Library Management Division
Meeting Thursday, February 21, 2013, 10am-1pm
Maryland State Archives

Present: Janet Vogel (secretary), Marie Slaby, Elizabeth Cromwell, Patty Sundberg (President), Morgan Miller (Vice President), Robin Goetz, Mark Hatfield, James Kelly, Lisa Colaianne, Frazier Walker, Alexa Leinaweaver, Vicki Lee, James Durham, Melody Kraus, Debra Mattingly, Gergana Kostova, Julie Strange, Maria Day, Dan Ramirez, Jenn Cruickshank

The meeting began with a presentation by Elizabeth Cromwell, Frederick County Public Libraries, titled: Media Relations Workshop: Presenting a Strong Message through the Media.

Elizabeth began her presentation by asking the group to introduce themselves and gauge their experience with the media.

The meeting concluded with a tour of the Maryland State Archives by LMD member and archives Reference Librarian, Dan Ramirez.

Next meeting: Be on the lookout for an announcement for our April meeting about mediation and conflict resolution. (This will be a ½ day workshop. Visit our Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/LMDmla, or stay tuned to MaryLib for the latest.)

The following is a recap of Elizabeth’s presentation:

**Presentation Objectives:**
- Importance of delivering a consistent message
- Strategies
- Key message development
- Bridging

**Goal:** leave presentation feeling more confident about talking with the media

Used example of recent Carnival Cruise Line problems as a poor example of media relations: Their actions – use a lower level person to speak with the media and protect the CEO, CEO also owns Miami Heat and had been tweeting about the games during the crisis

Strong example of Media Relations:
St. Mary’s College of Maryland after Hurricane Irene
Dorms became mold damaged
Very transparent about the problem and solutions oriented: we have this situation with a freshman dorm at the beginning of their freshman year. At first, they were sent to hotels 20 miles from campus, but concerns about distance added to issues. Mold problem ended up being worse than expected. President said that no one was to blame at this point and addressed the entire community (not just college) and asked for help. Apologetic – we
need to come together as a community and figure out what to do. Community brainstormed together. An alum called and had found out about a cruise ship that had been for sale in Nova Scotia, and it would be passing by MD on its way to NC. The college managed to get the ship docked and used for dorms. President worked directly with parents to address issues. Because of the way that everyone talked about it, they weren’t known as the school with mold, they are known as the school with the cruise ship.

Communications from the college: detailed, apologetic, solutions oriented & transparent

**When the press calls:**
Prepare, Prepare, Prepare!

- Do your homework –
  - pay attention to current events as they might affect your organization – they might be indirectly related
  - get to know the reporters or people who do reporting for the media. Reach out to a reporter if you like something that they have written (they want to know that people are hearing what they put out), even if it has nothing to do with their organization. This will establish a relationship.
  - Determine what a reporter’s “beat” is – you wouldn’t send a government affairs reporter the same idea you would send an entertainment reporter
- Anticipate key questions –
  - Toughest questions you can anticipate are much easier to answer if you have thought about them (and most of the time it doesn’t even come up!)
- Prepare key answers
- Identify three key messages
  - What are the key points you want to share? (they can be broad or specific to a certain topic)
  - You and your leaders should have 3-5 key messages always rolling in the back of your mind, whether you are talking to the media or even just the public or other librarians
  - Some may last for years, some may only last 3 months (duration of a project)

You can ask them if you can take their information and call them back. Be sure to ask them when their deadline is.

**Key message exercise:**
- Compelling, relevant, short messages that reflect positively on your organization
- Messages may be short or long-term (should be regularly reviewed)

Think about key audiences – Examples: elected officials, taxpayers (who may or may not use the library – there are plenty of taxpayers who may not use the library but support us), unemployed

**Bridging:**
Very important part of media relations
Question is on one side, and Key message on the other side – how do you bridge the gap? Use bridging
Goal is not to be deceptive, but to frame your answers in a way that it leads to a direction you want to highlight.
As librarians, we tend to want to answer all of the questions and be thorough, but we do not need to over-share information that the person has not asked for.

Managing the Media:
- Know your objective and messages
- Know your audience and medium – (if it’s for a blog, you might give a different response than for a Sunday magazine)
- List your key points and try to figure out how to bridge – you can write them down or keep them on a piece of paper by the phone
- Take control – spread your three key messages! Bridge!
- Make sure you understand the question – don’t try to figure it out, instead, ask them to reword
- Never lose control/lose your cool (they may be trying to get you to say something you don’t want to say)
- Never repeat a negative question or phrase in your answer – then it will sound like you brought it up (they aren’t going to hear the reporter, they are only going to hear you)
- Don’t use jargon
- “Off the record” doesn’t exist – you can speak “on background” which provides them with background information without attributing it to you
- “I don’t know” is an acceptable answer – it’s not your job to know everything, but offer to get the information for them (ask for deadline). But if you cannot provide the answer (i.e. personnel issue, etc), you can tell them that, but let them know politely with a bit of information why
- “Off the cuff” remarks are dangerous
- NEVER say “No comment” – Instead: “I would love to give you information at the appropriate time, but I unfortunately cannot give that to you now.”
- Accept responsibility – don’t pass the buck
- Never attach competitors or any other organization
- Be yourself!

During an interview:
- Tell your story (as if you were talking to your favorite niece or nephew) – don’t use jargon, etc and be yourself or you won’t be a compelling spokesperson
- Conclusion first! – followed by compelling evidence or arguments – same goes for a press release
- Jazz it up – use quotable quotes and personal anecdotes, even video or photo
- Clarify your speaking position – there are times that you may be speaking as an individual instead of as a representative of the library
- Challenge the reporter – challenge any effort to put words in your mouth; clarify when they try to walk you down a path that isn’t what you mean to say at that
moment (best not to call back 20 minutes later – take care of it now). If you think they misinterpreted your answer, “I’m not sure that was clear, let me try that again and give you another take on that issue.”

• Beware the laundry list – 8 questions all rolled up into one sentence. Make sure you pull out each piece of the question and answer them separately.
• Don’t be evasive
• Don’t know the answer? – not a problem. Resist any attempt to make up an answer!

**Your rights as an interview subject:**

• Time and location (ask for their deadline and be sure to call them back before then)
• Time available – can state this up front – be sure to stick with it (although if it’s going really well, you should feel free to keep going!)
• Topics – ask in advance for information about the topic, although they may or may not give it to you in advance. “I’m happy to set up an interview, do you want to give me some ideas about what to prepare for so I don’t waste your time?”
• Pace
• Challenging a reporter – you can and should question questionable facts and assumptions (but don’t lose your cool – keep control of the conversation)
• Personalize your response – quotes from others, personalize the story

Don’t be afraid to repeat the same message to multiple sources – be consistent
Take a look at broad trends nationally and then show how your organization hooks into that trend – then let them know how you connect to this national trend
Establish a connection with a reporter who covers things that are interesting to you and who covers things that somehow relate – this can open up a door – you might end up in that reporter’s rolodex as a contact
When you write a press release – you want it to look like they wrote it (so don’t say “we can’t wait to see you” etc - write it the way they would write it)

For any questions:
Elizabeth Cromwell, ecromwell@frederickcountymd.gov, 301-600-1629