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THE POLITICAL LIBRARIAN



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Mission

The Political Librarian is dedicated to expanding the discussion of, promoting research on, and helping to re-envision locally focused advocacy, policy, and funding issues for libraries.

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Christopher Stewart

As we close in on the end of a second year of Covid, the resilience of libraries remains one of society's most compelling (and surely needed) examples of institutional response to community need in the face of financial constraints, political noise, and seemingly deepening cultural divides. While articles in this issue cover a range of topics, the common themes of advocacy and action run through them. Paige Harris provides some intriguing insights on the role public libraries can play in partnering with stewards of Little Free Libraries (LFLs). Harris's suggestions are intriguing, especially as they concern leveraging public library-LFL partnerships in underserved areas. Pun and Bustos's exploratory study of barriers and experiences in library advocacy by library workers of color outlines first steps in filling this wide research gap in the field. Their study provides a CRT-based framework based on the direct experiences and counter-narratives of librarians of color engaged in advocacy work and is an invaluable resource for the profession. Dickenson and Jaeger's timely piece reminds us of libraries' history of activism, political engagement, and social justice. It is a solid primer, and one that compels us to live our legacy in response to an increasingly restrictive and often cruel immigration climate. DeLooper's analysis provides a detailed and useful account of the challenges and opportunities for libraries in the participatory budgeting (PB) process. DeLooper's discussion of the library's role in supporting the information needs of PB initiative organizers is particularly instructive. Celic and Delwhiche's detailed review of a successful library finding referendum provides a toolbox of strategies and steps for the process. Their focus on managing the message in social media environments, securing endorsements, and responding to naysayers is especially relevant in these politically divisive times.

Enjoy the issue.

The Big Opportunities of Little Free Libraries:

The Trend That's Serving Community Needs and Promoting Literacy

Paige Harris

Explanatory Summary

Library trends are distinguished from shorter-lived “fads” by their persistence and the influence that the trend has on the way libraries grow and thrive. They mark a change in the needs of patrons in a specific community or across the entire field, and affect how librarianship as a profession takes place. Despite their diminutive, “cutesy” name, Little Free Libraries are one such trend. They are not officially connected to any professional librarianship organization, but are of importance to public librarians. Public libraries and librarians should take note of Little Free Libraries because they offer a unique way to understand community needs, and because they can be a valuable resource in achieving library goals of increased literacy. These opportunities change the way that librarianship takes place and offer ways to provide better services in a timely manner. They encourage innovation and will assist in the constant updating of librarianship to match the needs of library patrons worldwide. Despite a lack of much-needed research, examples of Little Free Libraries responding to community needs and functioning as tools of literacy education can be seen via a review of the existing literature.

Little Free Libraries (LFLs) are small, free-standing structures, installed in public spaces that contain books, magazines, and other materials for users to take or borrow free of charge (Little Free Library.org, n.d.). They are accessible at all times and serve as a point of interaction and communication between various members of a community, who are invited to take and replace materials in the LFL as they see fit (Little Free Library.org, n.d.). LFLs aim to increase community interconnectedness and support the literacy education of local children, and have been embraced as a tangible expression of neighborly love for one's community

and city; they can now be found worldwide (Little Free Library.org, n.d.). They are installed by non-professional “stewards,” who build or purchase the structures and can choose to register them on a global map. Stewards also monitor and maintain the LFLs — the choice of what to remove or include is entirely up to their discretion (Little Free Library.org, n.d.). Additionally, there have been numerous expansions on the idea, including the Little Free Pantry and the Little Free Art Gallery, which demonstrates just how receptive people are to this service model (Lelyveld, 2019; Free, 2021). The popular acceptance of LFLs is, in fact, what makes them such a powerful litmus test of community needs.

A key piece of research by Sarmiento, Sims, and Morales demonstrates that Little Free Libraries offer librarians the opportunity for unprecedented access to embed themselves within the communities they serve, as a part of the “guerilla urbanist” movement (2017). This kind of embedded relationship makes libraries a more complete part of their communities, which in turn improves a library's ability to serve (Sarmiento, Sims, & Morales, 2017). Libraries seeking to become a more fully integrated part of their community should take notice of the mutable nature of LFLs, which make them a good indicator of the ebb and flow of community needs. For example, the weeding choices of the stewards who maintain them are a direct reflection of the values held by these specific members of the community, and while this cannot be relied upon to accurately reflect the needs of the whole community, numerous LFLs spread out over a wide enough service area can act as a kind of topical barometer (Kozak, 2019).

Additionally, LFLs are a potential point of contact between libraries and their constituents. In her work, Barela discusses the role that communities play in daily life (2014). Children spend 16% of their time in structured schools, and the rest is spent with families and

in their neighborhoods (Barela, 2014). Moreover, employed adults spend about 33% of their time working (U.S. Department of Labor, 2019). In both instances the time spent in one's community is substantial, and that time is an opportunity for libraries to connect with their patrons. LFLs exist within the fabric of the community, offering a touchstone by which formal public libraries can participate in daily life. Informational marketing, such as hours of operation or services that are on offer at the central library, posted within a LFL goes directly to the target population without the intermediaries of email, billboard, or flyer. LFLs are highly visible, making them a more reliable and less intrusive part of the daily lives of community members than any other form of advertisement (Free, 2021).

Furthermore, the integrated nature of LFLs presents an opportunity for partnership between public libraries and LFLs centered around achieving the shared goal of increasing literacy. The caretakers of LFLs are enthusiastically engaged with increasing the interconnectedness of their communities, but lack the planning and organizing abilities to fully leverage the opportunities that LFLs represent (Sarmiento, Sims, & Morales, 2017). Most LFLs are located in affluent neighborhoods that already have access to well-funded public libraries; rarely do they exist in "book deserts" — neighborhoods where children may genuinely lack access to appropriate literature — which interferes with LFLs' ability to have a tangible effect on childhood literacy (Sarmiento, Sims, & Morales, 2017).

Currently, public libraries offer LFL stewards recommendations about appropriate book selections and bias-free weeding. This participation could be increased with programming designed to actively recruit stewards and encourage the construction of LFLs in poorer neighborhoods. It is not possible to have a branch library in every neighborhood, but a series of LFLs that are supported by the library and run by local volunteer stewards is entirely feasible. Members of the community are likely to engage with

the library in this way, but may have reservations about starting an LFL on their own. Offering training and guidance to those who are interested, as well as actively marketing to neighborhood leaders in areas that would benefit from this program, will increase community interest and confidence and ensure that LFLs end up in sites of greatest potential value.

There is currently a lack of critical research into LFLs, as their pertinence to public libraries has only recently begun to be recognized (Snow, 2015). This lack of information is an obvious barrier to libraries getting involved alongside non-professional stewards; it also puts libraries in a defensive role when it comes to controversy surrounding LFLs. Although they aim to increase community unity, occasionally the opposite occurs, such as in a 2018 case of political vandalism where an unknown number of individuals repeatedly defaced an LFL dedicated to Michelle Obama (Miller). The incidents unsettled residents who frequented the LFL and, because the identity of the vandals was never determined, provoked suspicion within the neighborhood (Miller, 2018). When conflicts arise, local news media may turn to the perceived authority — the official public library — for comment, and to those librarians who keep an eye on local LFLs and their effect on the community who would have an understanding of the situation in advance.

LFL stewards have also been criticized for their haphazard weeding style (Kozak, 2019). Stewards are not professional librarians, and do not have a code of ethics to which they must adhere. It is fully within their ability — and their rights — to include or remove content based on their personal opinions about what makes for appropriate reading. Further engagement between professional libraries and LFLs would serve to smooth over these critiques by providing greater structure and training to the weeding process, thereby decreasing instances of unintentional censorship.

Although the trend is in need of further research, initial findings clearly reflect the abilities of Little Free

Libraries to serve public libraries as sites of community access and as partners in shared literacy goals. Community-led directives like LFLs give librarians a

peek into the changing interests of their service populations and provide an unobtrusive way in which libraries can be more involved in daily community life. If offered the support of professionals, LFLs and the stewards who manage them have the capability to make significant changes in access to books among less affluent neighborhoods. LFLs can extend the library's goals as a cost-effective means of increasing childhood literacy access and have the potential to become significant community fixtures. A "backfiring" of the goals of community unity and criticisms over biased weeding practices are obstacles to LFLs effectiveness and continuing use, but can be addressed through partnerships with professional librarians. These charming installations will have a profound influence on how public libraries engage their communities and expand their service population, and have the potential to become standard partners with their traditional public library counterparts.

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Understanding Barriers and Experiences of Library Advocacy Work by Library Workers of Color:

An Exploratory Study

Raymond Pun and Jessica Bustos

Abstract

This exploratory research highlighted experiences and stories of library workers of color who participate in library advocacy work at the local and/or national levels. What are their priorities and interests, and how do they get involved in advocacy work in a profession that is predominantly white? The study applied critical race theory (CRT) to frame the social relationships and the structure of inequities inherent in library advocacy work by exploring the counter stories, narratives, and perspectives of library workers of color.

Introduction

Advocacy work for library issues is incredibly important and difficult, particularly because of COVID-19 when there were fears that the economy may collapse. Engagement with legislative members at all levels on library matters such as funding, fair use, open access, net neutrality, or broadband equity has been important to support communities and libraries at large. Advocacy is defined as “a kind of political action addressed to a governing body with the aim of influencing public policy outputs” (von Winter, 2011, p. 29). Library advocacy work is generally led and coordinated by organizations and associations in coalition with many groups and individuals from grassroots efforts. Library associations such as the American Library Association (ALA) advocate for libraries and library workers at the federal level. State library chapters/associations focus advocacy work for libraries and library workers at the regional, state, county, city, or local levels.

Members of ALA or state chapters may participate in advocacy work for libraries on behalf of such associations. One important factor to consider is that the demographics in communities are changing and becoming more diverse across the United States (Fry&

Parker, 2018). However, the library profession itself has been 85 % white since 2017. There is limited research on demographics and on the backgrounds of those conducting library advocacy work. To increase policy and advocacy training opportunities, ALA created the ALA Policy Corps, a national library initiative, to expand, prepare and train library advocates on “key policy issues on behalf of the library” community in 2017 (ALA Policy Corps, 2020, para. 1). In addition, state associations may organize their own legislative training or support for members interested in library advocacy work.

This exploratory research examined the roles for library workers from racially and ethnically underrepresented groups in library advocacy work. Library advocacy work is broadly defined in this study. The range of advocacy work performed by library workers of color may include participating in National Library Legislative Day (NLLD), lobbying for library issues nationally or locally by contacting U.S. congress or state legislative members, serving on library advocacy committees or groups, and organizing grassroots activities to raise community awareness of library issues.

Using critical race theory (CRT), this study highlights the roles, common characteristics, and shared values of, and barriers experienced by library workers of color who participate in library advocacy work. CRT is a theoretical framework that posits the notion “that race is a socially constructed category that is deeply implicated in the use, and circulation of power in society. Thus, its two principal objects of analysis are race and power” (Torres, 2013, para. 2). Originally a movement and a legal concept by scholars such as Derrick A. Bell (1980), Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (2010), and Richard Delgado (1995), CRT was a response to “mid-1970s conservative, reactionary attack on the achievements on

the civil rights struggle” (Simba, 2019, para. 1). Race plays a central role in our history, communities and everyday interactions. To understand the advocacy work by library workers of color, CRT is a necessary framework to underscore the relationships between positions of power in systems, in institutions, and in the field at large. One core tenet of CRT is storytelling and counter storytelling, which amplifies marginalized voices to “communicate to their white counterparts matters that the whites are unlikely to know” (Delgado & Sefancic, 2012, p. 9). Counter storytelling is a critical tool in telling the stories and experiences of those whose stories are often not told. It is a tool that “expos[es], analyz[es] and challeng[es] the majoritarian stories of racial privilege. Counter stories shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race and further struggle for racial reform” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). The purpose of this study was to gather and highlight the voices and stories of those who are racially underrepresented in the field of librarianship and to understand the barriers and perceptions in library advocacy work in a white majority profession. This study used the term “library worker” to denote librarians and other types of workers in the library that may not necessarily hold the title “librarian.”

The research gathered qualitative data through interviews with library workers of color who actively engaged in library advocacy work at local and national levels. The research was guided by the following questions:

1. Are there common characteristics and shared values of library workers of color who are involved in library advocacy work?
2. What are the potential barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in library advocacy work?

To address these two questions, the researchers conducted a qualitative study that utilizes CRT as a framework in understanding the experiences of library advocacy work by library workers of color. The lack of research on library advocacy work performed by library workers of color reveals the lack of

understanding in the field, and the critical roles that library workers of color play in advocating for their communities, libraries and for themselves. Advocacy work can help us better understand the experiences of library workers of color in the profession at large.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with fourteen library workers of color who actively participate in library advocacy work in the United States. Library workers of color are defined as any current library worker (librarian or library staff) employed at a library (e.g., public, school, academic, special libraries). The project gathered experiences from those who are racially and ethnically underrepresented in the profession (e.g., Identify as American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Middle Eastern/North African, and/or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander). CRT’s storytelling engages with newly emergent voices that offer much needed perspective to counter the dominant narrative. Furthermore, storytelling proposes how to address the concerns or issues raised in the narratives of those who are underrepresented by illuminating new solutions and possibilities as well. Through in depth interviews, participants recounted their stories and experiences in library advocacy work.

First, the study conducted a brief online survey sent to all of the listservs of National Associations of Librarians of Color (e.g., American Indian Library Association, Asian Pacific American Librarians Association, Black Caucus of the American Library Association, Chinese American Librarians Association and REFORMA – National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and Spanish-Speaking). The survey requested potential interviewees, who identify as a library worker of color and are active in library advocacy work, to participate in a virtual interview with a researcher. Second, a researcher prepared a series of questions and each interview lasted ninety-minutes. The study gathered fourteen participants to explore their experiences, barriers and perceptions in participating in library advocacy work. To protect

participants’ identities, their names and affiliations are anonymized in the study, and only their types of libraries, and years of experiences are shown.

