



Bulletin

L I B R A R Y A N D F U N D R A I S I N G C O N S U L T A N T S

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Success!

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Case Study: A Community That Could

Prior to May 2004, the Coloma Public Library was located in 6,800 square feet of a downtown storefront and housed a collection of more than 82,000 items. Books were stacked in corners, the director's office doubled as the genealogy area and near-by fast-moving trains literally shook the building several times a day.

Today the Coloma library is one of the first things visitors see as they enter Coloma from the west. And what a first impression it makes! The interior of the library is just as striking and features 18,000 square feet of beautiful, attractive and serviceable space.

How did this project succeed in a small community where capital campaigns were unknown and resources seemed limited? Our case study of the Coloma library tells the story and offers a treatise in what it takes for a library capital project to succeed. To obtain a copy of the case study (at no cost), call 616-975-9907 or email rhondam@bretongroup.com.

Library Capital Projects

Is This a Good Time?

A 2002 survey of Michigan library directors revealed that nearly 70% of their facilities were inadequate to serve their communities. Reasons cited for not pursuing additional space were lack of funding, lack of a plan, not knowing where to start and lack of community support.

Despite the fact that Michigan has not enjoyed economic vitality in recent years, some libraries, both before and after the survey, have succeeded in renovation, expansion and construction projects. Sandusky, Coloma, Chelsea, Fremont, Howell, Richland, Clare, Alma, Hillsdale, Greenville and Spring Lake have supported library projects in the last several years. Why were these projects successful when others have failed?

The following key factors can help predict a project's potential for success:

- Overall positive tone in the community
- A plan that:
 - Clearly addresses current and future needs
 - Is financially feasible
- Clear connection between needs and the plan
- Strong support – financial and volunteer
- Constituents believe in the project and its potential for success
- Minimal "other" issues, e.g., competing capital campaigns, negative publicity about the library, etc.

These key factors paint a picture of a community that is ready for a library project. The preparation process focuses on:

- Building community awareness of the library's important role in education, culture, recreation and lifelong learning
- Educating the community about library needs, i.e., how lack of space negatively impacts the collection, programming and services
- Involving the community in the planning process so that the eventual plan is owned by everyone, not just board and staff
- Inviting investment not just in the library project, but in the future of the community

Good economic times come and go, but libraries remain community treasures because of the resources they make available to everyone every day. With adequate preparation and community involvement, library projects can and will succeed in both the best and worst of times.

The Annual Report: Validating the Library's Value

Success Story

Pere Marquette District Library

Does your library publish an annual report? If not, you may be missing an opportunity to educate your community about why the library is important. Further, the annual report is an opportunity to thank donors and to encourage continued giving.

In addition to revenue and expense detail, you may want to include information about the number of visits to the library (or a daily average), number of programs and attendance, number/description of resources, a list of community groups that used the meeting room, etc.

Through the annual report you can showcase your good stewardship of community resources and also show how the library serves everyone and enhances the community as a whole.

Generally, annual reports are published in the quarter following the end of the fiscal year. Though corporate annual reports often are multi-page, glossy productions, your annual report should reflect your library and your community. A clear and concise presentation of pertinent information in a professional looking, easy-to-read format offers an attractive and informative means of "making the case" for the library. Distribute the annual report via mail to everyone in your service area, make it available at the checkout desk and, by all means, release it to the local media.

Adding an annual report to your arsenal of communication strategies can help build understanding and appreciation of the library, as well as generate confidence in how well tax dollars and private donations are being used for the good of the community.

Even the best efforts to convince a community of the critical need for new or expanded library space sometimes fall victim to the old military credo, "hurry up and wait."

In Clare, Michigan, library leaders had already completed a needs assessment study that documented the urgency for a new 10,000-square-foot building and a feasibility study that verified community support for the library board's plan.

And then the wait began.

"It was frustrating," says Library Director Sheila Bissonnette. "We had the property identified, but we couldn't complete the negotiations and we weren't sure where the money would come from. We were just stuck."

Until retired banker Bob Beacom walked into the library.

A long-time community activist, Beacom had not been a part of the citizen committees involved in the needs assessment and feasibility studies, but he had read the reports and, after careful consideration and some conversation with a couple of longtime friends, he had an idea.

"I found out that the DDA was in the process of buying land from a local firm that was moving to our industrial park," recalls Beacom. "When I learned that the land would probably be sold to developers, I asked if the DDA would consider giving the land to the library." The DDA was willing and did give the land to the library.

Beacom didn't stop there. Aligning with old friends A.J. Doherty and Rich Smith, the trio agreed to use their contacts and expertise to secure funding for the effort. Quickly dubbed "The Three Wise Men," – in part, because of the campaign's proximity to the Christmas holiday, but also because of the wisdom and vision they lent the campaign – Beacom, Smith and Doherty began with their own contributions of some \$220,000 and then began calling on friends, associates and others they knew they could inspire.

When they were done, not only had the campaign surpassed its \$1 million fundraising goal by 25%, Beacom, Smith and Doherty's efforts accounted for more than half of the total.

According to Bissonnette, the key factor in her library's success was involving as many in the community as possible with the results of the needs assessment and feasibility studies. By putting copies in front of Beacom, she found a constituent who not only came to believe in the project, but advocated the plan with everyone he knew that could help contribute.

"There was a lot of luck in the whole effort," she says, "but a lot of it was just knowing that, if you keep working hard to get the message out, good things will happen."

The three wise men and the entire Clare community will celebrate the "birth" of the new library at groundbreaking this spring.

How Do You Thank Your Donors?

Thanks to Ann Perrigo at the Allegan Public Library and Melissa Davis at the St. Clair County Library System for sharing their ideas on thanking donors!

From Ann:

"It's pretty basic, but I do not take a check to the bank until I have my thank-you note ready to mail! It keeps me honest, and prevents that ugly guilt build-up..."

From Melissa:

"The St. Clair County Library System thanks its donors by: shaking hands and thanking people in person, sending them a letter, listing our sponsors on printed materials, and publicizing names in the library's newsletter or other local media. A few years back, we invited all the volunteers to the library during Volunteer Recognition Week and our library director presented each with a blue sapphire pin and certificate. Our library's Friends group celebrates with an annual luncheon in the library meeting room. They offer a great lunch and a lecture for a modest price..."