

Advocacy Plan

Mideastern Michigan Library Cooperative

Introduction and overview:

Mideastern Michigan Library Cooperative is organized under P.A. 89 of 1977 and is one of thirteen Cooperative libraries in the state. The Cooperative area includes seventeen public libraries in eight plus counties. Included in the area are Bay, Genesee, Ingham, Lapeer, Shiawassee and parts of Midland, Saginaw and Oakland counties. In addition to the public libraries, the Cooperative has 15 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, services to the blind and physically handicapped, 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 the area on the state and federal levels and keeps its membership informed on issues related to libraries and library services.

The Cooperative serves as a gateway to resources that support the needs of users/patrons of its member libraries and helps to insure quality, relevance and accessibility in the delivery of resources.

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 play in building a healthy and vital community, as well as assist library trustees and staff with a way to effectively communicate with those in government.

Due to the multi-type nature of the Cooperative, the Cooperative staff will seek to be informed on issues related to all types of libraries and to assist the library membership in keeping up on those issues.

Why do advocacy:

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

- a. Public libraries are an integral part of community life. School and academic libraries are also very important to their constituents.
- b. Information and need for lifelong learning are increasingly important for each individual in a community.
- c. Libraries face costly technological changes to keep pace with such community needs.
- d. The taxable wealth of each local jurisdiction varies at the same time that libraries face greater costs.
- e. Libraries must be increasingly competitive with other departments of local government to meet increased community needs with shrinking and/or always limited funding.

- f. Without strong grassroots advocates to speak up, libraries can be lost in the shuffle of democracy's many voices, be taken for granted and face tokenism.
- g. Cooperatives play an important role in providing services to the population through the libraries and yet their role is not recognized at the funder level.

Who should participate?

Library staff, trustees, and Friends should be involved.

Library staff: The first line of defense in an advocacy plan is the staff at the member libraries. They play a pivotal role in getting the word out to their boards, Friends and the general public about legislation that affects libraries.

Trustees/Friends: As the unpaid volunteers in public service they can speak up as representatives of the public. By their willingness to serve, they 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.

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

How do we advocate:

Advocacy techniques and basic effective communication:

- Be prepared with facts, figures and issues. Be clear about what you want to communicate.
- Be brief. A legislator'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.

Specific Advocacy Tools:

- **Website:** MMLC will dedicate a section of its website to a listing of the legislators for our area and their contact information including names of aides when available. Website will also have a copy of this Advocacy Plan and "talking points", both in general terms and specific points when there is a pressing issue. A FAQ section will also be

available. Periodically the website will feature an article about a particular legislator.

- **Training:** MMLC will conduct every other year a training session on advocacy. If possible the training will coincide with the annual Joint Meeting of the Board and Advisory Council to allow for the greatest audience. Additionally, the Cooperative will seek other types of training that may exist in on-line versions.
- **Legislative Activities:** Plan for legislative breakfasts, open houses and other events that bring legislators and librarians together. The Cooperative will assist areas of the cooperative in planning such events and would help design an advocacy module which may be used in various areas of the cooperative.
- **Special Events:** Assist libraries in planning events that are not of a legislative nature but exposes the legislator to the activities and programs at libraries. Dedications, special reading programs, guest appearances at libraries, etc.
- **Legislative Day type activities:** ALA legislative day occurs each year in Washington D.C. When the budget allows, the Cooperative should send one or two representatives to represent our area for legislative day. On a state level, MLA usually sponsors a Legislative Day and we need to support this activity.
- **MLA in Lansing:** Currently, the Michigan Library Association's annual conference is held in Lansing every other year. The year that it is in Lansing the Cooperative should plan an event (reception, breakfast, etc) that would bring our legislators and members together. The event would have a brief program and provide an opportunity for librarians and trustees to talk with legislators in a relaxed environment.
- **Getting the word out.** Libraries in the Cooperative will provide the MMLC office with a contact person to which information about pending legislation or other issues shall be directed so it can be fanned out to interested parties. The website will have talking points on issues.
- **Marketing:** Produce marketing tools which will be distributed to legislators and other interested parties. The tool kits may provide, but are not limited to, sample press releases, book marks, buttons, info sheets on library services and stats.
- **Media Contacts:** Compile a list of media contacts for the area. This will include TV, radio, newspapers, cable channels, etc that members may use to distribute information about legislation, interviews, etc.

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 they should be informed on the issues and ready to act when called upon. The Cooperative as the gateway must be sure that information is flowing in both directions and should act as a facilitator in this program. Our expected outcome is recognition of what libraries offer their communities and sufficient funding to accomplish our mission.