Prior to the interview, a researcher read a notice to each participant to ensure that they knew their participation was voluntary and asked for their consent in recording the interview. The researcher secured consent from each interviewee. During the interview participants were asked a series of questions, where they reflected on their experiences in advocacy work (see Appendix A). After each interview, the researchers transcribed the conversations using Otter.ai. Each transcription was sent back to participants to ensure that they were able to correct or redact anything that they said. The researchers performed an open coding analysis to identify emerging themes and common responses from participants using Dedoose, a collaborative qualitative analysis program to confirm the coding process. These findings illuminated the feelings, voices, stories and experiences of library workers of color participating in library advocacy work that are often not covered in library advocacy literature.

Table 1. Participants

Participants	Library Type	Gender	Years of Experiences
1	Public	Female	12-17
2	Public	Female	6-11
3	Public	Female	6-11
4	Public	Female	18+
5	Public	Female	0-5
6	Public	Male	6-11
7	Academic	Female	18+
8	Academic	Male	6-11
9	Academic	Male	6-11
10	Academic	Male	18+
11	Academic	Female	12-17
12	School	Female	12-17

13	School	Female	18+
14	School	Female	0-5

Findings and Results: Themes

This research is focused on answering two questions: 1. Are there common characteristics and shared values of library workers of color who are involved in library advocacy work? 2. What are the potential barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in library advocacy work?

For each participant, the researchers coded conversations that highlighted their experiences and gave perspective to their experiences as library advocates. The chart below demonstrates the codes and themes involved. The research of coding the participants experienced emerged in three major themes based on the coded qualitative responses. To understand the common characteristics and shared values of participants, the study highlighted frequently repeated characteristics, values, and barriers from the interviews. Through CRT, participants’ stories reveal how their experiences as a library worker of color enable them to navigate in such spaces that are not reflective of their backgrounds. The researchers created three important themes that captured the codes from the qualitative data. These are the themes: 1. external support and engagement; 2. personalities and experiences; and 3. internal barriers and external barriers.

Table 2. Themes and Select Codes

Themes	Select Codes
External Support and Engagement	Positive interactions and support from mentors, supervisors, and the workplace; positive training experiences from American Library Association, and state library associations.
Personalities and Experiences	Personality traits like passionate, outgoing and being social, extroverted, charismatic, fun, comfortable to be around; persistent; and effective communication skills; shared values including equity, diversity and inclusion; our stories and lived experiences; community and relationships; access to information; lifelong learning; and opportunity cost.
Internal and External Barriers	Lack of mentorship; lack of support from institutions; or lack of trusts; experiencing burnout and fatigue; stereotypes of librarians; directly and or systemically experiencing racism, sexism, misogyny, and/or ageism; and experiencing imposter syndrome.

Theme 1: External Support and Engagement

All participants expressed external support and engagement in their activities related to advocacy. One major external support is from their supervisors. Several participants described a supportive supervisor or mentor who guided their work and supported them in the process, and sometimes explained the origins of their collaboration. When asked about how they have been supported in library advocacy work at the state and/or national levels, participants shared that their supervisors and mentors were instrumental along the way.

Participant 1, a public librarian, shared, “Yeah, so [my branch manager] definitely was a first step. And I don’t think I would have even...I didn’t even know [state association] really did like...I didn’t know the extent of the work that they did until I became [involved]. Now that’s not to say that everyone will get that chance. You should really have a question around that! That kind of comes with that job.” Participant 6, another public librarian, responded, “A big part of it was my supervisor ... Luckily my bosses were just great about you know, understanding that. And my main boss who hired me, like I said, she’s a Mexican American woman. She’s been working in this community.... Whereas my bosses and a couple other people in my department, they are actively working on Colorado’s legislative committee work, you know, so they are the ones who are doing more of that direct advocacy.” Participant 4, another public librarian, commented that her supervisor encouraged her to do this work, “I got involved in library advocacy work because when I became a branch manager of a public library here, my supervisor took me along for the ride. She was a big proponent of advocacy [and] and she was a part of the advocacy committee. And so, she took me to the meetings. She took me to Legislative Day. My coordinator did...our assistant director did. They were the ones that got me involved.” Participant 10, also a public librarian, explained from her experiences, “the supervisors I have had, they’ve always been encouraging, and when they get staff involved, and things like that. So, I know even when we went [to legislative meetings], it was like a thing of, oh

everybody speaks ... So, given the chance, there’s always different opportunities like that.”

Participant 11, an academic librarian, described, “I had let my boss know I was applying to this [advocacy work] ...My immediate supervisor was really excited about it. My head of my library was really excited about it. Yeah, I think it was very much the recognition of the, ‘Yeah, this probably won’t benefit us any, but it benefits the profession and we’re willing to give you the time and resources to do this, even if it’s not going to selfishly help us.’”

Although supervisors may not have been described by all participants, mentors and mentorship were mentioned by select participants. Participant 12, a school librarian, shared, “Librarians of color who already were active in the profession for many years that I, you know, took on as mentors whether they knew it or not. They helped, you know, shape the way...” Participant 1, a public librarian, described the challenge of not having a mentor and how she would have experienced advocacy training differently based on her identity, “I don’t know if the [advocacy] experience would be different if I wasn’t of color and like if I would already be in a track with a group of people. Like...oh! When you look for some of the mentors who already know of these things [who could guide you]. Again, I was very lucky that just the branch manager...she felt like the council should see her staff. But I know that’s not the case with a lot of librarians out there and so I think even just getting your face out there is hard.” A mentorship program for advocacy work was mentioned by participant 8, an academic librarian, “I got mentorship more broadly in terms of like when I started academic library. I didn’t know what I was doing and if they had set me up with a mentor who was involved with advocacy, I think that I could have started earlier or something like that.”

Another major external support is their work-connected library association work, whether it is for ALA or the state library association. Library association is key in developing advocacy training skills. Participants 1, 5, and 11 mentioned their work in state library associations and how it was helpful in developing advocacy skills. They were able to connect with more people, establish

more opportunities for their association members, and mobilize and get the word out on issues affecting their libraries. Participant 11, an academic librarian, shared, “[advocacy] doesn’t have to be huge federal work but getting to the state library advocacy [work or], news alert, [and understand how] it could impact libraries.” Participant 4, a public librarian, recounted how she was able to get advocacy training through the Public Library Association from 10 years ago, but felt, “they let their president and officers do a lot of advocacy work, but I don’t think it trickles down like it should to the public.” The advocacy training from associations may be helpful or irrelevant depending on when the participants took the workshop. National and state associations that organized legislative days were also helpful to introduce advocacy work for participants. Participant 3, a public librarian, shared about National Library Legislative Day, “We basically go to our [congress representatives], our delegates, and we just explain, give background, to all the work that the library has been doing...has done. We usually kind of give short presentations, where we kind of recap things we’ve done that past year or current things that the library is doing too, so that we can advocate for the library to let our people represent us...” For participant 1, another public librarian, “I also participated in National Library Legislative Day and that was actually going into the Capitol and going to get the lessons with ALA, as well as going on site to talk to our representatives in our districts that are where we are.” These in-person opportunities to do advocacy work from external support can be instrumental to support library advocates.

Theme 2: Personalities and Experiences

For this theme, personalities and experiences were captured from the responses. Codes generated from participants’ interviews included personality traits like passionate, outgoing and social, and communication skills; shared values and experiences such as equity, diversity and inclusion; our stories and lived experiences; community and relationships; access to information; and lifelong learning. Participants shared how their personalities may align

with advocacy when asked, “what strengths do you bring to library advocacy?”

Participant 13, a school librarian remarked, “Libraries have changed my personality -- I was always withdrawn, but I have trained myself to be outspoken...” Participant 7, an academic librarian, shared this response, “I am very charismatic, I have good people relations, you know. I come across as someone who is knowledgeable and kind. And, you know, I am willing to listen. So, I think a lot of it is because of my personality ... I have a vision, and I translate that vision into reality through the way I communicate with different stakeholders.” Participant 2, a public librarian, described, “I am passionate about things I care about - it can go against me, or it can be helpful and get people excited about libraries, and I thrive in communication.” Participant 14, a school librarian, mentioned that she is bilingual, “and that it could reach to a broader audience” and she described herself as easygoing and someone who loves to be honest with community members, “So I think just advocating for the community. Just being able to build those relationships where otherwise people might not, you know, think that there is a relationship.” When thinking about advocacy, participant 5, a public librarian, described her strength as being reflective, “I have the ability to be more reflective, and stop and think, am I including the right people? Am I thinking in the right groups and being reflective?” Participant 9, an academic librarian, contemplated on this question and how he shifts his behaviors depending on the advocacy work, “I still think that I’m a little bit more of an introvert at the end of the day. But I do feel like I’m that kind of introvert that I can become extroverted and give a good presentation. I don’t really get too nervous when it comes to public speaking. I feel like my personality and that type of social aptitude does help me. And I tend to channel my own persona as someone who is accessible and friendly, and like open minded. But at the same time, I want to be focused on the values that I want to push for, right?”

Another characteristic is persistence as echoed by select participants. Participant 10, an academic librarian, shared, “You’re constantly, you know, if you’re doing at

the local level, people change. It's this constant, that's an important point, actually, is this constant, introducing yourself to new people in your local politics at the national level. It's just constantly like, you're always on a job, and you think you're always like introducing yourself." Participant 5, a public librarian, revealed, "I think [advocacy] really just is lifelong work and we're always kind of working toward moving the needle forward and kind of pushing advocacy work forward. It's just always making sure that people have a seat at the table and building a bigger table and increasing that space. So, tenacity would be one word." For participant 13, a school librarian, she remarked how "behind closed doors, I'm always the last one at the table to speak up on things and I have to push myself. So, one way of pushing myself is, I've learned that when I start getting angry about how librarians are treated or kids have lack of programming, I have learned how to productively flip that into articulating a very sound argument in terms of why library programming should be in place for kids. Instead of getting mad and cursing [at] them, like you know, that it's simpler to do. You're tempted to do that." These participants exhibited perseverance and described advocacy work as such.

These personality traits are important to note because they reveal how library workers of color consider their advocacy practice in relation to who they are as individuals and as professionals. Personality traits that include approachability, easygoing, outgoing, sociable or able to be extroverts were common characteristics from select participants. Although they are not necessary advocacy for libraries successfully, they were noted by participants who reflected on the question. In addition, participants shared their experiences and thoughts connecting to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) values. These values were described to be important as shared by many participants. DEI values emerged as important areas for library workers of color when performing advocacy work. Such shared values also lead to a better understanding of the profession. When asked what their priorities and values are, equity, diversity and inclusion often came up. Participant 7, an academic librarian, shared, "we espouse diversity and equity and

inclusion...Diversity is problematic if not interrogated ... So, for me, I really strive for inclusion so being more inclusive across different spectrums." For participant 12, a school librarian, it is important to ensure that, "every school has a certified librarian and retaining school librarians. Always having a school librarian at any library table discussion. ... Allowing students to see librarians that look like them. So, you know, promoting diversity within the organization for librarians."

On the issue of diversity and inclusion, participant 1, a public librarian, shared how it was critical to recruit new professionals but also to bring them into advocacy work, "for new people in the profession just to know how to advocate. And we already have a concern for having more people, more diversity in our profession for people of color. But it's that next step. Okay, we got them. Now, how are we, integrating them into this kind of world where they're going to have to advocate themselves?" For participant 14, another school librarian, she shared how relevant and needed it is to connect with your users, to advocate for their needs by being reflective, "regardless your race or your gender, anyone could be a librarian as long as you're passionate and you love what the library stands for. And I think by, you know, calling these kids, 'mijo' or 'mija', you know the type of endearment that you know, 'you are my son or my daughter in spirit', I feel like they understand that you know I'm really...I'm trying to build connections with them. And also, because even throwing that one simple word, they understand oh, she's not...she's definitely Latina, like I can relate to her." Participant 10, an academic librarian, described why diversity is important to advocacy work, "I think people may, again, forget that they need to diversify stories. It's all about stories. When it comes down to it, you're gonna go in there to tell stories, and your stories are not going to be diverse. It's just, you know, a bunch of white people." These examples shared and experienced by participants generate an important need to embrace and advocate for DEI values within the profession and in advocacy work.

Theme 3: Internal Barriers and External Barriers

Another important theme that emerged based on the qualitative coded responses focused on barriers. A

researcher asked these questions to participants regarding barriers, “what barriers have you encountered when doing library advocacy work? As a library worker of color, what are some challenges and opportunities you see in doing this kind of work?” Internal and external barriers were two types of overlapping barriers that emerged from this study.

First, internal barriers were understood as supervisors, departments, institutions; these factors prevented support for participants in engaging in advocacy work. As the first theme uncovered, participants who received support from mentors, supervisors, and institutions were enabled to learn and perform advocacy work. However, the lack of support can constrain participants. Participant 8, an academic librarian, shared, “So I think one barrier is like, lack of mentorship or involving advocacy as part of our strategic plan or mission or...I don't see it showing up in those kinds of discussions.” Participant 9, another academic librarian, shared his challenges, “So ... one of the challenges that I faced within my own department [is the] lack of support, lack of collaboration, which is really sad because I've always imagined librarians to be very collaborative and very social justice driven. But maybe I've just fallen into a library that just doesn't have those types of minds. So, I'm sorry, which is why I also try to share my time and my advocacy work outside of my library department and, you know, a statewide association, or other library organizations. Because I do feel slightly isolated in my library. And so, I feel like I need to work with other people who are equity minded, or social justice for them outside of my own institution.”

For participant 7, academic librarian, she described the importance of having administrative backing in doing advocacy work, “[Library advocates] have to be sure that they are empowered to do so. That they have the support of their, you know, libraries, their administration, their institution to do that. Because if you don't have that support, how can you effectively advocate something?... Then your advocacy work is not that strong because then you don't have the backing. You know, to follow up on the things that would support your advocacy. So, I think they have to

feel that they are empowered to make decisions, or to influence the decision related to what they are advocating for. Because the worst thing is like you are doing this advocacy work and then you get questioned, and then you will say, ‘Oh, I'm not sure about that. I don't know, or I don't have any authority.’”

In addition, there were experiences of and references to fatigue and burnt out that select participants shared. These types of emotions constrained participants from engaging in advocacy work and can be perceived as internal barriers for participants. Participant 9, an academic librarian, shared, “I am tired and frustrated of institutions only using the language to promote the values but when we see how campuses are run, you don't see those values manifested in conspicuous ways.”

