
Marketing and the Political Environment

PETER G. HAMON

ABSTRACT

THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES THE NATURE and function of various political processes which affect resource allocation to libraries and explores how to analyze these processes accurately. It discusses the marketing of library "products" through supplementing traditional measures of input and output with considerations of impact and by seeking to adapt and express library products in terms of the cognitive universes of decision makers. Finally, the article offers a selection of practical strategies intended to assist the individual librarian to maximize the probability of success in political processes.

INTRODUCTION

Herbert Grover, Wisconsin's State Superintendent of Public Instruction from 1981 to 1993, frequently opened his speeches to library groups by stating that, although many consider politics to be a "dirty" game, it is nevertheless one of the primary means by which scarce resources are divided up in our society. He would further note that, although it is entirely a matter of personal choice whether or not to participate in political processes, those who choose to stand aloof should also be prepared to do without the resources that these processes make available (Grover in a speech delivered to the State Superintendent's Conference for Public Librarians and Trustees, May 1989). As a former state legislator and the head of a state agency, Grover most often used the phrase "political process" to mean the way in which funds at the state level are allocated for library services.

Peter G. Hamon, South Central Library System, #2317 International Lane, Suite #102, Madison, WI 53704

LIBRARY TRENDS, Vol. 43, No. 3, Winter 1995, pp. 431-49

© 1995 The Board of Trustees, University of Illinois

But, in fact, his words apply equally well to almost any library situation. Whether a library is governed by a municipality, a district school superintendent, a board of regents, or a corporate department head, the resources received to conduct operations are determined by political processes. It is the purpose of this article to provide a brief overview concerning just how to utilize these processes effectively.

THE FIRST STEP: UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL PROCESSES

The phrase "political process" has many meanings. In the narrowest sense it is associated with political parties, candidates, campaigns, and elections. This definition is far too limited for this discussion. It applies only to how one particular kind of political environment is created and structured or, in other words, how the stage is set. Our task instead is to go backstage, to study the script, and to get to know the actors. We must look beyond structure and into function. We must determine how political processes actually operate after they are created, especially if we wish to learn how to influence them effectively on an ongoing basis on behalf of the various publics that we serve. Every organization has an official process for allocating resources. This process usually includes the presentation of plans or budgets, the consideration of these plans or budgets by one or more individuals or groups and, finally, the decision-making processes which actually allocate resources. The first step toward understanding this process in any organization is to seek information. Perhaps the best way to begin is simply to use the newspaper questions, "who," "what," "when," "where," and "why" and apply these to the process at hand. "Who" must include anyone who defines how a specific political process operates as well as anyone who sits in judgment of "products" at any stage during this process. For example, in a legislature, the political process varies greatly from year to year. Frequently, the joint leadership of the respective legislative houses determines what committees will hold hearings on a bill or a budget and whether there will be separate or combined hearings for fiscal and policy considerations. Likewise, the leadership chooses who will hear certain kinds of presentations based on which committees are given which tasks, or even which officials are appointed to which committees. Armed with the "who," a participant in the political process can attempt the fairly difficult task of influencing the design of the process itself to favor a particular "product" or the much simpler task of attempting to influence key decision makers to take favorable action at various points in the process. In either case, care must be exercised to discover who actually makes decisions rather than simply accepting the "official" roster

of decision makers listing their formal authority. Almost everyone has encountered a "lower level" employee in an organization who has somehow acquired the capacity to ensure that things either do or do not happen based solely on his or her own personal influence. This is not an uncommon situation. In fact, it is a normal condition in most organizations. For example, many legislators have key aides who deal with issues such as education. The legislator, swamped with detail, may rely on the aide to recommend decisions as well as, or even instead of, simply relaying information. Such an aide is often a more important factor in the political process than is the legislator who surrendered the authority.

The second question, "what," refers to seeking out technical elements of the process, such as directives defining what may or may not be requested, or the specific forms of request which will or will not be accepted. For instance, a corporation may have issued a directive to submit only a "hold the line" or even a "percentage reduction" budget. Is this directive being followed by every department or are there exceptions? Alliances result in some sort of sanctions being exercised against an administrator or a program. Is such a directive simply "window dressing" intended to convince stockholders of managerial frugality? Does the directive have "loopholes" which might apply to a specific operation? Careful investigation of all aspects of "what" is expected or allowed in a process places one in a position to ameliorate the possibly devastating consequences of simply "following the rules." For instance, instructions to prepare a simple line item budget might be intended to ease the load on overworked administrators. On the other hand, such instructions may call for line item budgets because, containing less explanatory material, they are easier to cut. Can a program budget, which better explains and supports an operation, be prepared to at least supplement the line item budget initially requested? If this can be done, to whom and how must such a budget be provided so that it ultimately attracts the attention of the appropriate decision makers?

