

Mideastern Michigan Library Cooperative

Advocacy Plan

Revised 2019

Introduction

Mideastern Michigan Library Cooperative is organized under 1977 PA 89 and is one of eleven Cooperative libraries in the state. The Cooperative area includes twenty public library systems in twelve counties. Included in the area are Bay, Genesee, Ingham, Lapeer, Shiawassee and parts of Clare, Clinton, Isabella, Livingston, Midland, Saginaw and Oakland counties. In addition to the public libraries, the Cooperative membership includes five academic libraries and two special libraries. School libraries are also eligible to join. The Cooperative provides services to its members that include continuing education for employees, 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 governmental matters that pertain to libraries and their services. The Cooperative has the responsibility of keeping its membership informed about the status of current legislative 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 to assist all library personnel and supporters with a way to effectively communicate with leaders 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. Advocacy is an ongoing process that occurs on a daily basis and is a part of the library and cooperative mission and goals.

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, special 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 make the need for advocacy a necessary regular activity.
- f. Libraries can be overlooked in the shuffle of democracy's many voices, taken for granted, be undervalued, 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 public and 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 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

- **American Library Association (ALA), Washington D.C.**
Mary Ghikas, Executive Director, mghikas@alawash.org
The MMLC website will link to the Advocacy University resources on the American Library Association website. Among the topics are information on the value of libraries, getting started, budgeting, challenges, building coalitions, and public relations.
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advocacy-university>
Additional links included on the website are:
 - “Library Advocate’s Handbook”
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advocacy-university/library-advocates-handbook>
 - “Quotable Facts About America’s Libraries”
<http://www.ala.org/offices/ola/quotablefacts/quotablefacts>
 - Legislative Action Center
<http://cqrcengage.com/ala/>
- **Michigan Library Association (MLA)**
Deborah Mikula, Executive Director, dmikula@milibraries.org
The MMLC website will link to the Advocacy pages on the Michigan Library Association website. <https://www.milibraries.org/advocacy-efforts> Included on the MLA site are:
 - Advocacy Resources
 - Contact Your Legislator
<http://cqrcengage.com/alami/action?1>
- **United for Libraries (UFL)**
Beth Nawalinski, Executive Director, bnawalinski@ala.org
The MMLC website will link to the advocacy resources on the UFL website
<http://www.ala.org/united/advocacy>
- **Friends of Michigan Libraries (FOML) and the FOML Trustee Alliance**
These two groups are a good resource for information and training on library issues.
Jill Sodt, FOML President, jill.sodt@mcc.edu
<http://www.foml.org/>
Shirley Bruursema, FOML Board Member, Trustee Alliance Representative, libsabsarg@aol.com

<http://fomltrusteealliance.org/>

- **Gale Cengage Learning**
Gale's Library Advocacy: MyStory <http://mystory.gale.com/>

Training: MMLC will facilitate advocacy training opportunities that will focus on assisting libraries in finding background information and data that will help them talk to library supporters and legislators. Cooperative training sessions following Advisory Council business meetings will also be opportunities for learning more about issues such as funding and how new laws will affect future revenue. 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 staff is available to assist members in planning advocacy activities. An advocacy event can be specifically to brief legislators on key pieces of legislation affecting libraries at a breakfast or other similar meeting. Other opportunities to inform legislators about important issues are library programs, building dedications, and appearances at libraries as a special guest or celebrity reader.

Legislative Activities: Support of and participation in state and federal legislative activities is an important part of the Cooperative service to its members. These efforts should be in cooperation with the MLA and supportive of all libraries throughout the state of Michigan.

- **Statewide Advocacy:** The Cooperative will work with member directors and other Cooperative Directors to schedule meetings with legislators and will be available to attend those meetings to lend support. The Director will share talking points and stories of how current legislative actions are affecting library services in their communities. During the Fall election period for state officials, MMLC will work with other cooperatives to schedule "Meet the Candidate" sessions.
- **National Advocacy:** An ALA legislative event may be scheduled each year in Washington D.C. The Library of Michigan provides support in scheduling legislative appointments and distributing information about the event. The Cooperative may choose to send representatives to the annual ALA-sponsored "Legislative Day" event in Washington, D.C. If funding is available, the MMLC Board may choose to award mini-grants to Board members and member Directors to assist in paying expenses incurred with attendance at the annual National Library Legislative Day events in Washington D.C. The MMLC Board Chair, MMLC Director, and at least two member Directors will act as the selection committee and will review the application provided. After the Advocacy Team has been named, briefings on travel and orientations related to specific ALA Key Issues briefs will take place.

Public Relations:

- **Communicating Important Messages:** MMLC Director will send out the latest MLA and ALA information regarding pending legislation and calls to action.
- **Media Contacts:** ALA provides the latest information on media contacts through the Campaign for America's Libraries.
<https://www.ala.org/ala/pio/campaign/campaignamericas.htm>

- **Communications Plan Workbook** is available at:
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/advleg/publicawareness/campaign@yourlibrary/prtools/marketing_wkbk.pdf
- **Public Relations** tools, sample press releases, examples for direct mail and art work are available at:
<https://www.ala.org/ala/pio/campaign/prtools/prtoolsresources.htm>
- The **Media Relations Handbook for Libraries** is available at:
<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/publicawareness/campaign%40yourlibrary/prtools/handbook>

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 library stories when the opportunity becomes available and when called upon. The Cooperative must be sure that information is flowing in both directions and should act as a facilitator in this process. The expected outcome is the recognition of the pivotal role that libraries and library cooperatives play in their communities in order to heighten the awareness of the issues facing libraries today.