When it comes to advocacy work, participant 5, a public librarian, described, “I think people get tired of teaching other people. Sometimes I think that comes up a lot. It's like I'm the go to or I'm the person that gets to run the list by.” In a more specific point, participant 11, an academic librarian, shared that the encounters of doing advocacy work can lead to burn out, “Just the time that it takes, because yeah, there was just always the...being one of perhaps five librarians of color just in my institution. Then you get asked to do lots of things partly...and I don't mean this in a bad way, but partly to be a face to a particular project or initiative...ways to encourage others to participate. But then you then get put on every single committee and it's just a lot of burn outs. So, there's the internal work that you need to do. There's probably also the concern of whether it's right or wrong. Will your elected officials listen to you as a person of color librarian?” Participant 3, a public librarian, shared an important tip related to feeling burnt out. “Don't get lost in, well, I'm gonna say it like this, in advocating for the library, don't get lost in advocating for yourself. Don't get so caught up in always working, working, that you get burnt out. So always make sure to show up and advocate for yourself first.” These internal barriers as shared by select participants reveal the struggle of advocating for libraries as a library worker of color.

For external barriers, there were experiences and mentions of racism, sexism, and/or ageism from

participants while doing advocacy work in their community, at an event and/or within their own workplaces; These discriminatory and destructive forces and barriers can severely hamper and demoralize library advocates of color. Participant 6, a public librarian, recalled an incident where he was meeting with a community member, someone important for advocacy related matters but the encounter turned out negative and participant 6 felt it was a combination of racism and ageism. "Like I introduced myself and [the community member] was kind of standoffish, and we talked for just very briefly and it was just like, I mean, you can tell when somebody's not listening to you, right? Or somebody who's not like paying attention, and it was just so weird because I was like, watching the interaction between my colleague and them just moments before and it was entirely different. And it's not like he was being called by somebody else. He didn't shuffle off to go and talk to somebody right away. He just kind of like...he left our table. He just kind of like sauntered around and eventually made his way back to the bar to get in a different drink. So, it was like, I don't know, it was strange." When asked to describe the community member, participant 6 shared the context, "he was an old white male. You know, probably, I guess probably in the 70s or 80s. He's no longer on the board. And that was...it was weird because I had talked to three other board members that day, and all of them were so interested and engaged." Participant 6's encounter connects to ageism and racism.

Participant 12, a school librarian, reflected on her own experiences encountering microaggressions within events such as the National Library Legislative Day, "it's almost like when you're walking into the venue. And you know, you're probably looking confused. Because the first time I went, I didn't know where to go. You know what I mean? So, there's this confusion because you don't know where to go. I remember my first ALA and someone saying you can always tell the librarians because they just, you know, kind of have a look. And so, I can tell I was in the right place, you know, because I can see other librarians walking around. But you know, we're positioned in a particular place in the hotel. And so, when you're asking, it's like,

'oh, you're here for that?' And then when you go into the space, there's nothing but white faces, except for literally one or two ALA staff members who are taking names. So that's two people of color. And then when you get your ID and your badge, and then you may be off. Because, you know, ... I was a member enough to where they were like, oh yeah...don't forget...we got it, you know? [...] So even when you go, you find a place to probably, maybe, put your stuff safely and then you're like, okay I'm gonna go get something to eat. You're like, the person of color grabbing food and it's almost like, are you supposed to be here? Like do you know that this is Day of Advocacy for librarians?" This story by participant 12 revealed that the colleagues at such an event may have suspected her as an outsider and not as a librarian. Participant 12 felt as a person of color, it drew unfortunate attention. Participant 12 shared that she had her badge which stopped the inquiries, however, the microaggressions were already enacted.

Participant 13, another school librarian, described the lack of trust and shared how her experiences are invalidated until a white colleague speaks up about these issues, "Sometimes it's white people. But then I also find, even within my community and it goes back to a slave mentality of if it's not right, or it's not accurate until somebody that's white speaks on it, you know. You know I would say this as another frustrating thing is that sometimes I can be fussing about something, until one of my white colleagues jumps on board and agrees with me, then it becomes almost a valid issue, you know? Can't take my word for it..." Being undermined as a librarian was also participant 13's experience, "So, barriers include, sometimes it's like you're a Black librarian, did you really graduate from library school? I've gotten that question asked to me, many times. Even my colleagues I work with, they're like, 'oh, I didn't know you had a degree. I just thought you were really smart.' So those are some barriers that...you have to deal with that mentality of thinking..."

Another external barrier that was echoed by participants is the perpetual myth or stereotypical image of a librarian that the public sees which has posed challenges for librarians of color in conducting advocacy work; as a

result, participants have expressed that they have experienced imposter syndrome because they are undermined by those they meet when advocating for libraries; they may feel that they “don’t look the part.”

Participant 12, a school librarian, shared that she knows she does not look like a librarian and as a result, may have been questioned during the National Library Legislative Day, “I know that I don't look like a librarian. So, you can tell that I have my proper slacks and my nice shirt and my cardigan. You know, the library stereotypes gear on and, but you still kind of get the look like, no, you no, this is not, you're not supposed to be here. Like, did you know this is the conference and you're not allowed to get the free food or something? But thank God for the badge. I noticed, like, I should always put my little badge on so that they can see like, I'm official...”

Participant 10, an academic librarian, shared a perceived expectation that he hadn’t considered, “This is how you do [advocacy work]? And there's really no right way to do it. So, my experience is I still feel like I'm still learning. It's been now like, I've been doing this for 15-16 years. And, you know ... at the national level, with every year, we know, we have a new slate. We have a new agenda, legislative agenda. And so, if you're constantly just like, learning, and I find it extremely rewarding when you're speaking with...when I'm doing advocacy, at the national level, I feel very rewarding, but also sometimes feel like ‘oh my god, like’, am I representing libraries correctly? Am I, you know? But I think at the end of the day, we're like storytellers... You're trying to tell a story of what your library does...” To represent libraries, the association and the profession at large, while telling the story and being reflective of such a role can be challenging, particularly for this individual.

Challenging the librarian stereotype has been also difficult and part of advocacy work. Participant 14, a school librarian, reflected that, “people think of a librarian as an old white lady. And that's always like, you always think of that librarian. But like me, I think I'm different... “She described how she had to push back against the stereotypes and advocate for her

library internally, “[teachers] just think that I just provide a space where it's books and quiet. And it's not that at all, so I'm just trying to get that stereotype away. The other thing is that working at the school library, I completely fought this, it was an idea of having the kids after school detention, having it at the library. And I didn't like that because I didn't want kids to think the libraries were a bad place, like a punishment right. So, I fought that. I'm like we are absolutely not having detention kids in here.” Participant 7, an academic librarian, explained how she pushed back against the stereotype, “I defied the stereotype of a quiet Asian woman, just be a wallflower. Because I am vocal, you know. I speak my mind and so I think that also kind of plays to why I became sought after. Because yes, this is a person who ... speaks well and has this engaging dynamic personality and so I think that defiance of the stereotype is also the thing that allowed me to be successful in my advocacy, but not everyone has that agency to do that.”

Participant 13, a public librarian, described her own experiences as a woman of color when advocating for libraries, “I hate to say it like this, but it sometimes feels like this, as a woman of color, that we have to work a little harder to make sure that people are seeing past, you know, those kinds of stereotypes and that like, you know, the very obvious brownness of our skin and whatever gender is. But you know, making sure that whatever you're doing that, as far as advocacy work, that you're doing it really well and that you have passion behind it and that you make way for your legislators to ask you questions and that you're, you know, just the best at what you do. But I would say that the first step to that is to get involved.” Participant 13 also described her encounters with sexism when advocating for libraries, “So when I was introducing myself [to the legislator] I also was told one of the lines that I've heard a lot [and] to me, it brings just [an] innately sexist [tone], ‘oh my mother, oh my grandmother was a librarian’ or ‘that, that, and that.’” She reflected how it felt to her to experience such encounters, “I feel kind of petty to even bring it up, but it's one of the things that I'll always carry with me because I had a moment of, I think really seeing what sexism can look like when you are a young woman and how it can really fail So I actually had to, I brought it to

a friend of mine because I was kind of confused about that like, just as it always is. When you're a minority or you're in any type of a marginalized population, and that happens, it's like you innately feel what it actually is, but it's hard to define and it's and it's even hard to make sense in your own head like, and you lean towards questioning yourself rather than calling it what it is.”

Participant 1, a public librarian also shared that she had encountered sexism by a state librarian. Participant 1 questioned whether it was the state librarian’s personality or behavior, “I feel like conversations in general I haven't felt uncomfortable in any way. But it's just that, just getting past the...the sections of it, and his personality.” The stereotypes of librarians may also contribute to the challenges in advocating for libraries as expressed by select participants. Participant 6, another public librarian, described how he encounters imposter syndrome as a result of advocating for libraries, “I'm starting to get the imposter syndrome, you know, because I'm pretty young compared to all of my colleagues too, you know. So, when I go into these large committees, especially for city or county wide committees, it's hard to feel like I actually deserve a place at the table, you know, that I'm there and actually able to offer something that's worthwhile. So, although I have experienced some social resistance from different people...”

When library workers of color do not feel like they “look the part” or are stereotyped, they may encounter racism, sexism, microaggression or ageism. Both internal and external barriers were placed in the same theme because they intersect with one another. Participants may experience both internal and external barriers because of their advocacy work.

Discussions

The themes reveal the unique experiences and counter stories from participants and how they come to understand advocacy and their work and experiences as library workers of color. In this study, their backgrounds are completely different from one another

based on years of experience, library type, gender, race/ethnicity and regions. Their responses answered two research questions in this study: 1. Are there common characteristics and shared values of library workers of color who are involved in library advocacy work? 2. What are the potential barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in library advocacy work?

Common characteristics of library workers of color who are involved in advocacy work may be specific personality traits and current support systems. First, select participants described having personality traits that allow them to connect with their users, community members or stakeholders. These personality traits may include being outgoing, communicative, sociable and passionate about their work and values. Those who did not describe these traits shared how they were observant, proactive, a good listener, and an effective communicator. These characteristics offer an opportunity to understand how library workers of color describe themselves when thinking about advocacy work.

A critical characteristic is having a supportive network whether it consists of supervisors, mentors, or exists in the workplace in general or library association. As shared by select participants, having a supervisor who was supportive of advocacy work could enhance the experiences for librarians who are unfamiliar or new to advocacy work. Whether they are supervisors or mentors, they can encourage their library colleagues to pursue opportunities in state/national association work and/or directly take them by the hand to meetings. As revealed by a few of participants, these supervisors recognized how important funding issues can impact their libraries, and so they supported their employees (the participants) in building important experiences in advocacy work. In a follow up question with select participants on this issue, when asked if their supervisors were also a Black/Indigenous/Person of Color (BIPOC), the responses varied from participants.

For shared values, the responses often focused on equity, diversity and inclusion; and the greater causes impacting

libraries such as funding, access to information, lifelong learning, community building and relationships. Select participants recalled their experiences in interacting with the public, particularly with legislators, but also the challenges and experiences with microaggressions, racism, and sexism. For participant 2, a public librarian, reflected, “I live in a very, like, in, Spanish, we call it, “machismo” and it's like, it is the idea that, like, you know, the man is the head of the household, and you know, we are in our culture, [it] is very, very much embedded in, you know, Catholicism or that is there. And so, there's, so yeah, I would say that might be one of [the challenges] that, you walk into a legislator's office and, you know, it's an older gentleman who's been there forever...” The intersectional identities by participant 2 and others who identify as women of color in this study, encounter additional barriers and challenges in doing advocacy work based on their gender, racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Library workers of color have to navigate such spaces to interact with these important community members to support their libraries. Participant 12, a school librarian, revealed, “I totally believe that legislation is a different type of librarianship. You have a different mindset. It's a wonderful type of librarianship, but it's different. And it wasn't something that I was used to, it wasn't something that I knew about...” Interacting with legislators and doing advocacy work is important work and highly valued by select participants despite present or unknown challenges.

The internal and external barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in advocacy work varied. Through critical race theory, their stories and perspectives regarding advocacy work are now told, to be shared and to be validated. The barriers that they have experienced internally and externally amplify the inherent issue that library workers of color experience when advocating for their libraries. Internally, select participants shared how they did not have a supportive work environment and cannot do their advocacy work. As shared by other participants, when there are supportive workplaces, advocacy work becomes clearer for participants. In addition, participants may

experience may include fatigue, imposter syndrome and burnout when doing advocacy work. This can be due to the fact that there are external barriers that prevent participants from fully engaging with the work.

These external barriers include sexism, racism and ageism, which were experienced by select participants in varying degrees when doing advocacy work. Select participants have experienced ageism in doing advocacy work. Select participants referenced sexism that makes it challenging for them to do advocacy work. Participants also added difficulty to perform advocacy work due to their white colleagues whether they are fellow librarians, colleagues, legislators or community members.

Participant 13, a school librarian, reflected, “I think sometimes our white colleagues don't realize how difficult it is for librarians of color to speak up, because sometimes the spaces that we are in, are not very well for [us] to do so. And historically, they've never been very welcoming. There's been a shift, mainly because we're in this pandemic and we're forced to look at things. And in looking at things and analyzing them, you know, there's a shift that people are starting to be a little more empathetic and looking deeper beneath the surface on issues. But right now, I just think this is the moment, especially as librarians of color, to really get our message out there, and we need to take advantage of it.”

Navigating such spaces can be challenging for library workers of color. These spaces can be viewed as “a world that is orientated around whiteness” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 160). Participants may not feel like they belong in such spaces or professions. Thus, the advocacy work itself can potentially make them experience a range of emotions such as fatigue, burnout, or imposter syndrome. These important factors have not been documented in the advocacy literature before, but they have been documented in the profession at large (Linares & Cunningham, 2018; Santamaria, 2020; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2017). This exploratory research raises awareness of the challenges experienced by library workers of color and highlights their advocacy stories in the process. In the fifth tenet of critical race theory, storytelling, and counter storytelling are approaches that amplify oppressed voices and to engage white colleagues

about issues they are unlikely to be aware of (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Thus, participants' stories and counter stories deconstruct the normative experiences and stories and offer a critical voice to those who may feel marginalized. By engaging and allowing new voices to emerge on this topic, these much-needed perspectives dismantle the singular viewpoint held by the predominant group, and address concerns and issues raised in the narratives by proposing alternative solutions or ideas.

