



# PRACTICAL ADVOCACY

## Strategic Funding Strategies

By Rocco Staino

*Fourth in a series of ongoing articles by guest authors*

Having recently retired from a thirty-four year career, I have been reflecting on those skills I developed as a library media specialist that can be easily transferred to a new line of work. It wasn't the skills of a teacher, information specialist, or literature expert that came to mind but those of a manager, negotiator, and promoter that now make me capable of becoming a politician, publicist, or reality show contestant.

These are skills we acquired as one of the few building level teachers entrusted to develop, market, and manage a sizable amount of money to "attain the program's mission, goals, and objectives." In developing a budget, it is politic and simple common sense to align the library media program with whatever current educational initiative your building or district is undertaking. Knowledge of the key words and concepts associated with the initiative should be evident in any rationale you present for funding. You can demonstrate your understanding of the district mission by offering to present your budget requests in person to the board of education. This gives you the opportunity to answer questions and concerns directly.

In many communities the school districts are the recipients of the large portion of local tax money, and they employ a great number of people. It is important that the district present a positive image. This difficult task is usually left to administrators. As part of your library funding strategy you may want to become a spin-doctor to present the library via stories that highlight collaborative projects with fellow teachers. Don't wait for the author visit or readathon to get your "in the library story" on the district website or in the local paper. Put a spin on lessons that feature joint planning and the use of library

**GUIDELINE:** The school library media program has sufficient funding to support priorities and make steady progress to attain the program's mission, goals, and objectives.

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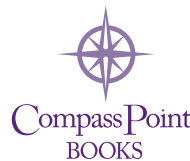
resources. For example, spin was placed on the traditional question, "What I did on my summer vacation?" with a simple compilation of the number of states and countries visited by students in a particular grade. The headline read "Sixth Graders Well Traveled," but the real story is that the library program plays an important role in the follow-up on summer reading. Take a lesson from our public library colleagues on how they communicate their story via print, web, blog, and various social networks, and be willing to become the face of the program.

As you plan a funding strategy you should try doing the following:

- Identify a library program area that needs funding support and link it to a district initiative.
- Identify five collaborative projects and spin it into a news story to be released throughout the school year.
- Target three individuals (principal, parent, or colleague) or groups (PTA, veterans, or chamber of commerce) that you will cultivate as a partner to win the great race for funds

Funding will make your library program a *survivor*, and strong funding will make your program an *idol*. Survivor or idol, you have to form partnerships and become a crowd pleaser. 🌈

**Rocco Staino** recently retired as director of the Mary I. Keefe Library in the North Salem CSD in New York. He has been involved in local, state, and national library organizations, and is a past president of the New York Library Association. He has served on the boards of the Books for Kids Foundation & Friends of Libraries USA. He is currently on the 2009 selection committee for the I Love My Librarian Award given by the NY Times, Carnegie Corporation, and the American Library Association.



Supporting strong school library programs