The third and fourth questions, "when" and "where," are often best addressed together. They refer to the fact that the elements which comprise almost all political processes are constantly in a state of flux with regard to time and space. The library budget a city required next week is now due yesterday if not sooner. A promise is made that a particular issue will be the very first thing on a legislative agenda, but it actually comes up six hours later after most of the supporters of the concept have already gone home. School board hearings mysteriously move from building to building, and no one seems quite sure where the next one is or who might possess this information. The final question, "why," is the only one which can

usually be answered without reference to any specific political process. Contrary to popular belief, most political processes are not designed to help good concepts or products to succeed. Instead, they are usually crafted as, or quickly evolve into, systems which function to enable participants in them to fail. In any political process, there are many more requests for resources than there are resources available for distribution. Furthermore, although each request may be both simple and understandable if given proper study and consideration, those in charge of resource distribution seldom have either the time or the expertise required to do justice to all the information laid out before them.

Agencies which distribute resources are frequently faced with hundreds, if not thousands, of highly complex requests, all of which must be reviewed in a very short time and frequently under the microscope of hostile public scrutiny. Finally, even if the vast majority of requests can be eliminated due to a lack of merit, those truly deserving requests which remain may still call for resources far in excess of the amount available. What this all boils down to is that, if a request is turned down on the basis of merit, that decision is likely to be challenged. If a request is rejected by an identifiable individual, then that individual can easily become a target for political reprisal. If, on the other hand, someone missed a deadline, was not present at a key hearing, or simply failed to fill out the right form, then that individual was rejected by a faceless system. Those in authority can express their deep regret and offer advice concerning how to do better "next time." The very clear assumption underlying both these regrets and this advice, however, is that any blame for failure lies solely with the participant and in no way reflects on the decision makers in the political process.

Although this view of why political processes function as they do may seem depressing, an objective understanding of what is actually going on is the first real step toward success. Remember that almost all the programs and requests for resources which are in competition with library programs and requests must undergo these same political processes, and most will ultimately fail for many of the reasons discussed earlier. Careful study of the political process which pertains to your operation, careful verification of your conclusions with whatever "resident experts" you can locate, and continuous monitoring of the inevitable "midstream course changes" in your process will often yield a definite competitive advantage over other programs or requests even though many of these may initially be much better understood or more generally popular than those emanating from the library community.

THE SECOND STEP: UNDERSTANDING AND MARKETING YOUR PRODUCT

It should go without saying that good programs are the result of good planning. Since a discussion of how to conduct a planning process is somewhat beyond the scope of this article, let it suffice to note here that before any service product (or the request for the resources to carry it out) is ready to be marketed through the political process, it must at least meet certain general criteria.

First, a product or request must be expressed in plain language and must include accurate cost information. Second, specific requests or products must support the overall long-range goals of the parent organization, and a comprehensive long-range plan must be readily available as evidence of this connection. Third, except in very rare circumstances, both the specific product and the long-range plan must have been approved by the individual or body which immediately governs the requesting agency. Finally, the long-range plan must have undergone processes leading to the endorsement of its primary provisions by the people or groups its services are intended to benefit, and it must be possible to demonstrate how a specific product or request is intended to achieve these benefits. These "environmental" criteria should ensure that a product can be understood and discussed, both alone and in context, and that a presentation has verifiably been "legitimized" both by a basic authority structure and by the public the agency serves. Unfortunately for anyone preparing to rest on his or her laurels, meeting these basic planning and legitimizing criteria is simply the beginning of the marketing process.

The single most important factor in marketing in the political environment is not product but perception. Consider the fairly common offer from automobile companies to pay a "manufacturer's cash rebate," often amounting to several thousand dollars, if the prospective customer will only purchase the particular vehicle being advertised. It is doubtful that this incentive alone causes many individuals to rush out and buy new automobiles, largely because many already have cars and most lack both the means and the desire to purchase new ones with any great frequency. Conversely, such an offer is very effective in cases where the listener has a real or perceived need for a product. Then the only questions that remain to be decided are those of which offer and which product are most advantageous. The decision to purchase has already been made.