To support library workers of color doing advocacy work effectively, this study also documented recommendations from participants. These suggestions include becoming involved in national or state level associations and connecting with community groups. Participant 2, a public librarian, shared, "I would say that representation matters, and I believe that in all facets of my life. So, get out there and do it on the national platform if you can. "Being involved in such associations provides training opportunities, networking and resources to build an advocacy strategy. When speaking with legislators, participant 3, another public librarian, remarked, "Don't be nervous to talk to people. I know sometimes people are nervous about public speaking and speaking to what are like, high profile people. But you talk to them like you talk to anybody else, cause it's really about the connection." A strategy for those who aren't sure how to engage with officials or community members on library advocacy issues may consider this kind of tip. Participant 14, a school librarian, echoed, "You just have to get it out there. You just have to plan. Think of a program that would attract more people, and just go for it, and if it's successful, do it again and do another repeat session."

For associations and institutions thinking about advocacy work in the future, participant 4, another public librarian, offered this advice: "Please go ahead and start training the next generation, or you will lose that institutional knowledge that can be so helpful to younger librarians doing advocacy work. I think that the most important thing is that one on one training, and that personal knowledge that you gain doing advocacy." Associations may consider creating

mentorship programs in advocacy work. Participant 1, another public librarian, shared, "Just browse, like, kind of the policy advocacy [in state library associations]. Like, see what is out there. There's so much though. I don't know if there's like a mentoring type of program where you can pull yourself up with somebody to just learn more about what they do. I think local chapters are also helpful to join, your local affiliates and the national affiliates. I mean, I think that's helpful. Just to know what, like, there might be some people who are more in tune. So, when you're building and networking, to know what they're doing."

As this study showed, advocacy work can be done effectively when supported by the workplace environments according to select participants. Advocacy is a type of work that should not be done by one person, but by a collective group. Participant 9, an academic librarian, shared, "stay active in the community. ... We do need that support system to keep us motivated and accountable, and it's more fun.... It feels more impactful when it's a group of people pushing something, as opposed to just one person." Advocacy work is a collective practice and requires everyone regardless of library type or years of experiences involved in the process.

Conclusion

This exploratory study was guided by two questions: 1. Are there common characteristics and shared values of library workers of color who are involved in library advocacy work? 2. What are the potential barriers experienced by library workers of color participating in library advocacy work? The study highlighted many important elements to consider from the experiences of library workers of color across public schools, and academic and public libraries. These counter stories revealed the deepening issues of advocacy work that need to be told and heard in the field.

It's important to note that their experiences and stories are not meant to be compared or generalized, but to raise awareness of such issues that may not have been captured or highlighted before in the literature. By revealing their stories, we learn about the opportunities

and systemic barriers as experienced by these participants, and how institutions and associations focused on advocacy work (for library funding purposes) may want to devise strategies to create a more inclusive environment for library workers of color advocating for their libraries and communities at large. We learn that from such perspectives that advocacy work can be challenging work with further layers of challenges connected to one's racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds. In addition, their stories and advice can be uplifting and inspiring to those who are new to library advocacy work and identify as a person of color. They share with us the authentic stories of struggle but also the stories of perseverance.

It is also important to note that this study was conducted during two ongoing events in the library science field. The first ongoing event that impacted the field is the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused systems and services to be online. This shift caused barriers in accessibility to materials and services, but participants in the study touched on how they were able to advocate for things such as broadband internet for students during the school year and to strive for open access of materials for colleges at a higher level. The second ongoing event that impacted the librarian field was the Black Lives Matter movement that gained national traction in the summer of 2020. This shift in wanting to prioritize Black voices was noted in interviews as being a change in the field for advocating for oneself and for other people of color. These two events also caused participants to also discuss a wave of social justice desires in their communities and to highlight ways in which their advocacy can reach more outlets and communities in their work.

Future studies may wish to consider how these experiences have been impacted by ongoing critical events. In addition, a future study may explore how library associations can better prepare and support library workers of color in advocacy work. Advocacy work is for everyone. When we work to advocate for libraries, we work to advocate for our communities, whether they are students, teachers, or the general public. As revealed by participants, advocating for specific library issues and opportunities for

communities with the support of mentors, supervisors and institutions, can be effective. When they experience setbacks and systemic oppression, their issues must be heard and revealed, and new strategies deployed and considered in order to dismantle systemic oppression experienced through advocacy work for libraries.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

- Please describe your experiences with library advocacy work.
- Why and how did you get involved in library advocacy work?
- What are your library priorities when it comes to library advocacy work?
- What advocacy values come to mind when you think about this work?
- What strengths do you bring to library advocacy?
- Can you share an example when you felt like you made a difference to your community through this work?
- What barriers have you encountered when doing library advocacy work?
- As a library worker of color, what are some challenges and opportunities you see in doing this kind of work?
- What would you like to have known about advocacy work before doing it?
- What advocacy related resources have helped you along the way?

- Do you have any recommendations for library workers of color doing advocacy work?

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Public Libraries, Immigration, and Asylum Seekers:

Remembering the Most Vulnerable Amid Xenophobia and a Pandemic

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Abstract

Amid increasingly restrictive measures on asylum seekers and immigrants, contemporary public libraries and librarians have connected with and sought to support immigrants to the United States in diverse ways. This article chronicles the history of the profession's involvement in such efforts and advocates for such measures as both morally imperative and realizable.

Introduction: Meditations on Libraries, Asylum, and Bookplates

This article explores ways that public libraries and librarians have connected with people who have sought or are seeking asylum at the US-Mexico border. It shows how certain actions – supplying books to children, educating oneself and one's staff about legal rights, partnering with legal organizations to better disseminate information, considering shelters and detention facilities among one's patron base and reaching out to those patrons, understanding issues and legal needs in order to better evaluate sources – are not only the right thing to do, but also are forms of activism, especially in particular political climates, especially in environments that distort migration into a crime. Its central idea is that as librarians, engaging in our profession, we can effect change. Perhaps it is meant as a message of hope.

Certainly, it is meant to showcase the efforts of librarians and educators working along the border or as allies farther afield. From library tours in San Diego for young people staying in immigrant shelters to story times at tent encampments in Matamoros, meaningful and hopeful work has occurred. Public librarians and public libraries in places like Hartford, Connecticut and Addison, Illinois, have worked with local legal organizations to become partially accredited with the Board of Immigration Appeals, so that staff might provide direct legal assistance (e.g., form completion)

to those accessing immigration benefits (Cohen, 2017; Department of Justice, 2020). The International Board on Books for Young People supported REFORMA's Children in Crisis Task Force through grants, and created a flyer to insert in donated books to inform recipients of public library systems and their services in the US (Sullivan, 2019). The books also feature bookplates to document ownership. A bookplate seems remarkably tiny when compared to the massive infrastructure of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), and the Department of Homeland Security (DHL). A bookplate, though, is a gesture of humanity and recognition of existence. A bookplate is a small personal thing; it affirms the validity of the person who owns the book.

But what does a bookplate mean when compared to nine Executive Orders and Proclamations signed in 2017 and 2018,¹ limiting asylum and immigration and rolled out with little or conflicting procedural guidance (Pierce et al., 2018)? What does it mean compared to a presidential determination allowing 18,000 refugees into the US in 2020 versus 207,116 refugee admissions in 1980 (Trump, 2019; Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2020)? What does a bookplate mean compared to a proclamation broadly suspending immigration to the US, citing protection of US jobs during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Trump, 2020)?² What does it mean compared to the expulsion of 10,000 migrants in early 2020 at the US-Mexico border in summary deportations that cite "emergency health measures" (Miroff, 2020a)? Compared to almost one million migrants turned away at the southern border in less than one year under the auspices of public health law Title 42 (USCBP, 2021)? Or forcible removals of over 10,000 Haitian asylum seekers from Del Rio, Texas, thousands of whom were returned to a country reeling in the wake of natural disasters and a presidential assassination?

A bookplate still means something; every action means

something and exists as part of a larger fabric of justice. That said, we need collectively to harness a million small actions, and we need to act urgently and with the collaborative ferocity and moral outrage shown in the wake of family separations to ensure that a public health crisis does not provide cover for the complete transformation and decimation of both asylum and immigration in the United States. The COVID-19 pandemic not only has made potently visible longstanding systemic inequities in the US, it highlights systemic efforts to further marginalize immigrants and curtail immigration.

The Newest Wave of Anti-Immigrant Policies

“If one attitude can be said to characterize America’s regard for immigration over the past two hundred years it is the belief that while immigration was unquestionably a wise and prescient thing in the case of one’s parents or grandparents, it really ought to stop now” (Bryson, 1994, 145-146). Yet, in the context of such history, the Trump administration’s attitude toward those seeking to become new Americans was notably virulent, being the core part of the former president’s stated political philosophy from the beginning of his campaign. Unfortunately, despite the new Biden administration’s pledges and rhetoric, it continues to enforce many of the restrictive immigration measures enacted during the previous administration.

According to *The New York Times*, the Trump administration’s restrictions and proposed restrictions on immigration, supposedly in response to an unexpected public health emergency, were “repurposed from old draft executive orders and policy discussions” (Dickerson & Shear, 2020). The president issued five increasingly restrictive proclamations between January and May of 2020 that suspended types of immigration, citing COVID-19. Superficially, such actions seemed warranted in the midst of a global pandemic: restrictions on travel were taking place across the country and globe and were supported by public health officials. But when placed in the context of the administration’s approach to immigration, they simply revealed an arc of border tightening, xenophobia, and restriction on legal and

humanitarian concepts, often invoking Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) § 212(f) to exert such authority.

INA § 212(f) states that “[w]henver the President finds that the entry of any aliens or of any class of aliens into the United States would be detrimental to the interests of the United States, he may by proclamation, and for such period as he shall deem necessary, suspend the entry of all aliens or any class of aliens as immigrants or nonimmigrants, or impose on the entry of aliens any restrictions he may deem to be appropriate” (8 USC § 1182). The Trump Administration was certainly not the first to use INA § 212(f) to restrict immigration; previous administrations used it to support sanction measures against, for example, North Korea, Venezuela, and Libya (Congressional Research Service, 2020). But executive orders issued on the basis of INA § 212(f) occurred during the Trump administration at a speed more than double that of the Obama administration and quadruple that of the George W. Bush administration (Congressional Research Service, 2020).

This has been accompanied by other measures and policies that cruelly devalue the humanity and existence of many immigrants. The first economic stimulus payments, as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act were not issued to workers without social security numbers, nor were they issued to the spouses of immigrants without social security numbers, even if they have individual taxpayer identification numbers (and pay taxes), nor were they issued for US citizen children of workers without social security numbers (CARES Act, 2020; Galvin et al., 2020). The second round of stimulus payments permitted payments to permanent residents and US citizens in families with mixed immigration status and the third permitted payments for US citizen children of workers with individual taxpayer identification numbers, but workers without social security numbers remained excluded (Lajka, 2021). Overcrowded migrant camps with little sanitation, in existence due to the Migrant Protection Protocols, are vulnerable to transmission of infectious diseases due to little sanitation, close living conditions, and minimal healthcare (Coronado, 2019; Department of Homeland Security, 2019). Detention facilities, typically run by private companies and often

lacking sanitary conditions, are perhaps even more vulnerable; the long-term increased criminalization of immigration has in effect created this precarious environment (Ewing et al., 2015).

According to a report from *ProPublica* in May 2020, Immigration and Customs Enforcement had tested only five percent of the detained population for COVID-19; of those, half had been found positive (Trevizo, 2020). By the end of May 2020, more than 900 detainees had been released voluntarily in response to the COVID-19 pandemic; that said, the number must be compared with the facts that immigrants held in detention centers reached an all-time high under the Trump administration (Aleaziz, 2019; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2020), that the number of immigrants in detention appears to be on an upward trend under the Biden administration (Narea, 2021; TRAC Immigration, 2021), and that the system of immigration detainment need not even exist. For much of the history of the United States, it has not (García Hernández, 2019).

The Art of Interdependence: Public Libraries as Institutions of Rights and Justice

But why are we writing specifically to librarians about this? And why now, when everyone and everything is anxious and uncertain, and many have lost jobs and loved ones, and one wouldn't be remiss to feel completely overwhelmed by information and reality? Because librarians are human, devoted to social welfare and justice, and devoted to the power of information. Librarians are creative enough to see power in a bookplate and connections between legal clinics and children's books. Librarians are called to community; and it might just be because it makes us feel better to think this, but we are positive that librarians consider the idea of community to cross the borders we humans feel compelled to erect. Thankfully, humans often *also* feel compelled to bound over those borders.

Though the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic may frighten us, we need to create public health measures that are ethical, comprehensive, and guided by science; we need to recognize how the contemporary

arc of restrictive immigration measures makes the public health crisis worse (Parmet, 2020). Our policies should coincide with who we want to be as people in a community or society. As librarians, how can we use our commitment to community, shared space, shared resources, and accurate information to decrease prejudice and xenophobia, while also increasing people's connection to necessary legal, health, and employment resources in their communities?

The true genius of public libraries lies in their embrace of the art of interdependence – communities are strong and resilient when they are equitable and inclusive, with resources and help available, so that individual community members have opportunities to succeed and grow. Libraries are, in short, the most powerful engines of rights and justice in communities that ever have been created (Jaeger et al., 2015). Even members of the profession of librarianship are often unaware of the profound contributions that libraries historically have made in promoting and protecting inclusion and justice. Just skimming the highlights of what the field has done to promote inclusion and equity for a huge range of populations in the past century indicates the breadth of their contributions:

- Some libraries have been consistently providing materials in accessible formats to community members with print disabilities for more than 150 years. As a frame of reference, disabled people only received civil rights protections under the law in the 1970s.
- With the influx of immigrants to the US from all around Europe fleeing the tumults of the 1910s which grew into World War I, children's story time became a common feature of libraries as a way to simultaneously teach young newcomers English, while giving their parents a chance to learn as well.
- During the Great Depression, libraries lacked funding for new materials or infrastructure repairs, but provided reading materials and a safe space for millions and millions of unemployed persons. Many librarians even went without pay, but kept working to serve their communities.
- The creation of the Library Bill of Rights in the 1930s was the fuel librarians needed to combat

ensorship of reading materials not only in libraries, but in their local and state levels as well. It also made a profound statement in the face of the widespread suppression of expression and destruction of reading materials by the National Socialist German Workers Party.

