outline

1. Use a real person (change name if necessary)
2. Present the person's problem (NOT a library problem – emotional hook)
3. Provide library intervention (library in supporting role)
4. Provide ONE library-related fact related to the problem/solution

[Video, ALA: How to Tell a Library Story](#)

[Library Journal article, March 2020: Stats & Stories](#)

Local Prep Research – More Ideas

- **Downloadable/digital material stats for NHDB** – gives the wider state picture, and then you can use that to frame your library's piece of it (i.e., your library is not alone in this struggle to balance services/budget).
- **Share lessons learned** – don't try to paint the picture as all roses. Be honest if you tried something and it didn't work and stats show that. Transparency can go a long way to trust. However, do have ready a great story/stat about a service that did work well AND how it contributed to the community.

Local Prep Research – More Ideas

- **Create a bullet list summary of what staff were able to do from home and how that translated into your top 3-5 service priorities.** If you can say it, make sure to emphasize that no one was paid for not working. If you have to say that some were paid for not working, have an elevator speech ready about that time period and why. Think about having Trustee provide this information, not Director.
- **Compare materials budget % of overall library budget with other similar-sized libraries or towns** using [NH Public Library Statistics](#) (2019 is most recent data available) & [Library Journal annual article](#)

Questions You May Be Asked

1. **The library has reduced operating hours by x%. Why aren't you cutting staff hours? (Unspoken question is why is the town not saving money by cutting wages and benefits).**

This is where you need to be able to talk succinctly about the difference between the library building being open pre-pandemic and your library's service priorities during COVID. There's a lot of behind-the-scenes, non-public work that goes in to providing digital/virtual services – have a story ready and a stat.

Questions You May Be Asked

2. Your library visits/circulation/programs are down x% and will likely take a while to return to previous levels. Why shouldn't your budget be reduced if the library is providing fewer services?

Again, this is an education opportunity that can be used to highlight the difference between services when the library building is fully open, and services provided virtually/digitally/in a different in-person format (such as curbside, which is much more labor intensive).

Main message should be the library isn't providing FEWER services; the library is providing services in a DIFFERENT WAY.

Questions You May Be Asked

3. What will library services look like in the future (long-term adaptations/changes)?

No one has a crystal ball, but this is where staying on top of national library trends can pay off (citing national journals/associations can be helpful to answer the question).

Example of long-term adaptation: providing virtual programming

Questions You May Be Asked

4. Why didn't the library lay off staff during the shut down so we'd save taxpayer money?

A great answer to this question comes through Linda Pilla (Hudson), via her school district superintendent:

"It's taken years to build up the team we have here, and we were not about to shoot that down for a temporary small financial gain with long-term negative consequences. If we treat our people with respect and show how much they are valued, they will give their very best work to advance the mission of the organization for the benefit of our community."

Sharing, Discussion, Q&A



Contact me!

Lori Fisher, Assistant State Librarian
(603) 271-2393
lori.a.fisher@dncr.nh.gov