
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND “OP-ED” PIECES

Library services are often the solution to problems being reported in the community and campus newspapers. We should not hesitate to use the local newspaper as an avenue to promote the value of libraries. The great thing about the newspaper is its wide readership. While a library newsletter will, primarily, be speaking to the converted, the newspaper reaches a broad audience, many of whom may never have considered the relevance of the library to the issues of the day.

The easiest way to get into print is to write a letter to the editor showing how the library is contributing to the goals and objectives of the community. Positive letters about the library can come from library administration, but they can also come from a trustee or Friend whom you've encouraged to write. In a targeted campaign for a specific issue, letters to the editor can be one component of an aggressive campaign, and in that case, the letters should always come from library supporters rather than from staff.

If you've done a good job in networking and cultivating outsiders

to the library's cause, you may well be able to influence one of the paper's own columnists to write an article on the library's behalf. If you don't have connection with the paper and its editorial board, talk to other community leaders whom you've cultivated along the way and see if you can find a connection there. If a particular issue is surfacing in the paper, you may be able simply to call the editorial staff and "pitch" your story to them. Be sure to have a compelling story with all the facts when you call. Although it is often harder to get a staff endorsement of your library that includes the message you want to send, it is usually more effective than a letter to the editor.

National library events such as National Library Week, Teen Read Week, and Banned Books Week are often used successfully by libraries to get local press coverage. Again, it is important when you pitch the idea of coverage to your local newspapers that you make the point, repeatedly, about why it matters. Why do libraries engage in national events? Why is it important to reach out to teens? Why are libraries focusing on banned books? Remember, it often doesn't go without saying so be sure to say it—often—and your chances are excellent that you will see it repeated in print as the columnist or editor's own view.

Figures 3.11, 3.12, and 3.13 are sample letters to the editor and an Op-Ed piece that use persuasion, passion, and facts to make the case and to urge action.

Continue to next page for sample letter.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

[Operating Budget, Public Library]

Dear Editor:

As the chair of the Anytown Public Library I am writing to remind the citizens of this community that the city budget will be developed over the course of the next three months. Now is the time for all citizens who care about their public library to call or write the city administrator and voice support for a 10% increase in the library's operating budget.

10% may seem large but added on a small and inadequate budget up it would translate into only \$500,000 extra for the library and would bring our per capita spending on libraries up with the national average. Keeping with the rest of the world is not our goal, however. Providing life-long learning opportunities for every member of this community no matter their background, age, or means is.

Over the last decade the library has been routinely underfunded, especially when compared to the city's overall budget. For example, in the last five years, the city's budget has increased approximately 5% per year. The library, by comparison, has sustained cuts and level funding, and increases for its budget equal only 2% per year. Every year the library falls behind in its ability to bring the citizens of this community access to the latest information technology, an abundance of books for young children just beginning their relationship with books, and hours of operation that meet the needs of a working family.

Here's what an extra \$500,000 will mean for all who use the library:

- Sunday hours all year long
- Expanded youth collections at all library locations
- Expanded video collection at the central library
- Internet access for the public at all library locations

Please call your council member and the city administrator at 555-1234. Let them know how important the public library is to you and your family. Let them know that you support a 10% increase for the library's operating budget. We owe it to ourselves; we owe it to our children.

Sincerely yours,

William C. Trustee

Figure 3.11—Sample letter to the editor (operating budget, public library).

In a short letter, funding history is shared along with a clear explanation of what additional funding will bring—what's in it for the community.

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