- During the Red Scare, libraries were often the only institutions in their communities to stand up to censorship efforts, which not only targeted pro-communist materials, but also was used as an excuse to target materials related to civil rights and human rights. Some librarians lost their jobs rather than censor library collections.

- In the era of Jim Crow, “freedom libraries” were established in many segregated communities, providing access to reading materials in places where local laws prevented non-white residents from entering the public library.

- At the height of the War on Terror, the field worked to educate the public about the threats to freedom of access and expression, even earning a rebuke from Attorney General John Ashcroft in 2003 for being too protective of the First Amendment.

- As the browseable Web became central to employment, education, governance, civic engagement, and so many other aspects of daily life, libraries were the only institution to ensure that access to computers and the Internet – and education for the necessary literacy and skills to make use of these technologies – would be available for people without other means of access.

- In our current age of misinformation, public libraries have crafted numerous online learning tools and lessons, as well as established many courses for patrons, to teach the information literacy skills that have become vital to survival.

- In response to the global pandemic, public libraries are planting gardens to grow produce for their communities, hosting farmer’s markets, serving as food banks and distribution centers, and acting as COVID-19 testing sites, among much else to help community members survive the pandemic.

While not every institution in the field has been on the right side of history and the field as a whole has sometimes taken longer than it should have to evolve,

overall, the modern history of public libraries and the work of our field can best be summarized as the protection of rights and the promotion of justice (Jaeger et al., 2015; Jaeger & Taylor, 2019). For public libraries, a large part of working to ensure fairness in their communities has been assisting the newest members of their communities.

The Legacy of Public Libraries, Immigration, and Asylum

Working to help immigrants has a long history in public libraries, especially in larger cities along the coasts. Immigration in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century represented a peak in the number of new immigrants in the history of the country, with the majority of the immigrants coming from parts of the world that were not previously heavily represented in the US population, especially the eastern and southern parts of Europe. While the majority of the country responded with a period of pervasive anti-immigration sentiment and the federal government created policies that blocked most immigration (Boorstin, 1989), public libraries were busily creating innovative new programs and resources for new community members (Burke, 2008; McDowell, 2011).

These activities included not only the advent of story times, but providing help with language, employment, social connections, and civic participation, as well as emphasizing the building of collections in areas of employment, education, economics, literature, arts, and politics that could help new Americans become enculturated and settled in their communities (Larson, 2001). In this same time frame, public libraries in large cities were also among the first public institutions to adopt new approaches and inventions to improve ventilation, sanitation, and lighting as they served ever larger numbers of patrons (Musman, 1993). By the end of World War I, services to immigrants were firmly established as one of the key functions of public libraries (Weigan, 1986). The development and expansion of children’s services, adult services, reference, tutoring, creative arts programs, and practical skills programs for adults were all driven in no small part by the increasing commitment to serving new Americans (Davies, 1974; DuMont, 1977; Jones, 1999).

With the dawn of the browseable Web and the delivery of

government services online, many public libraries became immigration centers, helping new Americans with the online processes for applying for immigration, seeking asylum, and other related government services (Gorham et al., 2013). Amazingly, given what has happened with immigration during the Trump administration, many public libraries had previously developed partnerships with local, state, and federal government agencies to further assist new Americans (Gorham et al., 2013).

In 1977, the Queens Borough Public Library (QBPL) in New York launched the New Americans Project (NAP), which may be the most comprehensive and long-running program for new Americans. It includes English language instruction, coping skills programs, cultural arts courses, employment services, and collections in a wide range of languages, as well as a host of public and social services, citizenship materials, language resources, and other helpful materials on their website (Carnesi & Fiol, 2000). The library staff members speak a wide variety of languages, allowing the NAP to provide courses in a large number of languages (Winkel, 2007).

Two more recent examples of immigration centers have embraced the idea of not only helping newcomers become part of the community, but helping them become citizens as well. The Hartford Public Library in Connecticut launched The American Place (TAP) in 2000, with the goals of helping newcomers secure citizenship and achieve language and technological literacy (Naficy, 2009). TAP has created online self-study courses and guides to navigate the immigration process. Throughout its existence, TAP has formed innovative partnerships with the local school district, local non-profits, and even United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). It offers voter registration and passport services for new citizens, as well as hosting swearing in ceremonies for the new citizens. The Austin Public Library (APL) in Texas also launched in 2000, eventually opening New Immigrants Program (NIP) centers in all of the branches of their system (Miranda-Murillo, 2006). These centers offer computer and Internet skills courses, English classes, and English conversation groups. Courses are also

offered in other locations in conjunction with partners in the Austin Community College and Austin Independent School District. Similar resources are available through their web presence.

A library need not be near a border or in a major port city to find innovative ways to serve newcomers in their communities. The information needs of immigrants and refugees occur in stages, which become more personalized as the newcomers become more settled in their communities: first, there are immediate survival information needs (food, clothing, shelter); second, there are sustained quality of life information needs (employment, education, healthcare); and third, there are the information needs related to building social connections and navigating institutional structures in their communities (Mwarigha, 2002). This later stage can include economic, political, cultural, social, and civic information, from banking to health insurance (Wang, Huang, Li, & Chen, 2020).

All of these are areas in which all libraries can help newcomers to their communities. Some libraries even take outreach programs and services – including technology services, English language learning resources, books in multiple languages, and resources necessary to acclimate to life in their new communities – directly into housing complexes and apartment buildings that are home to many immigrants and refugees in their service area (Jackson et al, 2019). A further major consideration for libraries in the US is the need to sustain a Spanish-language collection to provide physical, psychological, and metaphorical presence for established and immigrant members of the Latinx community, particularly in the wake of incendiary rhetoric and xenophobic policies (Alcalá, Colón-Aguirre, & Alaniz, 2018).

In the difficult past few years, libraries and educators around the US have found innovative ways to help immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in contrast to the harsh policy climate, in which even government programs meant to assist newcomers are not reaching many of them (Swenson, 2021). Melba Salazar Lucio, a professor at Texas Southmost College and leader with Team Brownsville coordinates *escuelitas*, comprised of weekly storytimes and interactive activities, and book

donations for children awaiting their families' asylum hearings in the encampment in Matamoros, Mexico. The encampment at Matamoros – and now, additionally, Reynosa – is a place where immigrants were forced to live in tents initially because the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) refused entry to the US for asylum seekers but insisted that asylum seekers be available for legal proceedings in the US (Team Brownsville, 2019; Department of Homeland Security, 2019).³ Ady Huertas in the Logan Heights branch of San Diego Public Library leads regular library tours (four in the summer and two in the fall or winter) for children living in nearby shelters for immigrant youth (Yorio, 2018). The Brooklyn Public Library has educated its staff on policies and rights when Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enter the building and offered weekly “know your rights” trainings to community members (Zulkey, 2020). Patrick Sullivan and Garza de Córtes lead REFORMA's Children in Crisis Task Force, which has connected with local legal aid organizations, shelters, and nonprofit groups to donate books to children seeking asylum and which regularly offers support to librarians around the country hoping to engage in such efforts (Sullivan, 2020).

This relationship between public libraries and newcomers is not isolated to the US. Across North America, Europe, and Australia, providing services to immigrants and asylum seekers is an established part of what a public library is and does (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Lerner, 2009; Varheim, 2010). These types of functions of public libraries are also developing in some African nations (Lawal, 2016). Immigrants, in turn, generally see the public library as a place to learn new languages and build new skills, expand social networks, meet people in their community, learn about social institutions, and stay connected to their native cultures (Varheim, 2010; Audonson, Essmat, & Aabo, 2011; Chu, 1999). Inclusive services for immigrant populations can also be found as a part of the curriculum of many library schools in the US and elsewhere (Jaeger, et al., 2011).

Conclusion: The Common Cause of a Truly Inclusive Society

While every public library is naturally focused on how best to serve its own community right now in the midst of a global pandemic, it is hard to imagine a more vulnerable population than asylum-seeking families with young children packed into cramped and disease-ravaged detention centers or crowded makeshift encampments. The curtailment to immigration and asylum is not just unnecessarily cruel, it is in direct conflict with the long-standing values and activities of public libraries. If we, as a community of public librarians, do not work collectively to support the needs of new Americans and those seeking to become new Americans in this climate of xenophobia, we will be failing to uphold our own ideals and our own historical legacy.

There are things that every public library can do to contribute. First, of course, is to consider your own community. Consider ways to improve and expand the services and outreach provided by your library to support newcomers in your local community and the partnerships you have with other local nonprofits and government agencies. Additionally, think about ways that you can educate your entire community about immigration. The United States is clearly in a period of deep xenophobia, but public libraries can serve as an educational counterweight to irrational anger. Special displays and programs that highlight prominent authors, who are first or second generation Americans, or that focus on materials related to the historical and current experiences of immigrants and asylum seekers, could help people to think about these issues in a new light.

There also is a national role for all public librarians, too. Every library can hold a book drive to collect materials for the programs that are providing books to those confined to detention centers. If you want to become more involved, learn more about programs like those of REFORMA's Children in Crisis Task Force or Team Brownsville and reach out to libraries at the forefront of helping those in detention centers to see what other help they need. Professional library organizations could help to coordinate efforts.

We can also engage these issues as national political issues, opposing them for their unfairness and

irrationality. Public libraries have a long history of political engagement, though we do not necessarily like to admit it to ourselves (Jaeger & Sarin, 2016a; Jaeger & Sarin, 2016b). Through opposition to censorship and book banning, standing up to the Red Scare and Jim Crow, subverting the intrusions on intellectual freedom of the USA PATRIOT Act, and quite a bit else, our field has demonstrated that a commitment to equity, inclusion, and justice defines public libraries and makes them such unique contributors to their communities.

Service to newcomers and helping them become part of their new communities has been an essential contribution of public libraries to these individuals and communities, but also to the nation as a whole. The United State truly is a nation of immigrants, and public libraries have been a long-standing, ever-reliable bridge into American life. Yet, the nature of the Trump administration's policies toward immigration and asylum sought to totally undo this fundamental aspect of the United States. As a presidential candidate, Donald Trump built his campaign around the denigration of women, the disabled, people of color, the poor, and immigrants, exploiting terminology of illness and disability to disparage these populations, most notably in the title of his campaign autobiography "Crippled America" (Cork, et al., 2016). Closing the border with Mexico as a way to limit immigration was a particular obsession; he even utilized the threat of disease as a reason in 2015: "Tremendous infectious disease is pouring across the border." And these disparagements were not a passing fancy of a candidate, as his annual proposed budgets aimed to eliminate funds that help these populations and his administration worked to create policies to suppress the participation of these populations – especially immigrants – in the 2020 Census (Douglass et al, 2017; Ndumu et al., in press).

Using the pandemic in part as cover, executive orders and proclamations have accomplished what building a border wall could not. Between closing the border on March 21, 2020 and May 14, 2020, the USCIS had turned away more than 20,000 people seeking asylum and interviewed only 59 of them (Miroff, 2020b). Of those 59 interviewed, 54 were rejected outright and only

two allowed to stay while their cases were considered, deemed to possibly qualify for protection under the UN Convention Against Torture. No, you did not misread the preceding sentence – out of more than 20,000 people, two (or less than 0.0001%) had been given the chance to enter the asylum-seeking process.

Even newcomers who had successfully completed every step of the citizenship process were thwarted from officially becoming citizens in the initial months of the pandemic, as USCIS decided the entirely ceremonial ceremony to swear the oath of allegiance to the US must be completed for the process to be finalized even though the ceremonies initially were cancelled during the pandemic. In mid-May, 2020, this found about 126,000 should-be-citizens living in citizenship limbo (Rampall, 2020).

Donald Trump was not the first American politician to use the threat of disease to promote racist immigration policies, and the Biden administration's ready embrace of Title 42 to continue excluding Haitians is merely another step in a history of inequitable immigration policy (Carter, 2021). The immigration law designed to prevent immigration from China – and subtly named the Chinese Exclusion Act – was passed in 1882 and remained law until 1943, with the primary argument from politicians in favor of the law being that Chinese immigrants were a source of the plague and other epidemics (Lepore, 2018). And Donald Trump was not the only politician exploiting fear to promote xenophobia at the pandemic's onset, "with ugly incidents in Australia, China, and beyond" (Smith, 2020, p. E17). But just because it is happening elsewhere does not mean that we have to accept it as inevitable in the U.S.

Since the widespread development of programs for newcomers in the late 1800s, public libraries have been outspoken advocates – through our actions and programs – for rights and justice in the communities that we serve, both those that just came here and those from past generations. Our long-standing commitment to serve newcomers is directly in conflict with the idea of banning newcomers.

So what does a bookplate mean, compared to all this? A

bookplate means hope for a collaborative, well-informed, inclusive future that seeks equity and justice. A bookplate is a small meaningful reminder of people's desires for stories and connection, of their ability to use books as "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors," in the words of Rudine Sims Bishop (1990), "to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created." A bookplate signals human existence and is an invitation to take inspiration from the words, stories, and work of others and do as much as we as librarians possibly can, and even more, to create connections between people, to use all the resources available to us through our existence in institutions dedicated to shared space, resources, and valid information to act urgently – in times of crisis and times of relative calm – to ensure that people are valued and respected. Without acknowledgement of shared humanity, what and why are we?

Endnotes

¹ Exec. Order No.13767, 82 FR 8793, January 25, 2017. "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements." Retrieved from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/01/30/2017-02095/border-security-and-immigration-enforcement-improvements>; Exec. Order No. 13768, 82 FR 8799, January 25, 2017. "Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States." Retrieved from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/01/30/2017-02102/enhancing-public-safety-in-the-interior-of-the-united-states>; Exec. Order No 13769, 82 FR 8977, January 27, 2017. "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States." Retrieved from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/02/01/2017-02281/protecting-the-nation-from-foreign-terrorist-entry-into-the-united-states> and Exec. Order No. 13780, 82 FR13209, March 6, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/03/09/2017-04837/protecting-the-nation-from-foreign-terrorist-entry-into-the-united-states>; Exec. Order No. 13788, 82 FR18837, April 21, 2017. "Buy American and Hire American." Retrieved from <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/04/21/2017-08311/buy-american-and-hire-american>; Exec. Order No. 13815, 82 FR 50055, October 24, 2017. "Resuming the United States Refugee Admissions

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² At the time of this submission, the proclamation was not yet available in the online Federal Register. The citation refers to the online publication of presidential proclamations available through the White House.

