Beyond Book Sales

The Complete Guide to Raising Real Money for Your Library

EDITED BY SUSAN DOWD

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Beyond Book Sales
Neal-Schuman purchases fund advocacy, awareness, and accreditation programs for library professionals worldwide.
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The Complete Guide to Raising Real Money for Your Library

EDITED BY SUSAN DOWD

for Library Strategies
A Consulting Group of
The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library

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ike most successful writers, I have personally experienced the transformative power of the public library. Several years ago, I became aware of the tragic lack of funding for libraries. I found it shocking that states and municipalities were cutting into the very backbone of our educational infrastructure. I have made it my personal mission to do as much as I can for libraries, whether supporting them through my trust, Save the Libraries, or speaking to the Georgia State House on the importance of a well-read citizenry. I think my experience represents a microcosm of the greater tragedy that has struck library systems all over the world.

In the United States, it is a fact that every dollar spent on public libraries returns $5 to the community. Eighty percent of our incarcerated juveniles are functionally illiterate. Adults who are unable to read are twice as likely to end up in prison as those who can. The math is simple: a child who reads does well in school. A student who does well in school goes to college. A college graduate earns a better living and not only pays more taxes, but has more disposable income to spend on services. They are also more likely to raise children who value education and reading and will in turn follow the education path of their parents. Contrast that with the millions of dollars spent every year on truants and in the juvenile justice system and you’ll find an exponential gain in investment by simply keeping the doors of our local libraries open.

This is but one argument I’ve found helpful in persuading politicians and local businesses to get on board with library fund-raising: by investing in libraries, they are making a fiscally sound choice for their communities. This message is catching on. In the past few years, there has been a great deal of national media attention given to the plight of today’s libraries, and this attention has stimulated an uptick in citizens’ public support of their libraries. It’s difficult to predict, however, whether this attention and goodwill will convert into financial support; and, frankly, simply hoping that it will happen is not a good strategy.
It’s time for libraries large and small to mobilize and focus on serious fund-raising. The consequences of leaving future library budgets in the hands of local public decision-makers alone will sound the death knell for many beloved libraries. It is an unfortunate reality that very few librarians are prepared to be fund-raisers. Even many of those with a master’s degree in library science are woefully inexperienced (and often intimidated) by the idea of asking for money. To make matters worse, the day-to-day challenges facing any library director leave precious little time for taking on the additional task of mounting a comprehensive fund-raising effort.

That is why practical, achievable help is at hand in the pages of this book. This new resource will go a long way toward helping every librarian, trustee, Friend of the Library, and library lover avoid the pitfalls of fund-raising. In it you’ll find great ideas and specific suggestions for conducting all types of fund-raising activities. You’ll learn how to create a plan and identify partners to help you realize your goals. Outlined within this book are clear, concrete tools for implementing the activities you will include in your fund-raising plan. The authors have even included a gallery of examples of fund-raising materials created by libraries that are leading the way in the brave new world of library fund-raising. However you choose to approach this book, do it with the knowledge that whatever plan you implement, you are moving in an essential direction for your library’s future.

I can think of no other warriors who are better prepared for battle than the men and women who have historically been on the front lines of literacy. Good luck!

Karin Slaughter
In this new millennium, public librarians, staff, and library supporters have reached an overwhelming conclusion: If public libraries are going to remain strong, people must get creative about funding them. The old model of banking on public revenues and occasional special funds—and hoping for the best—has gone the way of the card catalog. It has been replaced by purposeful library fund-raising designed to keep existing programs and services strong and provide opportunities for innovation.

Library fund-raising is beautiful in its flexibility. It can be adapted to meet the needs and resources of public libraries and communities of any size, ranging from the smallest library’s book or bake sale to huge urban library galas and generous corporate underwriting. It can be simple or sophisticated. It can involve the efforts of a few people or hundreds of people. And the best news of all? It can be sized to fit your library perfectly. Regardless of the size or complexity of library fund-raising, it is always about forging and strengthening relationships with the stakeholders in a library’s community.

The American Library Association (ALA) believes that private fund-raising is essential for U.S. libraries’ future survival. Under the leadership of President Roberta Stevens in 2010–2011, the ALA deepened its resources for private fund-raising, developing the association’s first online fund-raising toolkit. The toolkit was added to the ALA website’s “Advocacy University” as part of its wide array of online help for libraries seeking advocacy and fund-raising assistance.

