

Introduction

If you ever thought that partnering with a community group on a project was as simple as making a phone call or two, hopefully the first three weeks of this class have changed your mind.

If you want your library to have multiple, strong, and lasting relationships with local government agencies, community non-profits, and even businesses, your library needs to be willing to invest in setting them up, developing them, and expanding them to provide limitless service to your community. How successfully we start and grow these partnerships is key not only to their immediate value but to their ongoing effectiveness and durability. So it's important to take the time to do it right.



Up to this point in the course the partnership process has been broken down into some critical steps that cover how to get started and whom to involve. Here are some reminders of those critical steps.

- **Great partnerships are really just relationships.** Involve all of your staff, from creating a project team to capitalizing on what everyone else on staff can offer, from their existing connections to buy-in and great ideas.
- **Best projects = best partnerships.** Use the problem, solution, opportunity approach to be sure you're starting with a project idea that will truly make a positive difference in your community.
- **Be thorough.** Detailed planning, from studying statistics and data, to thorough needs assessments, budgets, timelines, and milestones will highlight how strategic and doable your project is to potential partners.
- **The perfect match.** Use all of your planning thus far and all of the connections and knowledge you can compile, then search for and find a perfect partner (or two) with a matching mission.

This week we will learn how to approach and make an appealing offer to potential partners—an offer they hopefully can't refuse!

The Perfect Pitch: An Overview of Week 4

If the library gets invited to make a pitch to the decision makers for the partner they're wooing, sometimes it's in the form of a short and sweet opportunity to impress—and you have to make the most of it because it might be your only chance.

Have you ever tried to summarize something really important to you in five minutes? Or attempted to put into words how appealing something would be, only to be asked to cut your written request in half...or more?



If the library's written message and presentation are both crafted deliberately with all of the important considerations in mind, it is possible to deliver a passionate message in a succinct way. This week we'll talk about preparing the very best communication options and then how to present them most effectively. We'll cover:

- What to say
- Building a layered message
- Considering your audience
- Prepping many voices
- Preparing for successful public speaking

Recipe for a Great Message (What to Say)

Think of the most boring message you've ever heard or read. Aside from the fact that it almost put you to sleep, what was wrong with it? Before we begin discussing the finer points of written or spoken communication, it's important to think about the basics of what we're trying to do. That boring message, most likely:



- Didn't tell you anything you really needed to know.
- Didn't move you (or get you interested in or excited about a new idea).
- Didn't leave you with a clear call to action. In other words, you were thinking "so what?" What mattered about the subject to you, and what were you supposed to do with it?
- Wasted your time which, in today's busy world, is probably the worst criticism of all.

Now think of the best communication you've received. It doesn't matter if you read it or heard it in person, it almost certainly met some of these criteria:

- It mattered. Somehow, someway, it made clear how it impacted your life or work directly.
- It was fun or funny or scary or entertaining or in some way reached you emotionally.
- It left you motivated to do something and made it clear what that something should be.

Consider these story options to see how communication does (or doesn't) work.

Example 1

The very overworked volunteer board of the local Meals on Wheels group gathers in the borrowed church kitchen for their monthly meeting. As they're getting seated, most are looking around at the work that needs to be done and are hoping the meeting is short so they can get to it. Two volunteers are sick and have dropped off the schedule and more hungry seniors are being added every day. The chair reminds them they have a guest tonight: a librarian who would like to ask for some help.

Thanks for seeing me, she begins. We have had lots of budget cuts. Let me tell you what has happened to our funding over the past five years (and she proceeds to tell them, year by year). We can't afford to fill our outreach position, and we want to know if your group will deliver books for us.

(Questions float around their collective minds: "Who is she? What is outreach? Would we have to pick up the books? Would we have to take them back to the library? How many books are we talking about? Maybe we should just do our own stuff and let the library solve its own problems.)

Example 2

Same set up, but here's what the librarian says...

Hi Mike, Ben, Nancy, Joe, thanks for having me. I haven't seen you all since several of my staff and I volunteered at your fundraiser last year. I hear from Mary, our Circulation Manager and your Volunteer Coordinator, that you are all busier than ever, so I'll get right to the point.

Books can reduce loneliness. Books can be friends. Books can be comforting. Since we know these are all parts of your mission—and of ours—we're hoping to work together to bring both food and books to our community's shut-ins. Both of us have limitations on resources and people, but if we can work as a team and think this through, we—and our residents—can be winners. Can we plan this project together?

As you can see, what to say and how you say it both matter and deserve your attention, focus, and a little bit of practice.

How to Build a Layered Message

If the library is lucky it will get several opportunities to bring partners in to support new, exciting, and relevant programs and services. What you don't want to do is reinvent the community wheel to prepare for every opportunity, and you don't have to. Here's just one way to create a four-level message that can be quickly adapted to meet most presentation needs.



Level 1

Start with the most simple, short, and compelling two sentences that get to the point of the project quickly and ask for help. Sometimes this approach is called either a "parking lot" or "elevator speech, implying the brevity it's designed to support. Without imposing by just dropping in on the head of the local Meals on Wheels group, you make a quick phone call or send a short email that gets right to the point. Using our books and meals example from earlier, we might say:

Leaving a book and food with a shut-in is like leaving a friend behind when the volunteer is gone. We're so excited about working with Meals on Wheels to provide this new service, and we'd love to have you help us do it!

