

Mideastern Michigan Library Cooperative

Advocacy Plan

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Introduction

Mideastern Michigan Library Cooperative is organized under P.A. 89 of 1977 and is one of eleven Cooperative libraries in the state. The Cooperative area includes nineteen public libraries in ten plus counties. Included in the area are Bay, Genesee, Ingham, Lapeer, Shiawassee and parts of Clare, Isabella, Midland, Saginaw and Oakland counties. In addition to the public libraries, the Cooperative has 8 school systems, 4 academic libraries and 1 special library. The Cooperative provides back-up services to its members that include continuing education for staff, delivery, programming and technology upgrade programs. Additionally, the Cooperative provides professional consultation services and group discounts for purchase of library materials and equipment. The Cooperative has a role as an advocate for its member libraries within the Cooperative and on local, state and federal government matters that pertain to libraries and their services. The Cooperative has the responsibility of keeping its membership informed about the status of all such upcoming and ongoing issues.

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to have a directed approach to advocacy that will help government leaders at all levels understand the pivotal role that libraries and library cooperatives play in building healthy and vital communities, as well as assist all library personnel and supporters with a way to effectively communicate with those in government. Due to the multi-type nature of member libraries, the Cooperative staff will seek to be informed and to assist all member libraries in gaining improved awareness/understanding of all library-related local, state and federal government issues.

Importance of Advocacy

Library advocacy is vital in today's society for a variety of reasons:

- a. All libraries are an integral part of community life; whether they are public, academic or school libraries.
- b. Information literacy and the need for lifelong learning are increasingly important for each individual in a community.
- c. The taxable property values in each local jurisdiction, which result in reduced tax revenues, are decreasing at the same time that libraries are facing increasing costs.
- d. Libraries must be competitive with other entities to meet increased community needs with shrinking and/or limited funding.
- e. Challenges to valued library institutions, such as the Library of Michigan, make the need for advocacy a necessary regular activity.
- f. Libraries can get lost in the shuffle of democracy's many voices, taken for granted, face tokenism, or be trivialized.

Advocates Include

Cooperative staff: The Cooperative office has the responsibility of being a gateway for disseminating information about legislation and other governmental actions to the membership; also, to promote interaction between the membership and the legislators. As an organizational member of the Michigan Library Association, the Cooperative receives legislative updates and is responsible for providing information to co-op members. Another role of the Cooperative is to help facilitate opportunities for library staff, Trustees and Friends to meet and talk with legislators.

Cooperative Board: The Cooperative Board has the responsibility to advocate for libraries at every opportunity. As representatives of all types of libraries, the Board is uniquely positioned to communicate the needs and challenges of cooperatives and libraries to the constituencies that have influence over library funding, both the public and the legislative bodies.

Member Libraries: The administration and staff at the member libraries are the first line of offense in an advocacy plan. Every staff member plays a significant role in getting the word out to those they come in contact with both in the library and in their personal lives. Communicating the issues that are important to library advocacy and seeking to achieve an understanding of their impact is a major objective of the plan.

Library Trustees/Friends/Local Advocates: As the unpaid volunteers in public service they can speak up as representatives of the public. By their willingness to serve, Trustees demonstrate their strong belief in the value of a library as an institution dedicated to the pursuit of uncensored intellectual freedom, as a source of information and lifelong learning.

Advocacy Tools/Resources

Advocacy techniques and basic effective communication:

- Be prepared with facts, figures and issues. Be clear about what you want to communicate.
- Be brief. Your audience's time is limited.
- Be appreciative. Acknowledge past support and convey appreciation for current action.
- Be specific. Refer to local library and cooperative needs.
- Be informative. Give reasons why a measure should be supported.
- Be courteous. Ask, do not demand or threaten. Be positive, but polite.

MMLC Website Links:

- **Michigan Library Association**

The MMLC website will link to the Advocacy pages on the Michigan Library Association website. <http://www.mla.lib.mi.us/advocacy>. Included on the MLA site are:

- Advocacy Resources
- Contact Your Legislator
- MLA Policy Positions

- **American Library Association**

The MMLC website will link to the Advocacy University resources on the American Library Association website.

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/index.cfm>

Some of the links included on the website are:

- Frontline Advocacy
- Advocacy Toolkit
- Making Budget Presentations

Training: MMLC will facilitate training opportunities on advocacy. The annual Joint Meeting of the Board and Advisory Council provides an opportunity for the director or other speaker to inform members about advocacy issues and efforts. Additionally, the Cooperative will provide or seek other types of on-site educational opportunities and training that may exist in online versions or webinars.

Events: The Cooperative will assist members of the cooperative in planning events; either legislative or those that provide an opportunity for the library to showcase its services. Dedications, special reading programs, and guest appearances at libraries can be opportunities to promote the library's advocacy agenda.

Legislative Activities: Support of and participation in state and federal legislative activities are an important part of the Cooperative service to its members.

- **National Advocacy:** An ALA legislative event occurs each year in Washington D.C. and is organized by the Library of Michigan. The Cooperative may choose to send representatives to the annual ALA-sponsored "Legislative Day" event in Washington, D.C.
- **Statewide Advocacy:** The Cooperative will organize one or more groups to visit legislators while they are in session or in their offices at the Capitol building. These groups will be provided with talking points and encouraged to prepare stories of how current legislative actions are affecting library services in their communities.

These efforts should be in cooperation with the MLA and supportive of all libraries throughout the state of Michigan.

Public Relations: Samples of advocacy materials will be made available to member libraries.

- **Communicating Important Messages:** Libraries in the Cooperative will provide the MMLC office with a contact person(s) to which information about pending legislation or other issues will be directed so it can be fanned out to other interested parties. Talking points on issues will be sent in a direct email.
- **Media Contacts:** Information about how to contact the media, including sample press releases, will be posted on the MMLC website.
- **Advocacy Materials:** Samples of direct mailing items, such as letters of invitation to legislators and postcards announcing upcoming events or elections, will be posted on the MMLC website.

Conclusion

The success of an advocacy program depends on the involvement and commitment of everyone in the Cooperative. Librarians and trustees must cultivate relationships with local legislators and library supporters; they should be fully informed on the issues and ready to tell their stories when called upon. The Cooperative must be sure that information is flowing in both directions and should act as a facilitator in this program. The expected outcome is the recognition of the pivotal role that libraries and library cooperatives play in their communities in order to heightening the awareness of the issues facing libraries today.