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## NEWSLETTERS

The power of the press. That's what you have at your disposal if your library publishes a newsletter. Certainly a newsletter is an important and effective way to let your patrons and supporters know what's happening at the library. If you are not also using this tool to let them know why what you're providing *matters* then you are losing half the value of the publication. It's great if your library is offering preschool story times, but why stop at letting folks know when they are taking place? Why not include a front-page story on literacy and how the best and cheapest way to ensure that all adults can read is to catch them early—to introduce children to a books and learning environ-

ment early on so that they don't become adults who can't read. What are the statistics on illiteracy in your community? How do library story times generate models for parents and make reading a fundamental activity in the family?

Whether or not your newsletter readers have children, they do care about literacy rates. For example, does your audience know that nearly 80 percent of America's prisoners are functionally illiterate? Do they know that according to the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives it costs an average of over \$20,000 per year to house a single prisoner? Literacy matters to everyone and libraries are incredible bargains—especially when you consider the alternatives. Make what you are doing meaningful to your entire audience (the parents who want to know when to bring their kids in for story time constitute the choir). Here is an opportunity to show why what you are doing makes a difference to the larger organization. Powerful.

Think about this tactic every time you publish your newsletter. Commit to ensuring that each issue has a brief article on why the events and information within the newsletter matters. If your academic library publishes a newsletter to announce important new acquisitions, be sure to include a paragraph or two on why those acquisitions matter. How is your collection helping the institution achieve its goals? How is collection development important to the academic success of students? How do your services support continuing research by faculty?

It's not enough just to report what your library has and what you are doing. It's not enough to let your readers know about new programs and materials. Every issue and every article should also be reporting on why it matters. Often, a leading sentence will do the trick. "In response to increasing evidence that teens need productive and exciting ways to spend their time after school, the Anytown Public Library announces Teens Online, an after-school Internet program especially for kids aged 13–16." Now you've not only said "what" but why it matters.

Figures 3.1–3.10 are examples of newsletter articles that make the case as well as provide information about programs and services. In these figures and throughout the rest of the book, I have underscored key passages that present a strong message.

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