Whether your library undertakes only occasional fund-raising projects, or is well along in this effort and wants to become more successful, the chapters that follow are designed to guide you through proven methods of effective library fund-raising. They will help you think about raising dollars in new ways, about going beyond your traditional fund-raising activities. In fact, because so many libraries already know how to do book sales (and other kinds of sales) successfully, this book
will not include that topic, except to offer one piece of advice: when selling books or other merchandise, determine how you can connect your sale to the other fund-raising that you do. For example, take advantage of the interest in your sale to promote membership in your Friends organization, as well as annual, special, tribute, and memorial giving. Whenever possible, gather names of customers at your sale and add them to your database for future fund-raising solicitation.

Instead of reading more about sales, however, you will learn the importance of developing a strong case for supporting your library, nurturing relationships, employing a broad range of fund-raising techniques (including the Internet), and moving your library’s fund-raising from hit-or-miss to solid and successful. Part I, “Focus on Fund-Raising,” will help you think through your fund-raising needs and position your library to be a strong partner for private supporters. You’ll be guided through the process of assessing your library’s strengths and challenges, developing a fund-raising plan, building an effective fund-raising team (perhaps through your current board, Friends group, or Foundation), identifying potential funding partners, and building relationships that benefit both your library and its funders. You’ll learn to understand what motivates donors to give generously and why thanks and recognition are important. Throughout Part I, you will find paths to the “Fund-Raising Toolkit” where there are easy-to-use tools that break down new challenges into manageable tasks.

In Part II, “Roll Up Your Sleeves,” you will find a wealth of good advice and more practical tools for a wide range of fund-raising activities, from the simplest annual fund to the grandest gala. If you have a small annual fund effort that needs improvement, or want to begin an annual Fund-Raising campaign, start here. If you have ever considered soliciting memorial, tribute, or major gifts—or if you know that planned giving (such as gifts made through a will) is important but don’t know where to begin—there are several chapters that cover these in detail. If you want to identify opportunities to partner with businesses (as library sponsors or underwriters) and to apply for grants from corporations and foundations, this book can make both of these feel easy and natural. If your library is in serious need of capital improvements, but you find the thought of raising large sums of money through a capital campaign terrifying, Beyond Book Sales: The Complete Guide to Raising Real Money for Your Library will hold your hand through every step of that multi-year process. If you feel daunted by online fund-raising, you can learn how to adapt your website and utilize social networks to use the Web effectively for library fund-raising. If you believe that everyone loves a party, library fund-raising events can run the gamut from punch and cookies to black-tie galas with best-selling authors. Your library’s special event “sweet spot” is somewhere along that spectrum, and this book will help you find it for maximum results.

Regardless of your level of experience in library fund-raising, you will finish this book with fresh ideas and an eagerness to roll up your sleeves and start raising dollars for your library.
Library Strategies is a consulting group of The Friends of The Saint Paul Public Library, created in response to increasing requests for services from libraries and library organizations. The mission of Library Strategies is to provide the highest-quality consulting services to support libraries and all library organizations. Our consultants are both leaders in the library community and outstanding specialists in other fields who offer a wide range of practical skills and decades of successful experience.
PART ONE

Focus on Fund-Raising—Fund-amentals for Libraries
This chapter could just be the shortest in history, in fact, just one word: crisis.

“Budget Cuts Force Charlotte Libraries to Shut Down,” “Library Cuts Threaten Research,” “Residents Protest Library Cutbacks” are just a few of the many headlines we see with increasing frequency. As cities, counties, and other government branches face budget deficits and struggle with service cutbacks and employee layoffs, libraries (particularly public and school libraries) struggle too. Temporary downturns in funding used to be just that: temporary—something people simply weathered. That old adage, “This too shall pass” was the mantra. That is no longer the case because the foreseeable future appears to be one of permanent fiscal challenge, even crisis, for libraries of all kinds. But this book is not about doom and gloom; it’s about what you can do to lift up your library when circumstances combine to bring it down.

The challenges libraries face are not unique. All nonprofit institutions are re-adjusting their practices and seeking new revenue streams. Creativity and persistence are the buzzwords of today, and there are more opportunities for creativity than ever before. Later chapters of this book will tell you why and how.

Library Use Is Increasing

How much time do you spend thinking about the ways your library matters to your community? Have you ever counted all the hats library staff are asked to wear? Try
listing them. You might be surprised at how long the list is. In many communities, library use is at an all-time high. It’s a well-known fact that library use increases in times of economic stress, and these challenging times confirm that fact just about everywhere. Door counts are up, computers have waiting lists, and people want their libraries to be open longer hours. They’re also demanding a broader range of services than ever before. Gone are the days when people went to their library solely to check out books and music. Today, they want their libraries to offer multi-language resources and programs, skill-building classes, help with resumes and job searches, and more. They want libraries to be kids’ places, teen places, and meeting places. Today’s library staffers are teachers and counselors too.