Perhaps the greatest weakness in traditional efforts to market library service is the failure to establish a need or even the perception of need for library products in the minds of those who control political processes. All too frequently our approach depends on our own perception of the goods we offer, and the perceptions of our audience

are completely ignored. "Libraries are good, just like motherhood and apple pie. If libraries are given resources, wonderful library things will happen. The nature of these things is not quite decided yet, but you may be assured that they will benefit you greatly." Expressed in this fashion, this "input only" argument is both ridiculous and embarrassing. Yet a surprising number of attempts to seek resources through the political process, once shorn of their voluminous jargon and technical detail, really represent nothing more than this approach. This methodology can work, but success depends upon those to whom it is presented already sharing a common belief in the value and importance of what is being offered. Otherwise, this approach is generally doomed to failure. A second "evolutionary stage" in the library marketing spectrum involves measuring and expressing outputs as well as inputs (Van House et al., 1987). This approach attempts to measure specifically quantifiable things that are being achieved with existing resources (such as circulation per capita, various fill rates, times required for document delivery, and so forth, and to suggest and ultimately measure how much more could be achieved through internal redesign or access to increased resources. Output measures provide a powerful managerial technique in that they enable us to study what is being done, how it is being done, and how it can be done better. This can be of critical importance in designing library requests or products in the first place, but output measures do very little to actually alter the basic perceptions of our audience of decision makers. A library may, for instance, successfully answer three times as many reference questions this year as last, but to an individual who has never used a library and sees no reason why anyone should, this achievement has little value.

An uncritical acceptance of the premise that "more is better" with regard to traditional measures of library services, may also actually hinder rather than help our attempts to adapt to a rapidly changing world. A customer who has refused staff assistance has little choice but to check out everything that may pertain to his or her need or do without. Circulation increases, but service clearly remains substandard. A customer, properly advised, checks out only what is necessary and circulation decreases, although reference usage may rise. A customer well trained in library usage, and perhaps also with direct access to full-text databases, may only show up as a number on a door counter or perhaps, on occasion, be represented in internal usage surveys. Circulation of materials by this customer may become almost nonexistent. Yet how many libraries still tie their budget requests to rising circulation?

In short, the misuse of library output measures to market our wares causes us to fall prey to the same fallacy we often attribute

to accountants and budget analysts. We know the cost (and, in this case, the frequency) of everything, and yet we know the value of nothing.

If neither input nor output measures alone provide an adequate basis upon which to market library service, then we must go beyond them to explore dimensions of value and social impact. To achieve this, we must set aside many of our own perceptions and attempt to enter into the minds of those we serve.

Consider for a moment the automotive engineer's view of a car. He or she almost certainly knows the characteristics of the alloy used to construct the cylinder walls of the engine and further understands how this alloy will perform under a wide range of conditions. As lay persons, on the other hand, we may only want to know how a car drives, what it costs, and whether it is available in fire engine red with a leather interior. This is not to say that the concerns of the engineer are unimportant to us. We want cars that run well with minimal effort on our part, and we get very upset if these conditions are not met. But the technical considerations that enable reliable and efficient operation are, for the most part, simply background to us. Our overriding (although perhaps, it is hoped, unconscious) concern may actually be limited to the image that we project to the rest of our species when we get behind the wheel.

The significance of the kinds of differing perceptions suggested by this automotive example is frequently underestimated. Our tendency is to assume that a few well-chosen descriptive phrases and statistics can convey the value and importance of library products to almost anyone no matter what his or her background. This is by no means necessarily the case.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, a theory which came to the attention of anthropological theorists in the early 1930s, attempts to explain differences in perceived realities, often called cognitive universes (Romney & D'Andrade, 1964, pp. 146-70), on the grounds that "language is culture, and that culture is controlled by and controls language" (Sills, 1986, p. 536). For example, Sapir and Whorf noted that certain historical Aleut (otherwise known as Eskimo) languages contained over fifty words referring to different types of ice. In our own culture, we make do with half a dozen or so. This difference is easy to understand. To a traditional hunter in the polar regions, correctly identifying a type of ice not only had a direct bearing on finding game, but also, since falling through the ice was invariably fatal, even basic survival was at stake. Our need is not that great so our language does not include this range of distinctions, and we do not think of ice in the same way. Conversely, certain southwestern Native American groups living in an arid desert environment used

the same word to refer to the color blue as well as to the color green. In our own culture, however, these two colors are not only indicated by separate words but, as any artist or decorator can tell you, we further treat these colors as categories which are subdivided into literally hundreds of different shades, each with its own unique linguistic descriptor.

