Keep In Touch

How to Get (and Keep) Your Library Into the Community Mix

Celise Reech-Harper, Associate Director, Beauregard Parish Library
“The library department...

...[is] like a biker gang, but instead of shotguns and crystal meth, they use political savvy and shushing.”-Amy Poehler (Leslie Knope, “Parks and Recreation”)
Be the biker gang. Use your savvy:

Be available to any and all.
Involve with community groups, non-profits, and small businesses
Keep updated on local civic and governmental wind changes.
Encourage staff and partners
Read the local papers, listservs, and newsletters.
Know Your Strengths

- What does your library have to offer?
  - Helpful Hint: The way this is framed will change based on whose attention you seek
  - Anything new?
  - Anything specialized?
Stay Flexible

- Do you have flexibility/adaptability?
- Does your library “seem” adaptable and approachable?
- Times of flux can be a great asset
  - Let groups (and individuals) know that they can shape their library
Stay Informed

• Read local papers AND newsletters
• Be active on the social media sites local agencies utilize most
• “Friend” community groups, local governmental organizations, etc…
• Visit area museums, art galleries, restaurants, performance arts buildings
• Chat with community movers and shakers
Media Relations

- Establish a relationship with at least one representative from each of the local media outlets
- Offer “sneak peeks” and advance notice
Keep Your Options Open

- Be willing and available to meet with different groups
- Publicize your availability
- Seek out new groups
- Open door policies work
- Offer library “goodies” and legwork
Recognize obstacles

- Be honest but positive
- Be transparent
- Respond to inquiries promptly (even when doing so is stressful or difficult)
- Acknowledge that you may not have all of the answers but will find them
Small Favors Mean Big Appreciation

- Take pictures at local events; share them
- Tag on Facebook
- Tweet @yournewlocalbestfriend
- Cross-promote
- Give people the “inside scoop”
Partners for Life (or at least the next project)

- Establish a respectful dialogue
- Convey appreciation
- Give public acknowledgement
- Provide honest feedback and suggestions (if desired)
Possible Matches

• Historical societies
• Civic Organizations: Magnolia Ladies, Rotary, etc…
• Government entities: Mayor’s office, city government
• Volunteer Groups
• Local and Regional Festivals
• Local small businesses (tread lightly)
Some of the Beauregard Parish Library’s Successful Matches

- La Cuisine de Beauregard Festival
- Beauregard Tourism Commission
- Council on Aging
- Merryville Historical Society
- OCEANS Mental Health
- Beauregard Association of Retarded Citizens
- Humane Society of Southwest Louisiana
- Beauregard Parish Fair
- Southwest Louisiana Veterans’ Reunion (annual event)
Glamorous Photos
More Glamorous Photos
Last of the Glamorous Photos
Staff Outreach

- Make it a competition
  - BPL SRP Color Dot Competition
- Personalize it
- Give praise
- Celebrate talents that go beyond job scope
  - BPL “From: Us, To: You”
Summer Reading Participation Results

- Across the board increases
- 72% indicated a color card (which means a staff member spoke to him/her)
- Completion for ARP was up 67%
- Increase in library card sign ups
- 200% increase in social media interaction
Top 5 Positive Comments I Didn’t Want to Hear

1. “Wow! I had no idea our library offered that.”
2. “We have a branch there? Great!”
3. “If I had known about this (event, service), I would have visited before.”
4. “Getting a library card is surprisingly easy.”
5. “You have a website?”
No takers?

- Find out what organizations need by polite inquiry or a little subtle sleuthing
- Find out when they meet and get yourself on the agenda
- Make contact with community leaders (not necessarily politicians or formal leaders—the people doing the heavy lifting)
Persistence & Patience

• Seek out new groups regularly
• “Check in” with established groups
• Remain polite and flexible when you hear “no” (and when you hear “yes”)

Actionable Responses to Interviews

• “More media coverage”
• Computer classes
• Seed exchange
• Programs for specific adult age groups
Resources

Bite-Sized Marketing: Realistic Solutions for the Overworked Librarian
Nancy Dowd, Mary Evangeliste, and Jonathan Silberman

Building a Buzz: Libraries & Word-of-Mouth Marketing
Peggy Barber and Linda Wallace

Librarians as Community Partners: An Outreach Handbook
Edited by Carol Smallwood
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