A report released in 2011 by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) found that, in 2010, over three-fourths of Americans used the Internet. Researchers called this group “information consumers.” The authors state, “In 2010, 68% of information consumers had a library card. For those Americans economically impacted, that rate was even higher—81%. Information consumers who have experienced a job impact were not just getting library cards at greater rates; they were using the library for more services and more often in 2010. And their perception of library value was significantly [higher] than those not impacted” (OCLC 2011, 5).

In 2009, the American Library Association published a report titled The Condition of U.S. Libraries: Trends 1999–2009. It chronicles library use, comparing 2006 and 2009 data. Researchers found that library use has increased between 2006 and 2009. In 2011, a Harris telephone survey of 1,012 adults over age 18 found that nearly two-thirds of Americans reported using their public library, either in person, by telephone, or computer in the past year.

A similar Harris Poll was conducted in 2010. Comparing the results between 2010 and 2011, Harris Polls revealed that:

Americans continue to value the importance of services provided by public libraries. In fact, when considering a list of eleven library services, two-thirds or more of the American public consider every factor to be very or somewhat important to them personally, surpassing the proportions in the 2010 study. The most highly valued services pertain to the provision of free information and services that promote education and lifelong learning.
More than nine in ten Americans (93%) believe that it is very important or somewhat important that library services are free, representing an increase of two percentage points from 2010.

Similar proportions place great value in the library’s provision of information for school and work (91%, up five percentage points), as well as the fact that the library provides a place for lifelong learning (90%, up three percentage points), and that the library enhances one’s education (89%, up five percentage points).

Eighty-four percent of adults consider it very or somewhat important that the library serves as a community center, is a source of cultural programs and activities (83%, up four percentage points from a year earlier), and provides computer access, training, and support (83%, up seven percentage points).

Three-quarters of Americans consider it very or somewhat important that the library provides health information (75%, up two percentage points) and financial information (75%, up six percentage points) that is accurate and up-to-date.


Libraries Matter

It’s clear that, as the gap between rich and poor and the resulting “digital divide” continues to widen, more people than ever before must rely on the library for important resources—particularly computers. State and local governments continue to cut costs by requiring individuals to access their services online, and people flock to their libraries for this purpose. Without a computer, it’s nearly impossible to apply for government assistance, register for school, or look for work.

Computers are essential for social contact today. E-mail and social networking are two of the most important ways we connect to one another in our modern world. If you don’t own a computer, or if you can’t access one from work or school, the library is the place you go to use one. Even if you do have access to a computer, if it doesn’t offer high-speed Internet service, you’re not likely to use it if you have another alternative.

All this technology, however, can also isolate us. When everyone is in his or her own private world—chatting, texting, e-mailing, tweeting, and posting on others’ Facebook walls—face-to-face social interaction becomes less frequent. The library provides “people space” where individuals can interact with others in story times, book clubs, classes, teen groups, and senior activities. The library has been described as “the community’s living room,” and that is a very good description of the function it serves for many people.

Words to Know

Digital divide refers to the gap between people who have access to computers and digital information and those with limited or no access.
Libraries also matter to the economic health of their communities. They are partners in economic development, providing resources to small businesses and other community organizations and serving as the go-to place for employment searches. Many of the individuals walking into the library to look for work have never before sought employment using a computer. Many have limited English skills or have never written a resume. Many are people who haven’t looked for work in decades because they thought their jobs were secure. Without the library—and librarians who can provide personal assistance—the community would face huge challenges in serving this population of job seekers, and local businesses would face longer periods of time with unfilled jobs.

A study published in March 2009 by Library Research Service looked at eight public libraries representing geographically, economically, and demographically diverse regions of Colorado. Using these libraries, researchers quantified the return on investment (ROI) to taxpayers for monies invested in public libraries. For most of the libraries participating in the study the ROI was five to one—that is, for every $1.00 spent on public libraries, $5.00 of value was realized by taxpayers (Steffen et al. 2009, v). An ROI study published in a February 2011 issue of Library Leadership & Management found similar results. Its author states, “The use of Return on Investment studies in a library setting have produced ROI numbers that are quite variable, although many seem to group in the $4 to $6 of benefits for each dollar spent by the library” (Matthews 2011, 11).

As school library services are cut back and even eliminated in some school systems (an action once thought incomprehensible), parents, teachers, and students rely more heavily on public libraries than ever before. Libraries are the lifeblood of learning. They are essential for students at all levels, and they’re the only place where many preschoolers can obtain the skills they need for school readiness. The library provides young children with opportunities to build literacy abilities they’ll carry with them into school—and into life.

The conclusion is clear: libraries of all kinds are more utilized and more important than ever today. For libraries to survive, alternate means of funding must be sought, and the clock is ticking.

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