

Advocacy, collaboration, and online learning

By Rachel Balko.

Trustee Session: Advocacy (F7)

Speakers: Jenny Benedict (Director of Library Services at West Vancouver Memorial Library, Member of the American Library Association's Committee on Library Advocacy) and Paul Tutsch (Trustee of the Whistler Public Library, Vice President of BCLTA, Member of the Board of Trustees of West Vancouver Memorial Library from 2004 to 2011)

Summary: The speakers define library advocacy as "a proactive process by which the importance of your library becomes self-evident to opinion leaders in your community." Inhibitors to effective advocacy include: a) no plan, b) no support, c) discomfort, d) fear, and e) inexperience. The "Six Principles of Influence," as identified by Dr. Robert Cialdini, Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Marketing at Arizona State University, were described and explained. These principles are: a) reciprocity, b) scarcity, c) authority, d) commitment, e) liking, and f) consensus. By using these principles, trustees can garner and maintain influence with important opinion leaders in their communities.

The following are key components of library advocacy: a) implementing a formal board advocacy program, b) year-round communication, c) support from senior library staff, and d) demonstrating appreciation. Examples from the trustee advocacy program at West Vancouver Memorial Library were provided, and the speakers encouraged library trustees to consult www.bclta.org for more information on library advocacy.

The More We Get Together, the Happier We'll Be (F12)

Speakers: Mari Martin (Library Consultant for Library and Literacy at the B.C. Ministry of Education) and Katherine Anderson (Manager/Coordinator of IslandLink and North Coast Library Federations)

Summary: Collaboration and partnership are now the focus of organizations of all types – for-profit businesses, government agencies, and non-profit organizations alike. The speakers define the process

of collaboration as "individuals or organizations working together to address problems or take advantage of opportunities to deliver outcomes that are not easily affected or achieved by working alone," and they stress the results-oriented nature of this definition.

Reasons for collaboration include: a) technology is available to facilitate it, b) increased stakeholder expectations for service delivery, c) cross-sector opportunities, d) government support and encouragement, e) changing political and funding landscapes, f) the complexity of the challenges facing libraries and communities, g) structures to support collaboration are already in place (e.g., federations, co-ops), and h) finite resources combined with increasing demands and/or needs.

Collaboration requires a significant investment of focus, time, and resources; not all "working together" is true collaboration. The work of the six B.C. library federations is a great example of libraries working collaboratively, with emphasis placed on the following goals and priorities: a) collaborative services and programming, b) purchasing through consortia, c) shared collections, and d) training and professional development.

Student Drivers: Building Collaborative, Student-Focused Online Learning Services in B.C. (F21)

Speakers: Elaine Fairey (Associate University Librarian at Simon Fraser University, Founding Member of the WriteAway Concept Committee) and Sunni Nishimura (Project Coordinator at the B.C. Electronic Library Network [AskAway, WriteAway])

Summary: The speakers described the success of the AskAway online chat reference service, established in 2006 and now being used in 29 post-secondary institutions in B.C., and introduced the WriteAway online writing help service, which will soon move into its pilot stage. Reasons behind the success of AskAway include: a) centralized coordination that "builds on existing trust," b) the benefits of the collaborative service model (e.g., cost savings, service continuity, encouraging innovation), c) staffing of the service is based on the size of the

institution and its number of FTEs, so the workload is perceived as being distributed fairly, d) partner engagement, e) an equitable cost-sharing model with the support of BCcampus and post-secondary libraries across B.C., f) transparency (e.g., open access to reports, meeting minutes, etc. on the website), and g) strong communication between partner institutions.

Challenges of AskAway include ensuring user privacy and balancing the needs of individual institutions with those of the collaborative. AskAway is looking into

the possibility of adding SMS/text reference services in the future. WriteAway, a partner service of AskAway, will provide both synchronous and asynchronous online writing tutoring for B.C. post-secondary students. The pilot launch of the WriteAway service in a few institutions (Douglas College, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Simon Fraser University, and College of the Rockies) is planned for the summer of 2012.

Rachel Balko is the Librarian at Alexander College's Vancouver campus.