³ The MPP became moot due to restrictions imposed at the border under Title 42, which has turned hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers away. The Biden administration pledged to stop enforcing the MPP but was ordered by a lower court, whose order was upheld by the Supreme Court, to resume its enforcement. The administration recently announced its readiness to reinforce the measure, while stating a plan to end MPP when a court injunction is lifted. The slow pace of processing, the use of Title 42, and the resumption of MPP seem likely only to swell the numbers of people living in the encampments, and the work of Team Brownsville continues.

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Participatory Budgeting:

A Librarian's Experience

John DeLooper

Abstract

This article discusses one librarian's experience with the Participatory Budgeting process in New York City. It includes information about how New York's Participatory Budgeting process works, as well as Participatory Budgeting's principles, and some discussion of how libraries have utilized PB. In addition, it includes discussion of how librarian skillsets can be especially useful for participatory budgeting.

Introduction

Cities and other institutions throughout the world have been experimenting with and integrating participatory budgeting (PB) into their workflows and governance structures since 1989, when Porto Alegre, Brazil launched the first PB program (Souza, 2001). Participatory budgeting, as a process, aims to make government more accessible to citizens, restore trust in government, and increase civic engagement (Swaner, 2017). It does this by giving community members a chance to propose projects that use government funds, then vote on them to choose which projects are implemented. Since its origin, PB has spread throughout the world, and in many places, nonprofits and non-governmental organizations have also become involved in this process. One notable example is the Participatory Budgeting Project, which sought to bring the practice of Participatory Budgeting to the United States ("Mission, History & Values," 2021).

Participatory Budgeting in Libraries

Aside from its use in government, participatory budgeting is gaining currency in libraries. For instance, the Brooklyn Public Library in New York lobbied its patrons to utilize PB as a tool to fund needed improvements (Brooklyn Public Library, 2019; Rosario, n.d.) and the New York Public Library created

a fact sheet about how participatory budgeting funds could be used to benefit their library system (Mihaltses, n.d.). Individual libraries have also devoted portions of their budget for PB, allowing patrons to have a more direct process to make their voices heard about their wants and needs in terms of equipment, collections and services (Asaro, 2019). More recently, academic institutions and their libraries have also tested allocating portions of their budgets for participatory budgeting, including schools such as Brooklyn College and Queens College (Asaro, 2019; Iqbal, 2019; Jordan, 2016).

Beyond this, libraries might even be considered pioneers in PB, since prior to the formal creation of the participatory budgeting process many libraries had workflows through which patrons could suggest collection or database additions. In addition, many of America's libraries were incorporated as Carnegie Libraries, which can be seen as a proto-participatory budgeting process. The Carnegie process required community groups to apply to the Carnegie Corporation for aid to build libraries for their towns and cities, and the Carnegie library application process effectively joined these civic groups with town agencies or library boards to jointly demonstrate their need and desire for library services and receive funding ("Carnegie Libraries," n.d.).

Participatory Budgeting in New York City: My Experience

Having seen advertising in my local community for Participatory Budgeting events, I decided to participate in local participatory budgeting projects over the past three years. I am a resident of Brooklyn, New York, which has been experimenting with PB since at least 2011, when City Council Members Brad Lander, Melissa Mark-Viverito, Eric Ulrich, and Jumaane Williams implemented the first participatory budgeting

programs in New York City (“About PBNYC,” n.d.). After several cycles of PB by these and other council members, New York passed a law mandating that council districts incorporate PB into their annual budget allocations, though its implementation has been paused due to budget shortfalls wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic (Khurshid, 2020).

In New York City, PB is typically run at the City Council District level, although it has also been attempted at the state level. The district I live in, NYC’s 38th City Council District, is somewhat of a pioneer in New York’s PB journey. Our council member, Carlos Menchaca, has taken great pride in partaking in the participatory budgeting process, and our district’s first PB cycle was featured in the PBS documentary *Public Money* (Sterrenberg, 2018). In addition, the council member from the neighboring city council district, Brad Lander, is one of the key figures who first brought PB to New York City. As a council member, Lander can often be seen at local events, because depending on the event’s location, overlapping populations from both council districts often attend.

My residential area is also one of the only parts of New York City to attempt participatory budgeting at the state level, when our then-State Senator Jesse Hamilton conducted the first PB program run by a state representative in 2018. These events indicate that PB has been quite important to our neighborhood – not only were we ranked in the top five districts in participation (“Participatory Budgeting Cycle 9,” n.d., p. 9), we did it despite the fact that our neighborhood has a significant portion of undocumented people. These community members cannot vote in city or state elections, and may feel unsafe in other interactions with governmental representatives (Hayduk, Hackett, & Folla, 2017). For these community members, PB can be the only way that they get to vote on government spending.

My PB experience extends to Senator Hamilton’s state level PB program, and two of council member Menchaca’s PB cycles (2018-2019 and 2019-2020). Each experience was somewhat different and will be discussed in more detail in the paragraphs below.

How the PB Process Works

PB requires two components to function: action and funding. In terms of action, PB is often led by volunteers from a local community working in conjunction with staff members from a local elected official’s office. With respect to funding, PB is typically funded out of a portion of the elected official’s discretionary funds budget (Su, 2017), and is usually applied to capital projects only (Citywide Council for Participatory Budgeting, n.d.). In New York, these discretionary funds can sometimes be combined with other funding sources, such as money from a Borough President’s office, or funding from private foundations or donors (Office of the Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, 2019). Discretionary funding, however, is not guaranteed. In recent years, funding has been cancelled due to budget crises and political retribution (Shahrigian, 2020a, 2020b).

The PB process is generally broken down into several steps. First, there is idea solicitation, where ideas are gathered via a webform and by people writing them on paper or whiteboards during in-person meetings. Next, ideas are reviewed at delegate meetings, where volunteers analyze project ideas to make sure they comply with relevant rules and to determine which ones will be sent to the appropriate city agencies for agency review. At this point, project proposals are formalized, typically as written documents, and sent to city agencies for their feedback and review. Volunteers then review the agency feedback, and several feasible projects are collated together onto a PB ballot. Then, there is a week or more of voting, often both online and in-person at select polling sites or “pop-up” locations. Votes are then tallied, and the council member will attempt to fund and implement the winning projects.

Although New York City followed a general formula for PB, the grassroots nature of PB precludes it from following a strict formulaic process. Therefore, the process or even steps of the process can vary significantly from one PB host organization or official to another, and other agencies can attempt their own participatory budgeting programs with their own modifications (Cardinale et al., 2020; New York State Education Department, n.d.).

Who Participates in Participatory Budgeting?

To vote in New York's PB, one must live, work, attend school, or have a significant interest in the community. Volunteers and voters must be 13 years or older. In my experience, determining eligibility is done on an honor system. Because there is no formal voter registration process, community members must self-identify which district they will participate in or vote in, and some people may be involved in multiple districts where they could potentially vote. For instance, during one PB cycle, I met a teacher participating in a PB program who lived in one district, but worked at a school in another district. Thus, this participant was able to advocate for and vote in support of a project in the district where he worked, and also vote in his home district as a resident.

Generating Awareness

People are made aware of participatory budgeting through advertising and word of mouth. Usually, the organizing officials use newsletters, presentations at community meetings, tools such as mailings or email lists, and social media posts and advertisements. The volunteer focus of the process means volunteers can make additional outreach attempts. For instance, in one PB cycle, several participants asked the council member if they could do their own outreach on the WeChat platform, to which the council member's staff enthusiastically agreed.

Soliciting Ideas

Volunteers attend working sessions where they review ideas submitted from a webform. At initial in-person meetings volunteers also work together to generate additional ideas for consideration. In New York these ideas must be for projects done in conjunction with the city's government, specifically city agencies. Public authorities, like the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), which runs New York's subways, and the city's Economic Development Corporation (EDC), which manages a wide portfolio of city properties and services, typically do not participate. Winning proposals are usually required to cost at least \$50,000, but can cost as much as the elected official has allocated

(often \$500,000 to \$1 million) or more, especially if they can combine their projects with those of other council members, or other officials, such as a borough president.

The costs of government capital projects can sometimes shock new participants. For instance, installing a curb extension in NYC can cost \$625,000 (NYC DOT, n.d.), and renovating school bathrooms can cost between \$400,000 and \$560,000 (Johnson, n.d.; Levin, 2020; Preston & Hechinger Report, 2019). These high procurement costs, along with restrictive rules set by agencies, can limit the number of projects that can be completed in any given PB cycle, and even slow or stall project implementation. For instance, as of 2019, none of the winning projects from my district had even broken ground (Yates, 2019).

Running an Election

Elections are run by volunteers and council staff members. Typically, voters may vote online, or at one of several poll sites, which officials often try to locate throughout their district to ensure geographic diversity of voices in participation. Volunteers can also run their own "pop-up" poll sites at locations they think will attract voters, such as parks, schools, and churches.

Implementing Projects (or Not): PB Results

In the three PB cycles I experienced, none of the winning projects were completed as of this article's publication. This experience is not unusual. According to an analysis by Gothamist, less than 6% of all participatory budgeting projects have been completed (Khan, 2018). This, unfortunately, can have lasting effects. During one PB cycle, I saw volunteers recruit community groups to support and campaign for their proposed projects. This high engagement drew dozens of volunteers, and hundreds of PB voters, and the projects these champions proposed were approved by the voters and funded. However, a year later, they and several writers of winning projects met and discussed the previous year's projects. All of them reported a similar experience relating to the project not being completed. In these instances, each of the volunteers of winning projects kept in contact with the elected official's office. The elected official then arranged

a meeting with the relevant city agency, who met with the proposal writer, council member, and other constituents, and explained several reasons why it would not be done.

This kind of result sets a very dangerous precedent – not only does it discourage one year’s volunteers from participating in future PB cycles, but it also damages faith in governmental processes and/or representative government to meet their community’s wants and needs.

Discussion/Lessons Learned

As a participant, I observed a few things that might be helpful to officials or organizations running PB programs. First, I found that the contributions of volunteers were key in making the PB process work. Volunteers generate ideas that otherwise would not have been generated by an elected official or their staff. Volunteers also devote their time and energy to attending meetings, drafting proposals, and running poll sites, and can help organize community groups or individuals to champion projects. By gathering support, these volunteers can effectively demonstrate to elected officials how constituents would benefit from completed PB projects.

That said, while volunteers are a strong element of PB programs, in my opinion, paid staff of the elected official should have final say on PB processes. In one cycle, the process relied too much on the volunteers to generate ideas, schedule meetings, and write proposals. Taken together, this slowed down the process, and caused us to almost miss our agency review period. In addition, without strong supervision from the officials who will implement the projects, generated proposals can be infeasible, either financially, practically, or politically. These projects are thus more likely to be rejected by the relevant government agencies, either at the review stage, or after a project has already been approved. In other words, volunteers should feel willing to suggest many elements such as project ideas and poll site locations, but the staff of elected officials should be willing to firmly say that certain projects cannot, will not, or should not be done.

Also, while the PB voting period can last for a day, a week, or even a month, I advise limiting the total number of events surrounding PB voting. I found that too many poll sites, activity fairs, and other events can overwhelm a body of constituents and the volunteers working to expand PB in their communities, because voters faced without a deadline usually defer voting to another time and thus may end up not voting at all.

Participatory budgeting also provides an unparalleled opportunity for those who do not have significant experience working with governments to learn more about how their government works. PB gave me the opportunity to meet with the staff of elected officials, and even meet the elected officials themselves. This made me feel less intimidated by my city’s government, and more confident to ask for needs or wants in my community. Staying in touch with the elected officials also showed me the importance of maintaining contact with them on issues, since keeping a project going often involved using methods such as calling the office, sending emails, and reaching out on social media. It also gave me the opportunity to learn new skills, such as running a pop-up poll site, and introduced me to activists and voters from other parts of my community district as well.

It also taught me more about the role of institutions in politics. When elected staff and PB volunteers suggested that I run a poll site in my church, I was initially taken aback. My experience in my religious institution was that this church tried to limit the role of politics in its day-to-day functions. I had never seen representatives from an elected official’s office either speaking or running a table after Mass, though many community organizations did these things. When my council member’s staff suggested hosting a pop-up site in this church, I reached out to my church’s staff, and found out this was a normal thing at other Masses, as well as in other churches of the same denomination. Going through the PB process thus also helped me learn more about my church’s community and helped engage fellow congregants in discussions about community needs after Mass.

Schools can also be key partners in successfully running a PB process. First, it was extremely encouraging that some of the most active volunteers in each cycle were

middle and high school students. That said, schools might be seen to have an unfair advantage in PB, as teachers can take class time to encourage whole classes to vote, and some schools even have assemblies where hundreds of students can vote at the same time, often on projects in support of their own school. In two cycles, I found that schools initially dominated the proposed projects, and in one case, won all the projects on the ballot. To address this outcome, the staff of the elected official running that PB cycle had to work hard the next year to solicit projects that were not only related to schools in order to ensure that constituents without minor children were still inclined to participate.

Finally, with budgets ranging from \$50,000 to \$1,000,000, the sums involved in PB can be insufficient for any city council or state senate district to fix the issues in their district. Indeed, some of the most popular types of projects, such as adding air conditioning systems to schools or fixing dilapidated or inaccessible bathrooms, seem to reflect a systematic failure to maintain public facilities by New York City's government (Gelinis, 2017; Lerner, 2018). In addition, I saw projects that cost-wise might seem to fit in a PB budget, like adding a soccer dome or pool "bubble," but which could not be implemented because of complex city procurement processes, bidding restrictions, lack of local expertise, and other factors that do not become visible until somebody proposes this type of project. While these challenges may be surmountable, they can require an elected official to have strong political will and demonstrate dedication to fighting for these projects over a period of what is likely to be years. Finally, communities within the same district can have distinct goals and different populations. For instance, the 38th City Council District, in which I live and vote, includes the neighborhoods of Red Hook and Sunset Park, which are two demographically different and largely physically disconnected communities.