Level 2

Your elevator speech got their attention, so you've been invited to stop by the kitchen the next time the officers are there for a quick "pre-packing" meeting! They don't have a lot of time to sit around and listen to you, but they're open to hear your ideas.

*Leaving a book and food with a shut-in is like leaving a friend behind when the volunteer is gone. We're so excited about working with Meals on Wheels to provide this new service, and we'd love to have you help us do it! Let me tell you a bit about **what** we would love to have happen, **how** the library staff would help, and **exactly** what role you would all play in this program. Then I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.*

Level 3

Those four or five board members you met in the kitchen decide this idea is worth a lot more thought, so the library has been invited to present to an all-volunteer meeting. You need to build a bit more on your previous messages, since this will be your chance to get buy-in from the whole group. Prepare carefully, and consider:

- Find out exactly how many people will be there
- Find out exactly how much time you'll have
- Consider bringing other familiar faces with you from the library
- Develop something creative to leave behind that summarizes your important points

- Consider contacting some of the members whom you know who will be in attendance, just to get a feeling for what the group responds best to

Level 4

Next you hear that the vote after that meeting went well, and now the organization's finance person needs to see something in writing with specifics on hours, service area, budget, etc.

Now, it's time to put everything together, so you will write something with information taken from all of levels that have come before. Then you add precisely what else has been requested—no more, no less. Make sure this information is true (based on real evidence), is accurate (have someone else check carefully for errors), and is clearly focused on supporting the missions of both groups.

We can learn a lot about effective proposal writing from experts who have reviewed hundreds of requests for grants over the years. When I interviewed two of them for a library management text chapter on grant writing, their advice was surprisingly similar:

- Get to know the person or organization you are approaching. Learn what's important to them and show how your project addresses that.
- Follow directions, provide what's requested, be concise, and be clear.
- Leave out jargon.
- Get to the point.
- Proofread. Turn in something that looks—and is—professional.

Author Gary McClain, whom I quoted in my book *Build a Great Team: One Year to Success* suggests there are really only three simple rules to remember when writing:

1. **Intent** - Why do you have to write this? What parts do you have to say? Say just those.
2. **Message** – What do you want the reader to come away with, after reading? Focus on that, clarify that, and tell them that.
3. **Audience** – For whom are you writing?

Which leads to our next discussion: adjusting for audience.

Consider Your Audience

In addition to selecting the appropriate level of information to provide, from elevator-length chats to a formal proposal, we must also adjust for audience. I used to do a lot of booktalks as a librarian, and as I prepared for them it was very important to know the age of the group and their interests. I prepared very differently for a "young professionals" breakfast meeting than I did for a nursing home sunroom talk that was scheduled for right after lunch!



Just as you might make adjustments to your resume when applying for multiple jobs, you should also consider and make adjustments to your presentations based on the audience. Also, as a matter of common courtesy, always make an effort to understand the length of program requested. You don't want to end up overstaying your welcome and leaving them with a negative impression of the library, rather than an eager desire to learn more.

Prepping Many Voices

Once you have that very basic, quick, and compelling first message written, share it all around the library. Take your elevator/parking lot speech and attach it to work stations, tape it to computer monitors and make it available any way you can to ALL library staff. As you learned earlier in this class, the more comprehensive the buy-in from staff, the more the project can benefit from the continual support of many voices. Make that easy for everyone. Share with them that quick and easy-to-remember message, so they can be ready to communicate it to your public.

- *What we **don't** want to hear:*

Customer to staff member: "What's all this I hear about the library delivering food or something?"

Staff member: "I don't know, they don't tell us anything. I hope they don't ask me to do that! That's not part of my job! Do you want me to call the director and you can ask her?"

- *What we **do** want to hear:*

Customer to staff member: "What's all this I hear about the library delivering food or something?"

Staff member: "Leaving a book and food with a shut-in is like leaving a friend behind when the volunteer is gone. We're so excited about working with Meals on Wheels to provide this new service, and we'd love to have you help us do it!"

That Was Great! Public Speaking Success

When the time comes to help train your staff to do public speaking, there is no shortage of advice, books, classes, and even websites available to provide advice. The important thing is: use it all! Make sure you never send anyone into a public speaking situation unless they feel confident they're ready to succeed.

Public speaking isn't brain surgery. With guidance, training, support, and practice, practice, practice, it can be learned and mastered. The more effective speakers your library has, the more support you'll garner for this or any future project you undertake. Here's some key (and very basic) advice from two different sources to get you started:



From Toastmasters, the premier leadership and speakers' training organization:

- Know your material, know your audience, and know the room. Arrive early, walk around and make sure all your tech is working.
- Realize that people in the audience want you to succeed.
- Relax, take a breath, pause, smile, and count to three.
- Practice, practice, practice.

From Deborah O'Connor, a 30+ year Ohio public library director and frequent speaker before the Ohio legislature:

- Being slightly nervous is actually good; it can be turned into positive energy and a feeling of being pumped up!
- Print your notes in very large type!
- Keep it light; even serious subjects don't have to be deadly.
- Practice, practice, practice.

There's no time like the present to start building relationships that matter between your library and your community. Involve more staff in organizations. Send more of them to group meetings. Contribute library staff as volunteers at community-wide events, fairs, festivals, and other celebrations. Be known. Build connections. Then, when the library identifies a chance to make a real difference with a special project, your community partners will be easy to find and even easier to engage.

What to Do Next: Proceed to the Week 4 Assignment Options.