

Superiorland Library Cooperative Advocacy Plan

Introduction:

Superiorland Library Cooperative is organized under P.A. 89 of 1977 and is one of eleven cooperatives in Michigan. The Cooperative serves 38 public libraries in 19 counties in the Upper Peninsula and the northern Lower Peninsula. The Cooperative manages a shared automation system for 84 multitype libraries and facilitates participation by MelCat members. Other cooperative services include continuing education for trustees and staff, services to the blind and people with disabilities, technical training and computer network support, and cost-effective group discounts for purchase of software licenses, library materials and computer hardware. The Cooperative professional staff provides consulting services for members in the areas of technology, library law and administration.

The Cooperative is an advocate for member libraries at the state and federal level and informs its members about important issues related to libraries and library services. This Advocacy Plan was adopted by the Superiorland Library Cooperative Board of Directors on March 3, 2009,

Purpose:

The purpose of advocacy at the cooperative level is to help government leaders at the local, state, and federal levels understand the pivotal role that Superiorland member libraries play in building healthy and vital communities. An important goal of the Advocacy Plan is to give library trustees and staff information and skills to communicate effectively with legislators and government officials.

Why is advocacy important?

Library advocacy is vital for a variety of reasons:

- ❖ The library is the heart of the community. It is the place where people go in the community to be entertained, informed, and connected to world-wide information resources.
- ❖ Information and life-long learning are increasingly necessary in today's information age.
- ❖ Libraries must invest more and more in technology in order to keep pace with community demand and need.
- ❖ At the same time that demand and costs increase for all libraries, government appropriations and millage income varies from district to district and from year to year for many libraries.
- ❖ Libraries are forced to compete with other departments of local government to meet increased community demands with limited funding.
- ❖ Without strong grassroots advocates, libraries are lost in the shuffle of democracy's many voices and special interest groups.

Who should participate?

Library staff, trustees, and Friends should participate.

Library staff: Staff plays a pivotal role on the 'front line' communicating to legislators, government officials, the media, and the community. Library staff should develop the message that trustees and Friends communicate. Staff also keeps trustees and Friends informed about legislation and the need for grassroots action.

Trustees/Friends: As unpaid volunteers in public service, trustees are in a unique position to speak up as representatives of the public. By their willingness to serve, they demonstrate their strong belief in the library's value in the community as an institution dedicated to intellectual freedom and as a source of information and life-long learning. Trustees/Friends are the library's most influential advocates, with legislators, government officials, and the general public.

Cooperative staff: The Cooperative is a gateway for information about legislation and about libraries to flow between legislators and library staff, trustees, and Friends. As an institutional member of the Michigan Library Association, the Cooperative receives a legislative update and forwards this information to members. The Cooperative facilitates opportunities for library staff, trustees, and Friends to meet and talk with legislators.

How do we advocate?

Advocacy techniques and basic effective communication:

- ❖ Be prepared with facts, figures and concise issue statements.
- ❖ Know what you want to communicate.
- ❖ Be clear, specific and brief.
- ❖ Be informative. Give reasons why a measure should be supported.
- ❖ Be courteous. Ask, do not demand or threaten. Be positive.
- ❖ Be appreciative. Acknowledge past support.

Specific advocacy tools:

- ❖ **Website:** The Cooperative will maintain an up-to-date list of legislators by district on its website, including names of aides when available. The website will have "talking points" about the value of the library and about specific timely issues. A FAQ section will give library data and statistics that can be used by trustees and Friends when talking to legislators or to the general public.
 - Statistical data will show trends, including income from penal fines and millages, # of library visitors, etc.
 - The State summary of statistics and ALS Tip Sheet will be customized for northern Michigan libraries.
 - Facts will demonstrate library needs and library strengths; i.e., Ironwood is the oldest Carnegie library in the state. Ironwood is one of only --- libraries in northern Michigan that is not barrier-free.

- Talking Points will include short one or two line statements that can be used by Trustees/Friends when they promote the library to their personal network in the community or attend town / government meetings or meet legislators.
- ❖ **Training:** Superiorland will sponsor one training session each year on advocacy. Effort will be made to provide online training if distance and work schedules make it difficult to attend face-to-face.
 - An “Advocacy 101” manual will include “9 things” each library director and board can do to improve advocacy. Examples:
 - Introduce yourself and your board
 - Describe your service area
 - Go to town meetings held by legislators
 - Email newsletters and annual reports to legislators at the state and federal letter
- ❖ **Legislative Activities:** The Cooperative will help libraries that host legislative breakfasts, open houses and other events that bring legislators and librarians together in each district. Assistance will involve planning events and developing the message with supporting statistics.
- ❖ **Legislative Special Events:** The Cooperative will encourage libraries to invite legislators and government officials to events such as dedications, special summer reading programs, author or guest appearances, etc.
- ❖ **Legislative Day.** The Cooperative will subsidize travel for one library director or trustee to ALA Legislative Day each year. Cooperative staff will support and attend MLA Legislative Day each year. The Cooperative will collect and deliver a packet of information about libraries in each district.
- ❖ **MLA Annual Conference:** When MLA's conference is held in Lansing, the Cooperative will plan a breakfast or other reception that brings together legislators and members. A brief program will update legislators on district activities.
- ❖ **Getting the word out.** Each library in the Cooperative will give the Superiorland office the name and contact information to create an advocacy network. Information about pending legislation or other issues can be distributed to this network for grassroots action.
- ❖ **Promotion materials:** The Cooperative may provide members with tool kits, including sample press releases and information sheets about library services and statistics.
- ❖ **Media Contacts:** Compile a list of media contacts for TV, radio, newspapers, cable channels and link this list to website.