Confidently Negotiating Political and Financial Support for your Library

Presentation at ALA 2019 by Lisa McClure

Too often librarians are content with the leftover crumbs from the budget. We have low expectations and that needs to change We should be able to rightfully demand what we need for our library and community.

Eight steps to confidently negotiating:

1. Know your value. As a library (we are part of life-long learning in our community); as a librarian (we are powerful; we have the means to change lives). Advertise your value; the gift that keeps on giving. Set the record straight, get rid of old myths of librarianship and let them know who we are today.
2. Know your facts. Educate yourself. Find out all you can about your community. Get statistics on who lives there, poverty rate, school enrollment, census data, housing costs, those on welfare, graduation rates, etc. Look at municipal reports. Use data to demonstrate need and what the library can do to meet it. Identify the need: in the community, for a particular culture, circumstances people find themselves in. Look at available resources – budget and development – as your jumping off point and go from there. Educate your partners; use info sheets (one-half to one page) on each department, their purpose and what they need. Look for solutions and do what you can to implement them. Have informational handouts ready to give out. Have presentations ready for anyone/group that wants to learn more. Use mostly pictures to get your message across.
3. Know your goals. Focus on outcomes: building knowledge and skills, changing attitudes and behaviors. Not how many people come to the library, but what happens to them after they leave. Do they have success academically, professionally, socially and/or economically? We are there to see our community thrive. We want all to know the library is the place for everyone. We want people to succeed on every level. Think big picture: collective impact, system-wide ideas, system-wide supply, system-wide capacity and appropriate budgets. Libraries share ideas so all can benefit. Make sure staff has time for community involvement. Collaboration happens when you pool resources – staff, spaces – for collective impact.
4. Create your narrative. Inspire others with your passion! Join with other community leaders to work together for community success. Be a storyteller; be ready to tell anyone the story of the library. Have success stories ready to share. Let people know how they can help. “You can be the one who… gives the teens a place to go …helps the makerspace to open …enables storytime to go on the road.” Elevator speeches can make dreams come true. Touch their heart with something that means something to them; share the path, how you expect to get there; share the dream and how they can help you get there.
5. Hunt your targets! Hunt down potential partners. Build a new network. Strategize how to work together to upgrade your network. Identify leaders you need to know. Start with a relationship with your senior administrators. Make sure they know the stats too, ask what they think is important. Take suggestions from the front line staff. Empower your staff so they can internalize the goal and support them in their work. Use the Planning Tool form to identify leaders and actors for a project. List anyone who would be impacted by the project on the sides. Then rank them in to the triangles as to where they stand in the process. Who needs to be involved first? Have people in every step of the process so it doesn’t collapse.
6. Be the leader. Don’t wait until you are ready, to be invited, for others to act; don’t wait your turn – you be the leader NOW! Take the driver’s seat, bet on yourself, be confident. Invite yourself to meetings if you think you should be there but weren’t invited. Our mission is our invitation. We deserve a place at the table. We need to be part of the community dialogue.
7. Make the pitch. Feel the power. Asking for money is not wrong! Create a culture of philanthropy. Have a profile of community need. Track every donation no matter how small. Establish joint funding. Assign roles and assing budgets. Establish a timeline – they can’t wait.
8. Win the prize. Make it happen. Be your own cheerleader. Celebrate your funders. Be not only relevant, be indispensable!

Start with one project, one thing you can do, and go for it.