A Role for Librarians in PB?

Librarians can be a particular asset in PB. As an information professional I had a general idea of what types of information New York City and local community organizations and media outlets published.

I was able to use my research skills to comb through these sources and find proposals from other districts that were previously funded, as well as budgets and other related documents that assisted with preparing PB proposals. In addition, I had done some grant writing for initiatives, such as the American Library Association's Muslim Journeys series and the National Endowment for the Humanities' Created Equal program. Thanks to these and other library writing assignments, I felt well prepared for writing project proposals according to city specifications.

During the research and writing process, I also became concerned about the city's barriers to information. At certain points, information that should have been available, such as the location of a closed subway entrance, was said by the Metropolitan Transit Authority to be unavailable, or in another case, that the city agency involved was not willing to provide the requested information. Because of that, I had to learn new information seeking skills, such as filing Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) requests, which helped me to better understand common obstacles faced by citizens and media outlets seeking access to government records in New York City. These barriers were especially challenging to me, because in my work as a librarian, I spend a lot of time helping patrons find the information they need for a wide variety of purposes. Having experienced how patrons can struggle to find information such as reports, statistics, or proposals, I tend to think that organizations and government agencies should make these kinds of materials easily discoverable and sharable. But the bureaucracy required to obtain these types of records showed me that other people who work for city and state governments do not feel the same way. Seeing that critical information often cannot be obtained without engaging in bureaucratic processes like FOIL requests has made me much more likely to file these in the future, as I know that FOIL requests must be acknowledged, and that timelines to return foiled documents can take between weeks and years. Therefore, any request that could potentially require FOIL should be filed early to maximize chances that records are returned before a project is completed.

Conclusion

While not without its challenges, I found taking part in PB to be a worthwhile process. It helped me and other participants learn how the government functions and introduced us to elected and appointed officials. PB can also generate new ideas for city projects or services that elected officials and government agencies would otherwise not be aware of and can also be a great tool for bringing community groups together to lobby for projects or sponsor poll sites.

I believe that librarians should consider working with and volunteering for PB efforts in their communities. The PB process can educate both staff and patrons about the roles and processes of government and may even be a tool for obtaining funding for their own libraries.

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Campaigning for a Library Funding Referendum:

A Detailed Success Story

Michael Celec and Jeannine Delwiche

Abstract

In 2019, we asked the taxpayers to increase our library's budget by voting themselves a tax increase. This article is meant to help other public libraries to successfully conduct a similar referendum. We believe the details of our experience will have broader application and usefulness, especially for public libraries in Pennsylvania.

Disclaimer: The processes we describe in this article are specific to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and will be applicable to differing extents in other locations. As we are not attorneys, this document should not be relied on as a legal guide. We advise you to seek legal counsel regarding all legal matters. The processes we describe were current as of 2019.

Gathering Petition Signatures

The petition phase is an important step in your campaign. It is all about getting your referendum question on the ballot. Details on petition and other referendum rules are published by the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), currently at <https://dced.pa.gov/>. Consult the *Referendum Handbook* at that site for more details. You can also reach this office by phone with questions.

How many signatures do you need? During the petition phase, you and your volunteers need to gather a number of signatures, "equal to at least three percent of the number of persons voting at the last preceding general or municipal election" (*Referendum Handbook*, Eleventh Edition, August 2019, pages 14-15). In order to find out your signature minimum, you can learn the number of voters in previous elections by consulting your county's voter services office. In our county, these numbers were available on the Voter Services website at: <https://www.montcopa.org/753/Voter-Services> (accessed July 18, 2021).

It is recommended that you gather signatures in excess of the minimum needed, in case some are successfully challenged for noncompliance. For example, signatures with incomplete or illegible information, or signatures from ineligible people, may be removed from your count.

When you have collected enough valid signatures in support of adding your question to the ballot, you should submit the signatures to your county's voter services office. Your voter services office will add the question to the ballot if you have completed this step successfully.

Who can sign? There are rules about collecting signatures when you petition to have a question placed upon a ballot. These rules codify not only what each page of the petition must contain and who can sign it, but also what information each signatory must provide, when they can sign it, and who can collect the signatures.

Petition time window. In Pennsylvania, signatures must be collected between the thirteenth and the tenth Tuesday before the election.

What it has to say. The petition must identify the referendum at issue and usually includes introductory material at the top and spaces for signatures at the bottom. While the full text of the question being submitted is not technically required, we strongly advise it be included to establish that the signers were completely aware of the issue they signed up to support, and thus eliminate a potential legal challenge. The statutory authority (e.g., the county board of elections) for the referendum should be cited. We were advised to include the full text of our question and followed this advice.

Each signer must be a registered voter of the political district *on the date when they sign*, and must provide

both their occupation and address (*Referendum Handbook*, Eleventh Edition, August 2019, page 8).

While the petition may consist of more than one sheet, they must be bound together when submitted with the pages numbered consecutively. Every sheet of a petition must include:

- The circulator’s affidavit (which must include a statement that the circulator is a registered voter of the political district)
- The circulator’s address
- A statement that the signers signed with full knowledge of the petition’s contents, their residences are correctly stated, they reside in the county, they signed on the date set opposite their names, and that, to the best of the circulator’s knowledge and belief, the signers are registered voters of the political district.
- The circulator’s notarized signature on this statement

While the person circulating the petition does not have to be the signer of the affidavit, the signer must have personal knowledge of the facts being sworn to in the petition (*Referendum Handbook*, 2019). This means that the circulators of the petition who are signing the affidavit must be registered voters in the same municipality. Figure A shows the petition form we used to gather signatures. Figure B shows the back side (second page).

Figure A: Petition page 1

Ballot Question Petition

Signatures must be procured within the legal period for securing same: and this petition must be filed in the office of the County Board of Elections on or before the last day prescribed by law.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

PETITION

To have the Library Company of Hatborough Referendum printed upon the official ballots for Hatboro for the May 2019 Primary Election.

We the undersigned all of whom are qualified electors of the Borough of Hatboro, hereby petition the Montgomery County Board of Elections to have the following question printed on the official ballots.

QUESTION

Shall the Borough of Hatboro establish a Special Library Tax to provide for the maintenance of and aid to Union Library Company of Hatborough at the rate of .55 mills on the dollar on all taxable real estate within the Borough of Hatboro?

PLAIN ENGLISH STATEMENT

The Union Library Company of Hatborough, the public library at 243 South York Road, has been operating in Hatboro since 1755. A majority vote yes to this question would establish for the first time, a tax line item that is to be paid specifically to the library for its operations and maintenance. The rate on the ballot is for the library to receive .55 mills.

SIGNATURE OF ELECTOR	PRINTED NAME OF ELECTOR	PLACE OF RESIDENCE			OCCUPATION	DATE OF SIGNING
		HOUSE NO.	STREET ROAD	OR CITY BOROUGH OR TOWNSHIP		
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						

Figure B: Petition page 2

SIGNATURE OF ELECTOR	PRINTED NAME OF ELECTOR	PLACE OF RESIDENCE			OCCUPATION	DATE OF SIGNING
		HOUSE NO.	STREET ROAD	OR CITY BOROUGH OR TOWNSHIP		
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						
21						
22						
23						
24						
25						
26						
27						
28						
29						
30						

AFFIDAVIT OF CIRCULATOR

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
COUNTY OF MONTGOMERY

Before me, the undersigned authority in and for said State and County, personally appeared the undersigned, who, being duly sworn according to law, did depose and say that his or her

residence is as set forth below, that the signers to the foregoing petition signed the same with full knowledge of the contents thereof: that their respective residences are correctly stated therein: that they all reside in the said political district: that each signed on the date set opposite his or her name: and that, to the best of deponent's knowledge and belief, the signees are qualified, registered, and enrolled electors of the aforesaid political district.

This _____ day of _____ 2019.

_____ (SIGNATURE OF CIRCULATOR)

_____ (PRINTED NAME OF CIRCULATOR)

_____ (STREET ADDRESS) (POST OFFICE)

_____ (CITY, BOROUGH, TOWNSHIP)

Your Messaging

You want people to vote YES. So, we recommend plastering the word YES on everything: your committee's name, website and URL, any mailings, your email address, and so on. When you make calls or knock on doors, introduce yourself as representing the YES Committee.

People have a good feeling about public libraries, but when you are asking people to raise their own taxes, you have to make the case as to why. You cannot rely on vague positive sentiment towards libraries. Campaigners must be prepared to answer questions in detail. They should memorize the FAQ and have figures ready to go.

Petition conversations

Naysayers. If you speak to someone that declines to sign, or that balks in some way, it is probably not worth your time to try to argue and convince them to change their mind. Mostly when we had a negative reaction, it was someone that did not like the idea of a tax increase. It is not a good use of your energy and time to try to move them on this point. Thank them for their time and move on.

Eligibility. This was our biggest petition challenge. We encountered many people that would have loved to sign in support, but who did not live in the borough proper and thus were not eligible. For these people, we had a flyer directing them to our website for more information. People like these should be invited to volunteer, donate, or supply a story that describes their personal connection to the library. The pool of people

that can vote is the same group that is eligible to sign your petition. In other words, only people who belong to the region's tax base are eligible to sign the petition. Someone that lives in the next town cannot sign your petition. Thank them for their support and tell them what they *can* do for you, but do not let them sign the petition. Upon submission, the petition signatures are spot-checked. If too many signatures are ruled invalid, it can place your entire effort in jeopardy.

Software and Messaging Platforms

Selecting Software. A Voter Database Management Software (VDMS) tool is needed to ensure you have an accurate understanding of where your voters stand, and to help focus your efforts where they will have the biggest impact. The VDMS is used to 1) identify high frequency voters, 2) track the contact your volunteers have with voters, 3) identify your supporters and opponents, and 4) divide tasks among volunteers for canvassing (door to door conversations with eligible voters) and phone banking (volunteer calls to eligible voters). As the campaign matures, the VDMS is the simplest way to track your progress on reaching your campaign's vote goal.

While both the Democratic and Republican parties use a VDMS, they use proprietary software you cannot access. At the time of this article, there are four non-partisan VDMS options available to you. Our campaign opted to use NationBuilder, following the recommendation of EveryLibrary. This option worked well for us. One advantage of going with NationBuilder is they have a useful voter database and web platform for building your website, in addition to the VDMS software.

Website and Facebook. Some campaigns forego a website due to the ubiquity of Facebook. We learned that some of our most frequent voters did not use Facebook, most often due to either a lack of interest in social media or privacy concerns. We recommend establishing a campaign website in order to reach those voters. An additional difficulty with using Facebook in place of a website is that neither Facebook group pages nor Facebook business pages are flexible enough to meet the

needs of most campaigns. While you should set up a Facebook campaign page, such a page should be used mainly as a tool to drive people to your website (more detail below), and not as a replacement for it. Your cornerstone campaign information will live on your website.

It is highly recommended that your campaign website include the following pages/sections:

- **About.** This section should include the precise wording of the ballot question, a brief account of why you are asking for funding, clarification on who can vote, the timing of when to vote, names of the campaign officers and their roles (which minimally consist of a president and a treasurer), and contact information (at the very minimum an email address) for questions.

- **News.** This section should be frequently updated throughout your campaign. Ideally, your social media director should develop enough content to ensure a new post will be added every day, at least during the month before election day. The distribution of new content at a regular interval is a good way to maintain interest, and to keep the campaign on your supporters' minds. We recommend using all of the following types of post:

- **Stories.** Have your supporters write about the individual connection they share with your library. Use these to engage voters on an emotional level. Talk about memories: why this specific library is important to them. General statements about literacy or libraries are less useful. Keep it local and personal.
- **Blog style essays.** Heavy on information about the library and the impact of the referendum, these should be written in collaboration with the library's director. These allow you to respond to issues raised by detractors on social media. These posts should not refer directly to any negative posts or comments. Use them to supply a fact-based message that is relevant to the counter-arguments to which your proponents can point.

People that planned to vote NO gave us good ideas for blog posts when they wrote negative comments about the campaign in the local FaceBook group.

- **Third party content.** Find memes, insightful quotes, videos, news articles, and more that match your campaign's message. Find ways to illustrate your point of view. EveryLibrary shares a large amount of content from which your campaign can draw serious and factual content, while the Grumbly Librarian on Facebook offers a variety of posts that are often on the "lighter" side. You can also create memes to support quotes that you feel are particularly apt for your community.

- **Endorsements.** The endorsement page should consist of letters of support from your local leaders. Define 'local leaders' broadly. We had a letter from our local garden club, for example. Ask your Chamber of Commerce, scout leaders, teachers, and more. Ask the people in town that are known and respected. To enhance the authenticity of the endorsements we received, we asked our local leaders to place their endorsements on either their personal letterhead or on the letterhead of their organization and to supply us with a signed copy of their endorsements. We also asked them to include a photo of themselves, to improve the "post-ability" of the endorsement, to increase the impact of familiar faces, and to enhance the relatability of their messages. Building your endorsements and making them look good is a task that is worth the extra time it takes. We return to endorsements in detail below.

- **FAQ.** This is where you put all your detailed thoughts and arguments. It is recommended that you write enough to satisfy everyone's questions, from the most informed to the least informed. Anticipate objections and answer them ahead of time. Consider what someone who has never visited the library would ask. Every library will have unique answers. Our FAQ filled two webpages and included answers to all of these questions:

- Why does the library need this referendum?
- Why is the library underfunded?
- What will the library do that it can't do now?
- "Why do we need a library when we have the Internet?"
- If I don't use the library, why should a portion of my property taxes support it?
- How much will it cost? Is it worth the cost?
- How did the referendum get on the ballot?
- What happens if the referendum doesn't pass?
- How does the local government support for us compare to that of neighboring libraries?
- Why don't we fund the library in some other way? Since it's eligible for grants, why doesn't the library fund its operations mainly through grants?
- Can't the library just be run by volunteers?

- **Pledge.** This section is a place where registered voters can come, commit to voting YES, and tell you who they are. We will return to why this is useful.

- **Donate.** Even if your webpage seems unlikely to bring in much money (ours did not), we recommend having the option to donate to your effort. It gives non-residents a way to contribute, and can be especially important if strong opposition arises against your campaign.

