

Rural Library Program in Romania

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October 2009

U.S. Speaker and Specialist Program

Bureau of International Information Programs (IIP)

U.S. Department of State

Program 3

Management & Advocacy & Marketing

Managing the Small Public Library

Managers of small public libraries find themselves in charge of many duties including:

- Hiring, training, and supervising staff – if the library is large enough to afford more than one staff member
- Ordering books and materials (acquisitions)
- Managing the collection (weeding – the withdrawal of materials – displays, etc.)
- Answering reference questions
- Helping patrons
- Troubleshooting and repairing computers
- Conducting storytimes
- Recommending policies and procedures

Duties a manager may not have expected:

- Unplugging toilets
- Cleaning up after a sick child
- Shoveling snow
- Working on the heating system
- General maintenance and repair
- Finding buckets for leaky ceilings

Staffing

The manager's number one key to success is a good staff. You may have a wonderful collection of information, but if you do not have a well-trained and dedicated staff, the information may never get into the hands of those who need it. Consider these tips:

- Hire friendly people with great smiles. Other traits should be good listener, problem solver, creative, inquisitive, helpful, pleasant personality. The tasks of running a library can be taught. Start with the best people for your library team.
- Allow your staff to use their special talents to enhance your library service. If a staff member is artistic, allow them to create signs or flyers and perhaps be in charge of a craft for story time. If a staff member loves to read, have them provide readers' advisory service to patrons. If staff member sings or plays an instrument, see if they will use their talents during a program for youth.
- Pay your staff a fair wage and provide benefits when possible. Reward your team for a job well-done. Allow them to express their ideas about how to do a job.
- When a person feels valued for what they do and bring to the workplace, they are more likely to be inspired and passionate about their jobs.

- Make sure you have an employee handbook that spells out what an employee might expect if they work for the library. This information may include benefits, days off, holidays, vacation and sick leave, expectations, evaluations, etc.
- Allow staff to attend training sessions. Continuing education is very important, not only for the new knowledge gained, but also because you are able to meet others doing the same kind of job. You can share what works and what doesn't work.
- Evaluations are an important tool for all employees. Each worker knows what kind of job he or she is doing. Being able to sit down with your boss and discuss your strengths and also areas that maybe there needs to be a bit more attention, is valuable in the development and relationship of all employees to each other and their supervisor.

Acquisitions

The selection of materials for a small public library can be very rewarding yet challenging at the same time. A smaller budget will mean you cannot purchase everything you may want to for your patrons. So, what you do select, has to be worthy of putting on your shelf. Consider these tips:

- When you decide what the role in the community the library will play, for example: a popular reading center; a child's door to learning; an adult learning center; etc.; you will be able to select materials that fit that role.
- Materials should be current, relevant and readable. Your collection should be balanced with views from different sides of an issue. An important example would be Creationism vs. Evolution. Although it may matter to you a great deal, which is more important, you cannot let that sway your judgment when selecting materials. If you have titles about the belief in Creationism, then you also need titles about the theory of evolution. This is one of the hardest parts of a small library manager's job – to try to separate your personal views and beliefs from those that would be important to have in your collection that may express an opposing view.
- Use professional resources to select materials. Read book reviews, learn how to judge a book from the information you research. Look at copyright date, subject matter, author's popularity, relevancy, popularity, etc. Sometimes you will select a book just because it is the latest by a popular author. The reviews may say the work is the poorest he has written and that it is a waste of money. But, readers that like this author, will still want to read it and you should consider purchasing it for your collection.
- You may decide to accept donations, but be very selective. Donations must fit your criteria. Donors of the materials must realize that once they donate the title, it may or may not be put into the collection. Perhaps you already have a copy and you decide to put it in a used book sale. The funds from that sale will then benefit the library.

Library Duties

Managing everyday library duties includes everything from opening and closing the library, answering the phone, helping patrons find books, helping patrons use computers, managing the collection, etc. Consider:

- Keep very good statistics on library usage patterns. Automated library circulation systems are vital for the modern public library.
- Build displays that feature certain parts of your library's collection.
- Keep the collection clean and orderly and make sure you weed on a regular schedule – that is, withdraw older, unread, unused, musty titles from the collection.
- Answer reference questions in a professional way. Repeat the question so that you can make sure you know what the patron wants. This is called the reference interview. When you find the information, always cite your source. Even if you know the answer, find it in an authoritative source and provide the patron that answer.

- Library managers must be familiar with computer programs and software. They must be able to conduct minor troubleshooting and fix small problems. Library managers must also be visionary, with an eye on the technology of tomorrow. Working knowledge of the Internet and online databases is also a key to success.
- Basic customer service such as checking books in and out, readers' advisory, listening to patrons will make up the bulk of the small library manager's day.

Policies and Procedures

The small library manager must have written policies and procedures that will guide operations. These policies may address:

- Internet Use
- Collection Management & Development
- Unattended Children
- Confidentiality
- Disaster (fire, flood, etc.)
- Unruly Patrons

Policies should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis or as needed.