Although the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has frequently been taken to mean that individuals in different cultures cannot imagine concepts not expressed in their own languages, this is, in fact, a misinterpretation of the intent of the authors of the hypothesis. Instead, it appears evident that humans can learn the criteria defining anyone else's cognitive universe, but that they habitually do not do so if there is neither a convenient opportunity nor a pressing need.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis may seem rather far afield from considerations of how to market libraries in the political environment, but, in fact, the concept is central to our efforts. Different cognitive universes not only occur among cultures but also within them. George Bernard Shaw once referred to England and America as "[T]wo countries separated by the same language" (Platte, 1989, p. 105). In fact, in many ways in our society, we are hundreds, if not thousands, of separate peoples divided by an increasingly specialized language. Although most people in our society have access to a broad range of concepts for general communication, separate specialized groups also utilize an ever-increasing quantity of field specific "jargon," which means everything to the initiated but little or nothing to anyone not consistently involved in the same subset of the culture. Thus a farmer may be able to fluently discuss field-specific issues ranging from the practical effects of fertilizers to the specific designations of new hybrid crops without ever entering the cognitive universe of libraries at all. Librarians, on the other hand, discuss interloan, MARC formats, circulation, and various arcane aspects of the "information superhighway" in the confident, and often completely erroneous, belief that those to whom we speak either understand what we say or at least care enough to try. An added complication to this situation is that, since all parties employ, technically speaking, the same language, the same words used in entirely different field-specific ways only further compound the confusion. For example, "bus" means to clean up tables in the restaurant trade, is a device to transmit information in the parlance of computer designers, and represents a cheap means of cross town transportation to the rest of us.

If we are unlikely to be able to impress the full wonder of our own cognitive universe of librarianship on a farmer, or a businessperson, or a legislator, then we must instead reshape our communications

so that we speak to those outside our field in terms which lie either within their cognitive universes or which lie within the general shared cognitive universe of the majority of our society.

Overcoming the marketing problems created by different cognitive universes, and by the fact that the cognitive universe of librarianship is not inhabited by a majority of the population in our society, is a task which demands a three step approach. First, a product or request for which resources are to be sought through the political process must be designed based on careful study and quantification of what is happening now, what beneficial changes will occur if the proposal becomes reality, what relationship the proposal has to the long-range plans of its parent organization, and what resources are required to turn the proposal into reality. This first step essentially creates a base of information which, if not necessarily comprehensible to those outside the library field, at least allows precise discussion and development of a specific product. This part of the process might be compared to creating blueprints for the design of a large building. These documents define the product and enable it to be redesigned as required. They are not, however, of a great deal of use to the casual observer.

The second step, therefore, is the translation of this product (and of as much of its underlying information base as necessary) into common, or at least well-defined, terms so that it makes sense to those outside the cognitive universe of the library field. For instance, instead of proposing an investment in public access terminals for use with the OCLC interloan subsystem, the same concept might be explained as a way to enable a student or professor who requires a book which a university library cannot afford, to borrow that book cheaply and efficiently from another university almost anywhere in the United States or even from somewhere else in the world.

Finally, and most importantly, a product must be shown to have a positive impact, which can be either personal or societal, within the terms of the cognitive universes of the audience of decision makers. For example, some generally perceived problems in our society include overcrowded prisons, ever-expanding welfare rolls, an educational system that seems inferior in some respects to that of Japan, a decline in literacy, a falling standard of living, and the perceived need for American business to compete more effectively in a global market. Can public libraries have an impact in these areas? Do they therefore deserve a larger share of scarce resources? Absolutely. Only people who are literate can hold most jobs. People who have reasonable jobs are a great deal less likely to end up either in prison or on the welfare rolls. Literacy improves the business climate because a literate work force is far more adaptable and trainable than an illiterate

one. Good business conditions mean good jobs and a higher standard of living for all. Public libraries promote literacy by strengthening the reading skills of children during summers when most of our schools (unlike those in Japan) are not in session. Public libraries usually direct anyone who wants to learn to read to professional literacy programs and supports such programs with masses of reading material which are freely available to all. Public libraries are a window of access to a wide range of private and governmental programs as well as information concerning how and where to obtain education and jobs and how and where to seek retraining when changes in the workplace leave workers behind. Public libraries provide businesses with information on almost everything (ranging from new product markets to the effects of changing governmental regulation) required to maintain a competitive edge.

