

SPRING 2004 TRUSTEE EDUCATION SERIES

EACH YEAR, Mid-Hudson Library System provides an education series specifically for member library trustees. Many of those who have attended commented on how valuable it was to meet with and discuss library issues with trustees outside of their own library board. The System offers a \$100 incentive grant to libraries if at least one of their trustees attends a trustee training. Checks will be mailed based on attendance.

The curriculum for the *Trustee Essentials* includes "Libraries in New York State," "Trustee Roles and Responsibilities" and "Running a Good Meeting."

(1) SAT., MAY 15, 10 A.M.–12 P.M., Morton Memorial Library & Community House, 82 Kelly St., Rhinecliff

(2) THU., JUNE 10, 5:30–7:30 P.M., MHLS Auditorium, 105 Market St., Poughkeepsie

(3) THU., MAY 27, 5:30–7:30 P.M., Mahopac Library, 668 Route 6, Mahopac

The *Advanced Trustee* curriculum will examine case studies.

(4) SAT., JUNE 19, 10 A.M.–12 P.M., Kingston Library, 55 Franklin St., Kingston

(5) TUE., JUNE 22, 5:30–7:30 P.M., MHLS Auditorium, 105 Market St., Poughkeepsie

Register online using the MHLS Calendar at <http://midhudson.org> or by calling 845.471.6060 ext. 46.

ACROSS THE

BOARD

WINNING YOUR VOTE



The most effective way to increase your budget is by holding a public vote. Every library, regardless of type, can have their budget voted on by the public. Some libraries do this annually, others do it as needed. It can be an overwhelming task for trustees: *How do you construct a successful campaign? How do you "get the vote out"? What happens if your vote fails?*

Yours isn't the first public library board to go through the process of a public vote campaign. Libraries in the Mid-Hudson Library System have an excellent success rate when asking the public to vote on their budgets. This issue of *Across the Board* is devoted to sharing best practices for library votes.

MAKE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR THE LIBRARY YOUR TOP PRIORITY

Just like in traditional fundraising if you don't ask, you won't get it. Don't be afraid to go to the public and ask them to fund the library at an appropriate level. Let's talk about the value of having your budget go up for public vote:

Customer Service Model

- Library can be responsive to patron demands
- Library is rewarded for good customer service

Service Based

- Recognition of cost of library service
- Taxpayers see how much they are paying for services

Direct Appeal

- Budget is based on demands of patrons
- Budget is not overshadowed by other priorities

Budget is Locked In

- Budget cannot be reduced
- Stability of budget will be useful for strategic planning

UNDERSTANDING THE VEHICLES FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY VOTES

School and special district libraries automatically have their budgets voted on annually. Association and municipal libraries can become school or special district libraries or they can remain as they are. If they choose to stay as they are, they have two options:

(1) **414:** This vote is based on municipality boundaries, and you would need to initiate the process for another vote each time the library needs a budget increase.

- Library Board votes on budget amount.
- A petition will need to be submitted. The details will be explained when you contact System staff.

- Submit petitions to town board which forwards them to county board of elections.
- Vote held on election day.

(2) **259:** The second option is referred to as a "259" vote. This is based on school district lines and would need to be initiated each time you needed a budget increase.

- Library Board votes on budget amount.
- Asks school board to place on ballot.
- Vote held as part of school budget vote; can be on a different day.

If you need more information about an annual school or special district vote or a 414 or 259 vote, contact Josh Cohen at Mid-Hudson Library System (jcohen@midhudson.org; 845.471.6060 ext. 17).

HOW TO PROCEED

Community Analysis: As a board you will need to identify services that patrons want from the library. You could design a series of focus groups combined with a questionnaire to help you prioritize services and their implementation within your long-range plan. This can help you craft a reasonable budget that covers the basics and responds directly to what the public has said it needs from you. *Yes* votes are built on what your library does all year long. Remember WIFM—"What's in it for me?" Your library builds *yes* votes through library programs, publicity and promotion that respond to what the community wants. During this analysis phase, target individuals or groups that might oppose the vote. Generally these groups include anti-tax groups and small businesses.

DECIDING ON THE AMOUNT

How do you know how much to go for? This is an essential question regardless of the type of vote you are pursuing. Base your budget on the cost of providing services that your community indicated it wanted during the community analysis phase. Next, find out what the tax impact would be. People will first want to know how much their taxes will go up. Consider basing your example on per \$100,000 of assessed property value. Then equate the increase to something graphically tangible, for example: "For an extra \$10 per \$100,000 of assessed property value you will get a better staffed library that is open on Sundays—less than the cost of one hardcover book."

In past years libraries have approached the question of "how much" in terms that were more strategic than mathematical. Some libraries

go for less funding than they actually need the first time out in order to get their budgets locked in, and then put up reasonable annual increases. Other libraries go for more but promise not to increase the amount for several years.