Ideally, social media campaigns put out new items on a regular and predictable basis. Our campaign aimed to offer seven different types of items, each on a weekly basis as depicted in Table A.

Table A: Social Media Posting Schedule (Items in bold were boosted through paid promotion)

Monday	#MyStory – a post from a patron or supporter (non-residents allowed)
Tuesday	FAQ Ad – targeted ad that promotes the recent blog post
Wednesday	Endorsement – letter from a local leader that supports voting YES on the referendum
Thursday	Other – Third party perspective that supports your message (news article or general facts)
Friday	Good Stuff Ad – a target ad that elaborates on a benefit patrons will receive if the referendum passes
Saturday	Good Stuff Poll – this poll is meant to engage residents and identify people that will vote YES

Sunday	Voter ID Ad – this targeted ad promotes voter registration, reminder of election date, etc.,
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We kept the weekends 'lighter' and rolled out more informative posts on Tuesdays. Our campaign website is archived and can be used as a template for your campaign:
<https://web.archive.org/web/20190520064208/https://www.yeshatborolibrary.org/>. Any public library running a referendum campaign is encouraged to borrow, modify, and use any text they find useful.

Managing conversations (including opposition)

Imperfectly regulated platforms like Facebook can be used to disseminate false information. Outside of groups and posts where you can regulate comments and other activity, social media arguments tend to become emotionally draining.

Given our limited resources, we adopted a careful Facebook strategy. We made a single announcement of the referendum on the local community Facebook group (and disabled the comments). On our campaign Facebook page, we set our filters to exclude profanity and certain key words, such as 'tax'. We used the 'hide' option on negative comments, which makes the poster's comment visible to only the original poster and his or her friends while rendering it otherwise invisible. Opponents were free to organize and disseminate their own message using the same online platforms we did, though they chose not to do that. It was not our obligation to let the Yes Committee's platform be co-opted by negative messages. Keep in mind this platform was developed by the Yes Committee, our incorporated political campaign, rather than the library.

In the first week of our public campaign, we did respond to negative comments in Facebook. Our responses used the following format:

"We're glad you asked about that important issue. As noted on our website, the answer is (x). Here is a link to our website FAQ with more detail on this and many other questions."

Note that this could be the answer to any comment, whether the comment was informed or ignorant, friendly or hostile. In retrospect, this was probably not a good use of our time and energy since it is nearly impossible to win an argument on Facebook. Additionally, the more comments a Facebook thread gets, the more visible it is. So, the best way to prevent a negative thread from gaining traction in a local group is to ignore it and to encourage your volunteers to do the same.

After the first week, we refrained from responding to negative comments in the local Facebook group. Instead, we monitored those comments and answered them as part of our next blog post. In our blog posts, we would work with the library director to lay out the counter-arguments to the latest negative comments. We would then promote the blog post using Facebook ads, targeted to local voters in our database. These blog posts never specifically referred to the negative comments, but did provide our answer to most objections. The goal was not converting the naysayers, but addressing their objections seriously for the undecided voters. If our ads received negative comments, we hid these as well.

Once you start talking to voters, your primary goal is to identify how they plan to vote and record this information in your database. As the election date nears, you should send reminder postcards to your identified yes voters only. With those who plan to vote NO, simply cross them off your contact list so you do not inadvertently remind them to vote. People that give you a solid no are helpful because you know not to spend more time on them. It is usually not worth your while to get into arguments. With undecided voters, you can answer questions they may have to aid in their decision making. These undecided voters are the only conversations that should take up much time.

Regardless of where you hear negative comments, try not to let it get to you or to take it personally. Typically, they are not haters of the library or its employees. Generally, opponents are speaking out because they

are unhappy at the prospect of having their taxes raised. While you try to direct voters into recognizing the value of the library to your community, remember that there is no such thing as a tax increase that will enjoy universal support. Try not to let the negativity bother you. We admit we did not always succeed in this goal and thank EveryLibrary for supporting us during these times.

When people send questions via email that come from a skeptical place, it is probably not a good idea to ignore them, especially when you can see some care went into their inquiry. Even when people seemed to hate the idea of creating a special tax, we answered as best we could, often pointing to the responses already on our campaign website. Ignoring questions completely will tend to make people angry. If you take care to answer a negative inquiry straightforwardly, the person may not support you, but at least they will not feel disrespected. However, some opponents will never be swayed, no matter how reasoned your argument. What you can do is work around them.

Acquiring Endorsement letters and Testimonials

Do not underestimate the value of securing endorsements and testimonials. Voters do not make their decisions based purely upon the facts, making educated decisions in a vacuum. They also consider what their friends and neighbors are saying and how those individuals feel about the referendum. If you can show that a beloved local organization or a local leader values the library, you can effectively borrow some of their political capital, which for some voters may carry much more weight in the decision-making processes than your message alone.

These community allies will be seen as having a more disinterested view when endorsing the referendum than library and the Yes committee personnel. By coordinating with community allies, you can amplify your message to reach more voters, and give your messages more resonance with the people they reach.

For both endorsements and testimonials, we found that our pro-library people tended to write things like,

‘Libraries are important for literacy’ or ‘Reading is important.’ While true, these sentiments are too abstract to serve as effective messaging for gaining support. For endorsements, you ideally want the leader or organization to explain why they value *this* specific library, what they do or have done to support it, and how the library aligns with their values and/or mission. In our case, the local elementary school principal spoke to how the library fit with their mission to turn students into lifelong learners by giving them a place where the students could explore topics of interest on their own, including local history. A local historical society spoke to the importance of preserving local landmarks like our historic library. Some borough council members spoke to how our library increased local property value, how it served as the heart of our community, and how it helped to bridge the gaps for those of lower socioeconomic status. A scout leader spoke to the years he and his troop had volunteered at the library’s book sale, while a local gardening group explained why they donated their time to tending to the children’s garden. These specific, personal reasons will have far more resonance with the voters than generic positive messages on the value of reading.

Similarly, with testimonials, you want to encourage supporters to talk about their emotional ties to your library. Ideally, testimonials will say something like, “I remember how exciting it was when my parents brought me to this library, how special that time was I shared with them, and I want my grandkids to have the same experience.” Or perhaps, “One of the things that drew me to relocating to this community was this library. I was drawn to it immediately.” Or even, “When my children were young, I contributed to the fundraiser and I still get a thrill of seeing their handprints hanging on the wall of the children’s room.” Testimonials should sound personal and committed. You are already covering the facts and figures – the testimonials are intended to invoke the “feeling” side of the equation.

Some people promised personal stories and endorsements and did not deliver them, so if you want

these valuable items, you should have someone prepared to do a fair amount of follow up. Endorsements were particularly challenging because in order to maximize their impact, we asked for endorsements to be printed on letterhead and signed. For most endorsements and testimonials, we had to request the item two to three times before receiving it, and many took more prompts than that. If our experience is representative, for personal testimonials, you should expect a return rate between 20-45%. We also found that for many of these, it was beneficial to suggest revisions before publishing online. Be specific about what you want them to do. For your local elected officials, you will need to be diligent in securing written endorsements from all that promise to write one. These people are busy, which means their endorsements may be slow to arrive, and you may need to ask them more times than is comfortable. At the same time, you do not want to pester people with frequent, repeated requests so that they change their minds about endorsing you. We strove to make the process as easy as possible for the endorsers. Our strategy was to keep reducing the hurdles that were preventing the endorser from sending us the letter we wanted, and followed up at regular intervals to keep the request alive.

Because of our notable success in securing endorsements, it is worth elaborating on the process we used. We began by identifying the most obvious leaders and groups to approach, then tracked down their contact information (minimally their email and preferably also their phone number). We sent emails requesting their endorsement, providing a suggested draft endorsement and told them they could use, modify, or ignore it. It is important to note that we drafted a unique endorsement for every person we asked. While labor intensive, sending a series of form letters would have had far less impact than what we wanted. In drafting a letter for each person, we considered their profession, age, marital status, whether or not they had children (and what their ages were if so), and anything we knew about them to predict how our library would resonate with them. Did they have young children that would like story time? Were they passionate about community safety, keen on

building community, a proponent for small businesses, or an avid supporter of the arts? Did they have nonprofit experience or fiduciary responsibilities that would suggest they could speak to the fiscal responsibility of the library? We considered what we knew about each person, their skill set, their publicly-displayed values, and drafted a letter that had potential to highlight a unique aspect of our library.

Seeking these testimonials and endorsements does not stop with the initial requests. Despite our thoughtful, customized drafts, it was extremely rare for us to receive an endorsement without additional prodding. We waited a week between requests early in the campaign, and only 2-3 days in between inquiries near the end. We also did our best to remove barriers and to do as much work as we could for them. Some claimed they were ok with the letter, but had not had the time to transfer it to a word document. Others said that they did not have a letterhead. To remove these barriers, we transferred the text into a word document for them, and even created organizational letterhead where none existed. If, after a few days, we still had not received a copy of the signed endorsement, we offered to print the hard copy for them. We even arranged to bring hard copy to them at a meeting where they could sign it. If this sounds like a lot of effort, it was! But the payoff was tremendous: a large gallery of signed leader endorsements. If you adopt this approach, it is helpful to keep in mind that YOU are asking them to expend social capital in support of your cause. Your goal is to stay on their radar, remove any barriers you can, and graciously accept their answer if they decline your request. Expect to have to chase people down for endorsement letters. Plan to make your requests in rounds, starting with your highest value targets and moving down your priority list as you receive endorsements or declinations. Your goal is to be able to release at least one a week until the date of the election. Strive to collect a portfolio of endorsers that is diverse, not only politically, but in other ways as well.

Photographs. Photos are helpful in maximizing your visual impact online, and help voters make a meaningful connection. The quality of the photos does matter, so you may have to chase down these from your endorsers as well. One strategy that worked well for speeding up the process was asking the endorsers if they would like to use an existing photo that we found on-line. We placed all the testimonials in the newsfeed of our website as can be seen here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190520170623/https://www.yeshatborolibrary.org/news>, while the endorsements were placed in a separate place as can be seen here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190520162310/https://www.yeshatborolibrary.org/endorsements>. On Facebook, we posted them as .jpg files in a dedicated album: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=YesHatboroLibrary&set=a.624894577938343>. We believe these items were well worth the effort it took to secure them.

Conclusion

We hope we have indicated both how much work this campaign was, and how worthwhile the victory was in the end. While a funding referendum requires great effort, the resulting dedicated library funding is as secure as any funding can be. The path is available for public libraries to be funded in this way, and a library that is filling its role well in the community will tend to find support at the ballot box.

About the Authors

Michael Celec is the Director of the historic Union Library Company of Hatborough, founded in 1755 and located in Hatboro, Pennsylvania.

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Volume Six: Call for Submissions

Proposal Deadline: March 1, 2022

We seek submissions from both researchers and practitioners, that fall into one of three submission categories:

- Opinions/First Drafts – Editorial in nature; the first draft of an idea or argument.
- White Papers – Longer form discussions that may include research.
- Peer Reviewed – Long form articles that include original research and arguments, and are submitted for review by our Editorial Board and/or external reviewers.

Submission Guidelines

Who Can Write for The Political Librarian?

We want to bring in a variety of perspectives to the journal and do not limit our contributors to just those working in the field of library and information science. We seek submissions from researchers, practitioners, community members, or others dedicated to furthering the discussion, promoting research, and helping to re-envision tax policy and public policy on the extremely local level.

Submission Categories:

- Opinions/First Draft – Editorial in nature; the first draft of an idea or argument (1000-2000 words).
- White Papers – Longer form discussions that may include research (2000-5000 words).
- Peer Reviewed – Long form articles that include original research and arguments, and are submitted for peer-review by our Editorial Board and invited reviewers. (2000-12,000 words).

Article Proposals:

If you want to propose an article for The Political Librarian, please submit the following:

1. Article abstract: a paragraph of no more than 250 words. Be sure to include what category of article that you're writing.
2. Attach resume/CV or a link to an online version.
3. Writing sample: this can be a fully completed article, blog post, essay, etc. Our goal is to see your style and ability not judge where the writing comes from.

Completed Works:

Completed submissions should include:

1. Article abstract: a paragraph of no more than 250 words. Be sure to include what category of article that you're writing.
2. Attach resume/CV or a link to an online version.
3. Full text of the submission.

Submission Format

Accepted submission formats are Word documents (doc, docx), rich text or text files (rtf, txt). Please do not send PDFs of article submissions. This hinders the editorial process, and you will have to resubmit.

Style Guide

The Political Librarian is dedicated to publishing professional and well-composed articles. Guidelines for The Political Librarian:

- **Be professional:** While we encourage our writers to reflect their own writing style and voice in their pieces, we also require that articles are professional in nature and tone. We are creating a new kind of journal and bringing new kinds of discussions to the forefront, and we want our articles to reflect well on that mission.
- **Be Inclusive:** The world is a dynamic and varied place and we at the Political Librarian believe in creating and inclusive environment for writers and readers. Your language should reflect this dedication to inclusivity.
- **Be Critical:** The Political Librarian wishes to foster debates and critical discussions. That said we want to foster well-reasoned and supported arguments. Your piece should stand up to critical examination by our editors and readers.
- **Be Clear:** Be sure your topic is relevant and well thought out. Use examples and/or evidence to support your claim along. Use clear and concise language that is professional but not so full of jargon that it is not accessible.
- **Cite Your Sources:** If you are citing the work of others you must cite them. All articles should include a works cited list formatted using guidelines. In-text citations need not follow APA to the letter, but they should be consistent throughout the piece, hyperlinks are encouraged. If you are using a direction quotation you must list the author's name in addition to any other relevant links or source titles that are appropriate to the piece.

Formatting/Punctuation/Grammar

- Double-spaced lines.
- 12pt standard font (Times, Times New Roman, Calibri, etc).
- Single space between sentences.
- Use the Oxford comma.
- Spell out acronyms the first time they are used.
- Submission formats: doc, docx, rtf, txt. Please do not send PDFs of article proposals/submissions.
- Use proper punctuation and grammar.
- Pay attention to subject/verb agreement and tense.

Those interested in submitting an article should contact the editor:

Christopher Stewart - stewart@everylibraryinstitute.org