Advocacy in the Small Library

Advocacy is basically the act of speaking out in support of something. You can be a child advocate and speak out about the rights of children. You can be an animal rights advocate and be the voice for animals. A library advocate speaks out in support of libraries – not only to explain why they support public libraries, but why it is important for everyone to not only support public libraries by using them, but also with financial support.

A library advocate will "sell" the importance of the public library and why stable funding is vital. A library advocate must be able to:

- Provide information about the public library – how it is funded, types of services, etc.
- Speak in front of one or two people – or in front of groups of people
- Articulate the message of the importance of the public library for an informed society
- State reasons why a public library is important to the community
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Consider the following reasons public libraries are important:

- Public libraries provide information in a variety of formats to meet the varied informational needs of the citizens
- Libraries help ensure that Romanians can access the information they need – regardless of age, education, ethnicity, language, income, physical limitations or geographic barriers – as the digital world continues to evolve
- Public libraries can be the “door to learning” for young children not yet ready for school.
- Public libraries can serve as a neutral meeting space for community gatherings.
- Public libraries serve “all” the public, not just an elite few.
- The public library may be the only place where citizens can find a variety of viewpoints about issues – information that is not controlled or distributed by any one entity or agency.
- The public library is a storehouse of the creativity of mankind – local, regional and national authors will find their books on the shelves next to the great authors of both recent and historical times

Tips for Advocating the Library to Officials

Identify who the “officials” are in your service area. They may be leaders of the county, city, village or town governments. They might also include the school superintendent, college president, county board chair, business leaders and others who see the library as a valuable asset to the community.

- Invite local and regional officials to an open house – let them see what the library has to offer.
- Explain that when business and industry is looking to move into the area, they are looking for an educated workforce. The presence of public libraries shows potential investors that this community values education and access to information
- A public library brings culture into a community
- Share any success stories you may have of your public library impacting the lives of your patrons

Other important Advocacy Messages:

- A public library adds to the quality of life for an individual. They have the freedom to read what they want and to make decisions based on the information they have researched.
- A public library will encourage the talents of patrons.
- Free access to information is a basic right in a free society.

Turn Stakeholders into Allies

Stakeholders are everyone who benefits from or has a particular interest in seeing the library thrive. They can be powerful allies in delivering your message.

Questions to consider:

- Who is on your side and is willing to speak out?
- Who can be most helpful?
- Who are most influential?
- Who should approach them, when and how?
- What are the risks, as well as benefits?

Who needs to hear the message?

Everyone may be the easy answer, but it’s hard to reach everyone—especially with limited resources. Also, some audiences are more important than others.

Identifying high-priority audiences will help to ensure that your message gets heard by those who most need to hear it. These target audiences generally include those who have the most influence or are most likely to support you—including your staff, trustees and support groups.

Examples:

- Funders/Decision-makers
- Mayor, County Government Officials, National Legislators, Foundations and Grant Programs Administrators
- Voters
- Ages 55 and over, Young adults—ages 18-30, Parents, Grandparents, Caregivers, Library users, Teachers/educators
- Newspaper editor
- College president
- Civic groups/boosters
- Richest person around
- Local “do it all”

Do not forget your “Internal stakeholders”: Library staff, library governing boards, volunteers

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More tips for dealing with decision-makers

- Attend meetings. Participate.
- Offer to host a meeting of the county government, school boards, etc. at the library.
- Provide refreshments and a tour. Host after-work coffee hours or receptions.
- In an election year, provide candidates with information about the library. Make sure they have a library card.
- Support candidates who support libraries.
- Send letters of congratulations to winning candidates and an invitation to visit the library or media center.
- If you have them, participate in county and national legislative days – days set aside for the governing bodies to meet with citizens.

Answering hard questions

There is only one good way to deal with sensitive or difficult questions. That is to prepare answers ahead of time.

- Keep your answers to the point. Too much information can provoke more questions. If your questioner wants to know more, he /she will ask more questions.
- Never answer a question you don't understand or are uncomfortable answering. No answer is better than a wrong answer. It's OK to say, "I'm sorry I don't know that." Or "I'm not the best person to answer that." If possible, add that you'll follow up with the appropriate person.
- Always answer with a positive. Stick to your key message.
- Question: Why do we need a new library when we have the Internet?
Answer: Our library is a real place where you can get help from real people. It's a place where people of all ages come to learn and enjoy. Our community deserves a 21st century library.

Helpful Resources from the U.S.A.

The American Library Association

<http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/supporttoolkit/toolkithome.cfm>

Great Online Resource: www.webjunction.org

- WebJunction bridges the barriers to learning by providing open, affordable, online learning communities. Our members take courses; attend events, share knowledge, and network with others – all in an environment that fosters collaboration and mutual support. Our vision is to be the place where the worldwide library profession gathers to build the knowledge, skills and support we need to power vibrant, relevant libraries.

