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## EXHIBITS AND DISPLAYS

Like programs and special events, library exhibits and displays are both an information service and a public relations activity. They can help to increase your library's visibility and promote its services and collections. In addition, by allowing schools and other community groups to exhibit in your library, you can increase library use and bring in new audiences. Most parents will want to visit the library to see their child's artwork displayed there, even if they don't normally use the library. While they are there, they may see the available resources and services and change their perception of your library. In some cases, they may even become library users.

Before you begin to plan an exhibits program for your library, decide whether or not you have the space available. You need room for both the exhibit and for participants to view it. The exhibits that you book for your library may come with display boards or you may have to look into building or purchasing some for your own use.

You must decide the goal of your exhibits program. Where does it fit in terms of your overall public relations/communications plan? What goals and objectives does it help you fulfill? Again, like all other communications tools, an exhibits program needs to have a purpose and a plan.

If you decide that an exhibits program will help you achieve your public relations/communications goals, the next step is to develop an exhibits policy. The principles in the American Library Association's *Exhibit Spaces and Bulletin Boards: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights* will help you develop this policy. The policy should include your procedure and criteria for accepting exhibits, the length of time that exhibits will be on display, and the security and insurance that your library will or will not provide for exhibits.

Finally, you need to develop an application for exhibit space. The application will help you select exhibits for display and can also be used when you are promoting the fact that your library has exhibit space available. A sample application for exhibit space appears in Figure 11.7.

### EVALUATING YOUR EXHIBITS PROGRAM

You will want to evaluate the success of your exhibits program on an annual basis. One way to get continual qualitative feedback on your exhibits is to provide a guest book for visitors to

sign and write comments in. This information will help you to plan future exhibits and to decide which exhibits were particularly successful and should be booked again. In addition, you may wish to send your exhibitors an evaluation form after hosting their exhibit. This is an opportunity to receive feedback from their perspective and again will help with future planning.

Another way to evaluate the success of an exhibit is to compare your library's gate count during the exhibit to the gate count for the same dates in the previous year. If there is a significant increase, this increase might be linked to the popularity of your exhibit.

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