

2006 NJLA Conference: Advocacy, Alliances, Action

Building Alliances: 25 Ideas in 50 Minutes

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It's so good to have partners to help you reach your goals. As the Amish say, "Many hands make light work." Sometimes it's a bonus to have business partners; sometimes it's essential. Either way, you need to know how and why to form alliances with other people and organizations. And it's best to make new friends *before* you really need them. Why not start today? Here are 25 ideas to get you going:

1. Join the Chamber of Commerce or Speaker's Bureau to meet community leaders and business owners.
2. Join community service groups such as the Lions Club, Jaycees, etc. to meet people and to join or to benefit from community projects.
3. Partner with grocery stores to hold story times there, to put a book drop or a branch there, or to get discounts on food & beverages.
<http://www.wrl.org/feedmeastory>
4. Have events in a nearby shopping mall to attract people who may not come to your location. <http://www.infotoday.com/mls/nov05/gruber.shtml>
5. Identify groups with similar values or missions, such as historical societies, genealogical groups, schools, theaters, etc.
6. Identify groups that could use your help, such as secretaries of college deans, city/county commissioners, sports coaches, etc.
7. Work out trade deals with small businesses. Build an alliance with a florist who will give you floral displays for your events in exchange for your free publicity. (Put out small signs that say "Flowers courtesy of Betty's Bouquets," thank the shop in your event program, have a pile of business cards sitting out.) Or let a music store owner give a presentation (that may bring business to his store) in exchange for some CDs to expand your borrowing collection.
8. Seek out IT experts that might trade their services for yours. The owner of computer-repair service might do discount work for you in exchange for your library having him as a speaker or posting an ad for his services.
9. Contact college professors to see if they would create student projects that are actual work for you. Marketing classes can create marketing plans and promo

materials for you; design classes can create logos for you to choose from. (The student group whose project you chose to use could get extra credit.) Don't forget about library schools!!

10. Join with scout troops to offer them service projects that benefit the library. They could build wooden benches or creative book shelves, plant gardens, or read to younger kids.

11. Form an alliance with videogame stores, skateboard shops, or arcades. See if the management will help you promote teen reading by giving coupons or game tokens to kids who read X number of books from your library.

12. Work with videogame store owners or school gaming clubs to have a game night in the library. Wake Forest University did it with very little money. <http://www.infotoday.com/cil2006/presentations/>, Wed. 3/22, Session D105 — Creative Visibility: Toolbars and Game Nights

13. To ensure that you build a few new alliances every year, make it part of your strategic plan.

14. Hook up with your state library, local consortium, or other library associations to take advantage of group discounts, training, and templates for press releases or advertising. Get all you can from them, but, to be a good partner, give something back too. Share things you've done or templates you've made with colleagues that can distribute them for you.

15. Contact organizations like the AARP to get access to their members and to deliver services through a group they already know and trust.

16. Work with senior citizen centers to give them meaningful projects that also help the library. Seniors who are qualified can volunteer to read to kids or can help with inventory or shelfreading. Or you could exchange programs with them: Seniors could create programs where they talk about their experiences in exchange for you speaking at their site about healthcare or computers. Seniors can also be valuable volunteering to write time-consuming grant applications.

17. Get involved in local politics so the politicians and their staff members can get to know a real-life, modern-day librarian. Create opportunities to interact with them and to discuss your daily working situation. Offer to work on their campaigns. All of this keeps the idea of "libraries" in their heads. <http://www.infotoday.com/mls/may04/still.shtml>

18. Offer your research services to lower-level government officials. Keep abreast of the work or topics that are coming up and proactively offer your help. "I see you'll be planning for a new road soon; we can find studies and statistics from around the region that might help you."

19. Make allies of the whole community. Invite every single person to become a book sponsor! You make a list of hundreds of books you'd like to have and their prices. A school library does it: <http://www.infotoday.com/mls/mar04/howto.shtml>

20. Help reporters fill the voids when they need news. Meet with them and make them aware that you usually have a program or event every week that they could use for a feel-good story and / or a photo op. Also offer to do some just-in-time research for them as they're finishing stories at deadline time.

21. Form a Teen Advisory Board if you want to get any attention and respect from this group. Don't try to guess what they do and don't want from a library—ask them directly and let them have a say in and take responsibility for their own events. They'll do their own word-of-mouth promotion from there. (Don't forget to also ask them what you *shouldn't* do to attract and keep teens around.)

22. While you're at it, form other advisory boards of people from target audiences that you want to build awareness with. They will probably be glad you asked, and they should be individually honored to serve on your decision-making team.

If you do a lot of story times and crafts for kids, have a Mom's groups to offer ideas about new activities or crafts. (Maybe each one will take a turn helping the children's librarian with an program.)

If you want to reach Latinos, create a Latino Advisory Board and let them tell you what services they'd like and what forms of publicity their community pays attention to so you can advertise the services when you're ready.

If you don't want to form full groups, find reps from each group and invite them to be on one People's Advisory Board, or at least in your Friends group.

23. Partner with parents to help them understand what librarians can do for their kids. Have evening or weekend sessions that parents can attend to hear what you offer for their children. (Have a kids' story time or other session simultaneously so the adults can listen to you without interruption.) Ask how they'd like to help or what programs they can suggest. Treat them as partners in the processes of learning, reading, and researching to win their support.

24. Build alliances now with K–12 teachers to help with your summer reading programs. What topics are teachers covering at the end of this school year or the beginning of the next? How could your summer program segue with those? How can you help each other to further students' learning?

25. Form relationships with consultants! Look for local consultants, especially small proprietorships, that specialize in things you could use help with—finances, marketing, advertising, image/branding, space planning, etc. Chances are these people need access to information and help with research when working for other clients. Sounds like a fair trade waiting to happen. And you never know—it could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship!

But how do I approach people and get them to listen?

>> Don't act as if you're about to ask for big money or a big favor. Remember, you're offering something just as valuable in return.

>> It's easier to start with someone you already know and are comfortable with. So either start with a familiar person/business, or join an organization and take time getting to know people before you approach them with alliance ideas.

>> Role play with colleagues to practice asking for things until it feels more natural.

>> Have a friendly sounding line in mind to start with. For instance: "I'd like to propose a mutually beneficial idea." or "I'm going to make you an offer you can't refuse!" (Humor is allowed!)

>> You might want to propose something that spoofs other official sponsorships that we see around us every day. It might be fun to have your programs or signs say "Joe's Hoagies — the official lunch of the Trenton Bookcart Drill Team" or "Angela's is the official gardener of the Willingboro Public Library."

>> Don't be afraid to casually talk to people anywhere and everywhere. Just mentioning that you work at a library, or that you are an information specialist or a researcher, gets others thinking about the topic. They might even be curious and ask some questions, giving you more of a chance to portray your work in a positive light.

>> Use documented library facts to convince potential partners of your value and expertise. ALA has plenty of these available.

>> Study the new report on how people feel about libraries to help guide you toward productive change. The OCLC report *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources* asked thousands of people across six countries questions about their library awareness and familiarity, and their usage of electronic resources. You can download a free copy or order a bound copy from <http://www.oclc.org/reports/2005perceptions.htm>.

How do I get started?

Start at the end and build backwards. What outcome do you want to end up with? Then ask yourself what organization can help you reach that goal. Who do you need to have on your side? Then build a relationship with that organization and work toward your ultimate partnership.

As with so many endeavors, if you begin with the end in mind, you increase your chances of success.

Thanks so much for your interest and attention!

~Kathy