You should have a strong majority of *yes* votes in the community at least two months before the vote. Build support and *yes* votes early: Will government officials support you? Speak early to government officials explaining why you want to increase the amount you are asking for or why you are putting your budget up for a vote. Use library supporters who have connections with officials as spokespeople—a familiar face can ease the way and help make the case for your library. Let officials know that a public vote on the library budget takes the onus of tax increases off them.

Remember when we told you to keep your eye out for opposition to your budget increase in the community analysis phase? Although the opposition is sometimes in the form of organized anti-tax groups, we have seen cases where just one vocal taxpayer stirred up opposition. **Don't ignore opposition—deal with it.** Are there library patrons connected to the opposition who can be turned into spokespeople for the library? As a way of addressing their concerns, distribute a sheet of **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)** about the budget vote. **Develop programs for opposition groups** that get them into the library. Some libraries have provided programs that helped the opposition better understand the services their library provides, as well as the real costs of running a library in today's economy.

GETTING OUT THE YES VOTE

During the last month of your campaign, focus your efforts on those people you **know** will vote *yes*. **Create a campaign timeline.** This will help you plan your communication strategy and assign duties. Think of it in terms of days, weeks and months “out,” or left before the vote: “We’ve scheduled the mailing to land 20 days out from the vote.” **Use library patrons and volunteers to encourage voter participation.** Letters to the editor and publicity flyers should emphasize new services and their cost in dollars to the taxpayer. **Consider holding public**

presentations on the vote. These can build support even with those who can't attend once they hear of your efforts to reach out to the community. Make sure your presentation is well crafted to fully explain costs. Be prepared to answer tough questions. **Be honest.** If you don't know the answer to a question, tell the person that you will get back to them with an answer as soon as possible, then do so. Remember, the side that wins is the side that *gets out the vote*.

NOTE: You cannot use library funds to pay for campaign flyers. Any publicity that asks people to “vote yes, support the library” must have a tagline that states where the money came from for that particular piece. **Don't use library staff for campaigns.** The campaign should be run by Trustees, Friends and volunteers of the library.

AFTER THE VOTE

Your actions after the vote will lay the groundwork for your next vote. If you win, immediately issue a letter thanking voters and informing them of new services as well as the total tax implications. Be sure to highlight new services as they are launched—use press releases, your newsletter or library signage. Don't forget word of mouth, a great way to emphasize new services. Continue to find out what other services patrons would like.

If your vote goes down (yes, we mean if you lose) immediately issue a letter thanking voters for support, just as you would have had you won. Determine who voted against you and strategize about how to convert them to *Yes* voters for next time. As a Board discuss whether or not to cut services—a drastic step—but to make your point it may have to be done. Continue to find out what services people want from your library. Don't stop being proactive because the vote went down. You'll figure out the right combination eventually. **Whether you win or lose, your next budget vote campaign begins the day after election day.**

If you would like to explore your options or need help planning your next vote, share this article at your next Board meeting. Invite MHLS staff to talk to your Board. Or you could start now by contacting **Josh Cohen**, MHLS Executive Director (jcohen@midhudson.org or 845.471.6060 ext.17) and talk to him about your library.

THE SYSTEM BUDGET

Unlike public libraries the Mid-Hudson Library System cannot hold a public budget vote. Our funding comes directly from New York State. This year **Governor Pataki** has proposed a **5% cut** to library funding which is based on a decade-old funding level. In addition, we are currently operating under a **destabilized funding formula**. This means that the population increase for the mid-Hudson region as indicated by the **2000 Census** should have resulted in an annual **\$70,000 increase** in state aid for the Mid-Hudson Library System under New York State law. This rightful adjustment has not been made.

The Mid-Hudson Library System works hard to save your library money through resource sharing (automated circulation) and services such as delivery, professional consultants, continuing education and graphic

design. For a very modest investment at the state level (*one-tenth of one percent of the NYS budget*) public library systems stretch the dollars they are given to the max. MHLS alone provides benefits to over sixty-six communities.

Please speak up for our System dollars by writing to your legislators today and telling them to reverse the governor's cut, stabilize the library funding formula and increase state spending on libraries. We have learned that some of the electronic databases now available through Home**ACCESS** (that includes the NOVEL* databases) will be threatened this year without an increase in state funding. These databases provide millions of dollars worth of subscriptions to hundreds of newspapers, magazines and journals and over 800 reference books—far more than any library could afford on its own or through a system. The NOVEL databases are also used in schools across the state.

Consider joining us in Albany on **Tuesday, March 16** for the New York Library Association's **Library Advocacy Day**. Library supporters from across the state will gather in the capitol to visit with area legislators and speak out on behalf of libraries.

If you cannot attend, please write to your legislators. A sample letter and legislator's addresses are available on the MHLS web site at *Advocacy Central*, **http://midhudson.org/**. There are also details about the organized transportation.

For more information, call or e-mail Rebekkah Smith, Coordinator of Member Information (rsmith@midhudson.org; 845.471.6060 ext. 39).

***NOVEL is the acronym for New York Online Virtual Electronic Library**

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