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The Political Librarian: Foundations

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Three years ago, John Chrastka, Erica Findley, and Patrick "PC" Sweeney founded EveryLibrary. It was and remains the first and only national organization dedicated to "helping public, school, and college libraries win bonding, tax, and advisory referendum, ensuring stable funding and access to libraries for generations to come." Since then Peter Bromberg, Mel Gooch, and Brian D. Hart have joined the board. Over the past three years, the board of directors along with a team of expert advisors have:

- Participated in more than two dozen campaigns;
- Helped secure more than $55 million in stable tax revenue;
- Began publishing the Library Politics Rodeo, a weekly summary of political campaigns and initiatives throughout the country;
- Founded an "Artist-In-Residence" program designed to change the way librarians talk about themselves and their work;
- Presented at dozens of library conferences, state library agencies, and conducted "vote yes" advocacy trainings;
- And helped foster direct voter advocacy including: "Outside the Lines," "sxswLAM," and participated in "National Voter Registration Day."

EveryLibrary has had an enormous impact on each of the library systems with which it has worked, each person they have taught about information-only campaigning, and on the perception of libraries and, perhaps more importantly, of librarians to the broader community.

Steering the Conversation

The idea of creating a publication that is rooted in the mission of EveryLibrary and that expands the discussion of, promotes research on, and helps re-envision the concept of locally focused advocacy, policy, and funding issues for libraries was discussed in the earliest days of EveryLibrary. Because associations and other professional organizations are mainly focused on federal and state-level issues, conversations about library funding have often been in response to issues at those levels of government and decision-making. While discussions of state and national-level concerns are an essential part of the discourse, it remains that a majority of funds for libraries come from local sources, leaving a significant gap in the conversation.

The Political Librarian seeks to be an accessible resource for library professionals, library users, and those outside the field. Despite the fact that 91% of Americans say that libraries are important to their communities and that 76% believe that they are important to their own families (Zickuhr, 2014), very few understand that their libraries are funded locally. Nor are many familiar with the shear number of services that libraries offer (Zickuhr, Raine, Purcell, & Duggan, 2013); services that go well beyond the lending of books.

Libraries and librarians are notorious for not being proactive in demonstrating their roles and value. Many outside libraries are unaware of the so-called non-traditional services libraries provide for their communities including: the hiring of social workers to help libraries serve their neediest of patrons effectively (Bowman, 2015; Jenkins, 2014; Shafer, 2014); or operating summer lunch programs for children who receive free or reduced lunches during the school year (Chamberlain, 2015); or providing software training for budding graphic designers and access to recording studios (Rowan, 2015). It is time that libraries leverage the public services they provide to demonstrate their value and worth to help ensure stable sources of funding.

With this in mind we set out to create a dedicated space where practitioners, researchers, and users could publish on frontline advocacy experiences, campaign strategy and research, and/or about tax and public policies impacting libraries on the local level. Through this journal we will foster a resource that:

- Furthers the discussion of tax policy and public policy in the local context;
- Offers practitioners and users examples of how current policy models impact library service delivery and community outcomes;
- Explores new models that address library funding initiatives; and
- Provides resources and tactics that libraries can use to educate stakeholders on the value of libraries and librarians in their local community.

In this first issue we are starting small, with two different approaches to library funding. Bill Kennedy, Development Director at the James River Valley Library System offers us a practitioner's example of how a lack of understanding from the community has impacted their library funding initiatives. A.J. Million, PhD Candidate at the University of Missouri, provides us with his own argument on the need to diversify the funding sources for public libraries. In future issues we will continue these discussions and work to steer the conversation about library advocacy towards the challenges and opportunities at the very local level.

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