

Notes from 414 Panel Participants
MHLS Auditorium
8/23/06

Facilitated by: Josh Cohen, Director, Mid-Hudson Library System

Panelists included:

- **Marilyn McIntosh, Director, Monroe Free Library**
- **Patti Haar, Director, Patterson Library**
- **Julie Johnson, Director, Kinderhook Memorial Library**
- **Mark Fuerst, former trustee, Starr Library**

1. Did you or your board have apprehensions going into the 414? How were these apprehensions overcome?

Patti H.: “No one wanted to ask for more money.” [Patti assured the board that they would *not* have to go door to door asking for more money. She explained to the board that they really had nothing to lose and everything to gain. Stabilizing the library’s funding was the strongest argument for doing a 414. Patti tried to take the onus off the library board by saying things like, “the Board of Regents recommends this” and by comparing per capita spending to show that Patterson was below. She reminded the Board and the public “citizens of Patterson deserve good library services.”]

Mark F.: “There was a fear of failure among some board members.” Some board members were concerned that they were undermining the town’s authority and that the town would view it as going over their heads, almost as a way of directly saying to the town, “we’re not happy with this relationship anymore.” Several trustees were politically active and well connected, and helped to maneuver through this issue effectively.”

Marilyn M.: “You may have to turn off some town board members, this has happened to me. I just try to maintain a civil relationship with them.”

2. What PR materials were developed for your 414 and how did you use them? Did you have negative comments, letters, or news articles? If so, how did you deal with them?

Patti H.: “We created a bookmark about our 414 and listed 6 other libraries in our area that did a 414, because there is safety in numbers. We also went directly to our seniors and calmly explained our position. For our second 414, we sent a postcard directly to users who were active within six months. For our first 414, we had to educate. For our second, we had to advocate.”

Julie J: “We did yard signs.”



Regarding Negative Comments

Mark F.: “You have to ask yourselves, is this a real big problem or is it just somebody writing? There were some negative things written about Rhinebeck’s first 414, but there was no big, organized campaign. There are *always* some people who are going to be negative. You can’t expect 100% support.”

Marilyn M.: “Two town board members actively campaigned against us. We just kept on going. You can’t be afraid of negativity. Think of possible negatives and spin them your way. Be proactive.”

Patti H.: “We were prepared ahead of time. We picked a nice guy in the community with name recognition who was on stand-by to send a letter-to-the-editor should we need him to. He wasn’t a political figure, just a well-known person in the community whom everyone respected. We also made sure all our communication about the 414 was scripted, so no one was shooting from the hip. Library staff were able to provide basic information about the vote, but if someone had a lot of questions, they were sent to the director.”

3. How much work is required for a successful 414 vote?

Marilyn M.: “A lot of work. You must get out there and always be advocating, both inside and outside the library.”

Patti H.: “It’s work, but it’s not overwhelming. It mostly requires good planning and organization. We had about one or two key people and two or three people collect signatures for a couple hours on a few Saturdays to get on the ballot. We only directly contacted library supporters, we didn’t try to convert the masses.”

Mark F.: “It was work and we approached it like a real campaign. We created a reasonable timeline. My work was mostly contacting supporters. We tracked heavy users and those who made donations. Volunteers who collected signatures passed out yellow balloons. I think this was a good idea because it suggested “something good is going on at the Library.” You must continually cultivate your relationship with the public, deliver what you promise, and promote what you are doing. You also have to have a compelling case. In broadcasting we have listener panels to gather feedback. I feel we should have done something like this to test our case with the people we were trying to reach. You also need to work toward alignment between the board and staff. Work at getting people facing the same direction. Get problems out on the table and deal with them internally.”



Josh Cohen: “A successful 414 changes your relationship with your patrons. They become customers, much like a business. You become responsible to the public.”

Patti H.: “We stepped up professionally. We always do a survey before the vote. There is a psychological value to the survey. It sends the message, “we asked and this is what you want.”

4. What happened when you presented your 414 plans to the town board? What happened when the information became public?

Marilyn M.: Some general suggestions about submitting petitions to the town board:

- Make copies of petition and signatures.
- Have town clerk stamp petition so you have proof of submission.
- Call the Board of Elections to inform them that you have submitted.
- Bring voter registration lists with you to check where people live when they go to sign the petition to make sure their signature is valid.

5. What advice would you give libraries going through the 414 process for the first time? Are there things you wish had been done differently?

Julie J.: “Be careful what you promise because some things you may have difficulty delivering. You may not want to promise *not* going for another 414 within a certain number of years, because you may realize that you need to do another sooner than you think.”

Patti H.: “Pick the most popular things in the library and promise more of them – and deliver on the promises!”

Mark F.: “We probably should have done a survey prior and gotten more feedback from people who were not involved in the campaign. There was also some tension from library staff. This should have been addressed better. There should have been more team spirit among the staff and board. We also probably should have asked for more money. We probably could have asked for \$50,000 more.

Josh C.: “Keep your library’s message consistent. With regard to raising taxes, give the public the real numbers, not the percents. Promote the most palatable numbers.”



Question from participant: **Do you still receive donations after doing the 414?**

Josh C. “Your fundraising becomes more specific after passing a 414. You might do it to raise money for a new building, or for something else very specific.”

Patti H.: “Passing a 414 has given us more credibility and visibility. It has raised the bar for library services in our community.”

Summary Question: What would you say to summarize today’s 414 discussion?

Marilyn M.: “Do it every year!”

Julie J.:

- “Follow through on what you promise.”
- “Your Friends group can help with some of the 414 efforts.”
- “[We] proved how vital the library is by having a positive presence in the community.”

Patti H.:

- “It’s about them (the community.)”
- “When they vote on the library, they own it, it’s theirs.”

Mark F.:

- “A strong community outreach program is very important!”
- “Physical contact and connection with the public helps with gaining support.”