WebJunction Beliefs:

- Libraries play a vital role in their communities
- Library staffs have the power to make libraries "vibrant, relevant and sustainable"
- Community is central to everything we do
- Partnerships are the foundation of our success
- User experience is more important than a lot of new features
- Ownership of content and resources should be retained by our contributors
- It's OK to try and fail, so long as we learn and share
- Having fun makes learning and sharing more memorable, and rewarding
- Our common trust is what makes us possible — the trust that our members, partners, and investors have with us and with each other

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What is marketing?

Anything you do to put your product into the hands of your customer. In the case of libraries, marketing can refer to bringing patrons into the door and connecting them with the materials your library has to offer.

Identify Your Audience -- Basic Demographics

- As with any service, you have to get to know your community
- Who lives in your town or your county or your service area?
- Are there families? Singles? Elderly?
- What is the income level?
- How many schools? How many children?
- Gather basic information about "who are my customers or patrons?"
- Think about where you might find this information. A school district could give you the number of students enrolled and even break it down by grade
- If you have a social services center, or senior center, they could possibly give you the number of elderly in your area
- Use census data from the government to identify not only the number of people in your service area, but also the ethnic breakdown. This could help you when building the collection.

Identify Your Product -- Your Library Materials and Services

- Your library will consist of a core collection and will build according to the differing information needs of your patrons
- For example: If a major plant or factory closes and another opens in its place, your patrons may need to learn new job skills -- computer skills. Your library can offer computer classes and teach basic skills.
- For example: Your community or county has a lot of college students. Your collection may consist of study guides or preparing for college materials
- If your county or service area has a high unemployment rate, your collection may have many resume or new skills books
- If your area is known for an historic event, your library may house a special collection about the event

Connect Your Product with Your Audience or Customer or Patron

- Once you identify and build your collection -- based on user needs and other gathered information -- it is time to connect the collection with the customer or patron
- Identify how you would get the information to the patron
- If the unemployed, is there an employment center that would allow you to display or distribute flyers announcing the materials the library has to help?
- Where locally can you let folks know about computer classes?
- Find out how to get the word to your customers who need the service

Library Displays are a Part of Marketing

- Displaying books "jacket or cover" out is good eye-catching way to bring attention to that area of the collection
- Make sure your book shelves are not so tight that a patron cannot remove a title
- Keep shelves and the library clean and dusted. Keep computer monitors wiped down. Keep glass doors sparkling clean.
- Also consider placing hand sanitizers throughout your library to help prevent the spread of flu virus on keyboards and other library materials
- Set up displays based on subjects such as gardening, cooking, sewing, traveling. Sometimes a patron will come in just to "browse". This is great! It is then that a reader is more likely to discover new ideas

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- Make lists of favorite titles of the staff -- people like to know if you have read something good and why you liked it

Advertising is a Part of Marketing

- You might have a wonderful public library with beautiful books and high-speed computers; but if no one knows about it, your efforts are wasted.
- Advertising is the process of communicating with potential customers or patrons in an attempt to persuade them to visit the library and use the services
- "Free" is always a good word to use when attracting users
- Consider advertising with flyers, information distributed to students at the schools, visits to community centers or places where people congregate, newspapers, radio, word-of-mouth

"Branding" is a Part of Marketing and is the Latest "Buzz" Word

- When people see the red and white logo for Coca Cola they automatically think of a soft drink. Think of other brands or logos that are recognizable.
- If your library develops a brand -- such as a book with the name/address of library and maybe a slogan -- and, if that brand is used on all stationary and print materials -- then your patrons will come to recognize that brand or logo as "the library"
- When people see the name of your library, they must immediately know that this is the place to go for free access to balanced and authoritative information.

Your Library's Reputation

- Your library should strive to be the "information" center for your community
- Your library should be known as a place that is clean, friendly and welcoming
- Your library should be known as a place where citizens can access the information they want -- knowing that anything they research or check out is private and confidential
- Your library should be a place where customers know they are getting the best, most accurate, up-to-date and compelling information
- Your library should be a place where children can come and dream about their future -- what they can become when they grow up
- Your library should be a place where citizens can imagine their lives differently -- they can travel to distant lands, learn about other people and cultures, learn new skills, improve their quality of life

Your Small Library

- Does not have room for every book or all information that is published
- Should strive to have only the most compelling information on the shelf -- if a book does not circulate, consider "weeding and withdrawing" it from the collection -- AFTER you have displayed it, brought attention to it, etc.
- Always be looking at your collection with fresh eyes. How do your customers see the library when they first enter? Is it welcoming? Friendly? Bright?

Keep an Eye on the Future

- Be aware of any new industry being built in your area
- As the highways and transportation infrastructure are improved, commerce and trade will move rapidly through the country. This could mean some villages grow to cities, county populations increase and the overall workforce changes
- The children born today will not know about or be able to relate to a communist regime. Your public library has the opportunity to provide information to spark imaginations and help people turn their dreams into reality