Notes from the MLS Listening Tour Stop on Advocacy at the Massachusetts Library Association Conference in Hyannis on May 22, 2017

Link to Listening Tour-Advocacy libguide:
http://guides.masslibsystem.org/advocacy_resources

How does advocacy benefit your library?

- Many in our community don't even know what we do/offer....advocacy helps raise awareness
- Getting more money
- Building relationships that pay off in unforeseen ways
- Advocacy allows us to share our message with the people in our community (users,voters, elected officials)

What are your obstacles to advocacy?

- We don't often ask our supporters to act...I think (generally) we feel uncomfortable asking for support.
- There's no way to practice advocacy and get feedback to improve.
- If every kid spent his life in library, there would be fewer prisoners!!
- Ourselves - obstacles are our excuses
- Compassion fatigue is a real thing...so many causes, so many issues, so many calls to call you reps! Make your voice heard. How do we ensure we remain sane?
- If we can show that we are part of the solution for all others
- Once had a mayor say to me... bullets books... what's more important?
- It's hard. We find ourselves pitted against other good causes for diminishing resources.
- One influential non-library lover can sour the whole bunch
- Need to lay foundation for relationship before we approach looking for the handout
- Difficulties in synthesizing key mission
- Feels like beating a dead horse sometimes. It needs to be a constant effort, and that takes a lot of energy.
- Where to find the people to advocate to
- Presenting in terms of community value not a strength
- We don't prioritize that time
- Many think advocacy is the director/mgmt/other people's job...it should be everyone's job
- Library jargon
- Old brand
- We are not all public speakers
- Time
- Time
• Consistently being taken for granted (legislators, the public) and we do so much with so little
• How do you reach out to non-library staff?
• Some people are afraid to.
• Prioritizing time – is advocacy one of our priorities? – prioritize getting in front of groups – school committees, etc.
• Discussion at yesterday’s ALA Advocacy Pre-Conference Workshop about reaching out to people who are not library directors or staff – they might be available during day.
• Knowing you are not the only important game in the state – when budget cuts are being announced – some things are more important – opioid – sometimes it’s hard when there is so much cutting going on.
• We heard a lot [at the pre-conference] about how much libraries are admired across the world. I think everyone is taking us for granted. They don’t know how important we are.
• We do so much with so little.
• Hosting substance abuse committee meetings. Connecting with community issues.
• Malden Public Library – Chief of Police for Malden spoke about how important libraries are for his life – very moving – strong words – look up on MBLC website – he was the most impressive because he was not from a library
• We need to reach out to speakers who can advocate for us.
• Sometimes our obstacles are also our excuses (have a script for challenging situations)

How can we communicate with you about advocacy needs?
• Use all regions list serv
• Email lists are good but sometimes there are so many messages it’s hard to pick thru what’s important
• I hope it’s two way. Can libraries share their needs with mls/mla/each other?
• MLS involvement on MLA Leg Com. Hate too much redundancy.
• Clarify advocacy vs. lobbying rules for town/city employees
• We need to be careful about everyone having their own legislative committee. Would like to see all advocacy under one umbrella. We should have a shared message and a shared mission.
• Does MLS have more flexibility than someone who works for the state for advocacy/lobbying? MLS has the ok to do a “little lobbying.” Greg reports lobbying time every month.
• How does that affect MLS staff?
• Greg will share Advocacy LibGuide and MSLA site – Are you advocating or lobbying?
• Communicate information about lobbying vs. advocating.
• It’s best to have someone who uses your library to advocate for you.
• Letter writing campaign, tea parties with postcards
• Friends sharing with friends – post cards
• WMLA – bus to legislative day, pay stipend to someone to go to National Library Legislative Day
What tool(s) do you need to respond to our call for action?

- Easy Advocacy "assignments" ideas for each staff dept
- It would be great for everyone to join the [MLA] Engage list!!
- Want to log-in to one place – MLA’s website – and see in a checklist kind of format – what were the messages – here’s where we are – this is the one everyone needs to do right now – here’s what’s coming next – see it in the broader context of what’s coming next – send a message that it’s not just firing off an email once in a while – there is a package of communications about what everyone should be doing – Dear Appropriator Letters – “now it’s overriding time”
- Would be helpful to have – here’s where we are right now – here’s what you need to do
- We need to know legally what we can do – we need to get trained on it regularly – what’s allowed under conflict of interest law may change – we need a lot of hand-holding and walk us through each gate – if it goes well (and it hasn’t lately) we need to celebrate and we are not good at it either
- Sending out the same email is not advocating – they need to know what we are advocating for affects our community
- Overwhelming your legislator with multiple emails makes them less likely to vote a way – article in Globe
- Get more active in getting Board of Trustees to contact legislators – get them to ask 5-10 people.
- Votes only recorded with overrides. Don’t thank legislators if they didn't vote in your favor.
- Call relatives in Red States!

What Does Active MLS Membership Mean to You?

- Staying informed RE: what's available from MLS and making use of resources
- There is a gap AND a redundancy
- Databases are essential
- New roles of networks and MLS confusing to many
- Feedback
- Delivery is a BIG DATA ENTERPRISE!!!!!
- Volunteering for committees
- Getting staff to go to workshops
- Attending annual meetings and summits
- Serving on Executive Board.
- Some members miss service and camaraderie of regions.
• Members want more consulting, more support, more personal touch.
• Feel dissatisfaction – disconnect
• Networks are changing roles –
• Too far flung – mission has changed – formerly felt they could pick up phone and knew everyone
• MBLC – first Friday of every month – talking about issues with being a Director – other groups are filling gaps.
• How do I respond to daily crisis in my library? Ex/ Recent issue with robo-email from library donor complaining about budget.
• MLS should draw upon director’s expertise before they retire. Invite to present/share expertise.