

KANSAS Trustee Education Program
Director's Template

Topic: MARKETING THE PUBLIC LIBRARY TO THE COMMUNITY

Discussion Starter: [Director, select one of the following questions for board discussion.]

1. What are the special strengths or “star programs” of this library that our community should know about?
2. What services or programs does this library need to build to serve our community better?
3. How well is our library supported by our community leaders -- government, business, education, public services and entertainment?
4. What is needed to build long-term, effective support for our library?

Points to cover: [Director, also discuss one of the examples on the Trustee Handout as appropriate.]

1. Marketing is important because it leads to more effective use of the public library's services by the entire community.

An excellent public library is not possible unless effective services are partnered with an ongoing and well planned program to market those services to the entire community. In recent years, marketing has been one of the fastest growing library fields because library educators and library leaders are beginning to realize that the lack of marketing is crippling the library field.

Marketing has often been the weakest part of an otherwise good library program and only regular library users are aware of the full range of services that the library offers. This has three negative results:

- The library suffers from inadequate support because the local government and community leadership do not understand what the library is contributing to the community and do not consider the library essential to the community's quality of life.
- The community suffers from inadequate information and recreation because needs that could be met by the public library are not met, or are met at a higher cost to the citizen.
- The public library continues to serve only certain parts of the community, when it has a definite legal obligation to serve the entire community.

When a public library is heavily used, the library staff and board have a tendency to assume that the library is doing well and that the community knows what the library has to offer. They are right about the first but not necessarily right about the second. Library services have to be advertised to the community on an ongoing basis and in a wide variety of ways. If presenting library services to the community is not a priority, then there will be many community residents who do not know what the library has to offer.

2. Marketing is important because it builds support for the library.

A library may be offering excellent service to the community. But if the community leadership and community government do not perceive that the library is essential to the community, the excellent library service may not translate into good financial support for the library.

Too many librarians and trustees believe that the community leadership will not care about supporting the library when the problem is that the community leadership has inadequate, outdated and just plain wrong perceptions about what the library is doing for the community. It is the responsibility of the staff and the trustees to change those perceptions.

The tools for changing those perceptions include hard data about the community and its needs, hard data about how the library is being used by the community, solid evidence that citizens do care about the library and are prepared to actively support it and skillful marketing of the library's accomplishments to both the community and the local government.

There have been libraries that had a stratospheric circulation plus an incredible use of public access to online information plus extraordinarily high attendance at both adult and youth programs. Yet the local government was aware of none of this because the library had not planned and implemented methods of telling them about the library's accomplishments. When the library staff and board want to request better funding for the library, they should have:

- Evidence of what the public library has already achieved and a record of presenting library accomplishments to the community
- Specific knowledge of what the library should accomplish in the next two to five years and why those goals are right for the library's service community
- Specific information on how additional funding will be used
- The ability to pack a government meeting with library supporters
- The support of key community leaders that has been gained through active partnering and information sharing
- The ability to get coverage in local media of major library projects.

3. Marketing is possible for any public library.

A larger public library should have staff or a staff committee that spends time developing and implementing a marketing plan. But marketing the public library is possible for a public library of any size. The staff and board of any public library should be planning and implementing new library programs or developing and improving existing ones.

Every program that is developed for the library should be actively marketed to the community. Without marketing, the community will not benefit fully from the program because the community residents will not understand what the library program can do for them. Without marketing, the community will not perceive the library's program as being essential to the quality of life in the library's service community.

A good part of marketing the public library is described as "building influence" or "the human side of marketing." Marketing involves knowing the community, networking with the community and involving the library as a partner in community projects.

A library director who knows the community leaders and a wide variety of community residents from all walks of life has been engaged in very good marketing, although the director may not have used that term to describe it.

A library staff that is actively involved with the community and has involved the library as a partner in many community projects has also been involved in marketing and has done a great deal to make sure that the library is both visible to the community and valued by the community as a vital part of community growth and development.

4. Every library should have a Marketing Plan but there are many ways in which marketing can be pursued.

A Marketing Plan should consider the nature of the library's service community and what its needs are. A community that has a large number of young families with school age children should have different library services from a community that has a very high percentage of residents over the age of 55. A suburban community near a major urban area will have different needs than a community that serves as a trade center for a sparsely populated rural area.

The library staff and board should identify the library's strengths and then plan ways to market those accomplishments to the community.

The library staff and board should identify the library's weaknesses and plan to build library programs that will address unmet needs. As new programs are developed, marketing should be an integrated part of the program's implementation.

The library staff and board should identify areas that will not be a priority, at least not until a later time. A community with a small school age population and a very high percentage of senior citizens may decide that the library's youth services program is adequate for the present and that the library's planning and development will be concentrated in other areas.

Tools for marketing the library's programs and services can include:

- Meeting with local government to plan for the library's support
- Networking with community leaders
- Holding focus groups of targeted library users to learn more about their needs
- Presenting programs to professional groups and community organizations
- Partnering with the media to learn how to generate effective publicity for the library's programs and major projects
- Self-publishing of library newsletters, flyers, brochures and bookmarks
- Using library and community web pages to communicate about the library's hours, services and current projects
- Using special programs for children and adults to make the library more visible to the community.

- Showcasing materials from the collection to bring them to the public's attention

People who can help market the library's programs and services include:

Staff	Volunteers	Trustees	Friends
Active library users		People who like to speak	
People who like to write		Computer buffs	
Local artists		Fundraisers	

See resource list at the end of the Trustee Handout for additional information.3/6/07