This final step, which is adaptable to any kind of library and almost any type of program or request, consists of simply seeking to translate what we perceive as the good offered by our institutions and services into concepts understandable and persuasive to an audience not necessarily familiar with our cognitive universe. In short, rather than trying to convince those who control resources in the political process to change their own world views to encompass our products, we must instead try to demonstrate how our products will benefit or improve the worlds those decision makers already understand.

Frequently, once the necessity for exploring cognitive universes other than our own is understood, the actual techniques required to gather information concerning these universes are not too difficult. Whether a target audience consists of rural county board members, city officials, or corporate vice presidents, the process is much the same. It is necessary to become familiar with current and long-standing concerns in the audience's area of expertise and to learn how these are expressed within that "culture." This information can be verified and supplemented through actual interviews of individual members of the target "culture." If possible, it is desirable to determine if there are general "articles of faith" (i.e., "everyone knows that the government over regulates small business") which are commonly accepted within this "culture." In order to be persuasive, consideration must then be given to adapting at least part of the information intended for presentation concerning the library product to meet the expressed needs of the target audience's world view.

For instance, crop markets rise and fall and farmers must adapt to changing circumstances or go out of business. A few years ago the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection advised farmers that the long-term outlook for traditional

crops was not good, and that they might profitably consider growing entirely new kinds of crops, such as asparagus ("Asparagus May Green Farm Future," 1987, p. 11). The agricultural community, however, soon noted, and commented upon, a lack of information concerning just how to grow and market these new crops. Needless to say, any library proposal of that era which sought to identify with that particular information gap and which further suggested how the gap could be closed, not only stood an excellent chance of being funded but also tended to build up valuable political capital for future use.

One particular note of caution. Do not ever allow yourself to be seen as attempting to offer expertise in an area where you have none. It is effective to note that: "Several members of your group have indicated that the following is a problem, and here is how my agency may be able to help to solve it." It is suicidal to proclaim, "the answer to the single most important problem in computer design today is...." and to have everyone in the room simultaneously realize that you have no idea what you are talking about. To avoid this, test presentation arguments on someone who is representative of, or at least very familiar with, your target audience of decision makers. This person should not, however, be a member of the specific decision-making body itself. This testing process helps to avoid errors in fact, terminology, and concept. It also provides feedback concerning whether arguments are both germane and convincing as to how a program or agency is vital (or at least beneficial) to the needs of a target audience. Finally, if no way can be found in which a specific program or request serves the field-specific needs of an audience, then it should be designed and presented in terms of commonly held world views and to meet needs perceived in this shared universe.

THE FINAL STEP: USING THE POLITICAL PROCESS EFFECTIVELY

The preceding parts of this article have dealt primarily with theoretical aspects of how and why political processes operate and of how to design and market products through these processes. This final section contains a selection of practical advice concerning how to operate effectively within ongoing political processes. This material is designed to take the reader beyond theory and into the political "game" itself by discussing actual strategies for utilizing structural and functional elements of political processes so as to increase the probability of successful resolution of these processes.

Strategy 1: Prepare for Any Outcome

Absolute victory or defeat is certainly a possible outcome of any political process, but the usual result lies somewhere between these

two extremes. Politics has been described as the art of negotiation, and it is necessary to study this art to succeed in this field. Although the art of negotiation is the subject of many treatises, there are two cardinal principles which should suffice here. First, the negotiator with the most time normally wins. This is because someone up against a deadline must usually choose between an inferior solution or none at all. Second, unbalanced settlements seldom endure. If either negotiator wins everything, the other party has good cause to attempt to somehow undermine or disavow the agreement and will frequently attempt to do so. Only if the final agreement contains something of value to each party are both likely to maintain it voluntarily.

Since political processes are highly fluid, it is vital to know at all times where things stand (information being the single most valuable commodity in political processes) and what fallback positions are acceptable. Would you agree to half your needs being met? What about 20 percent? The actual culmination of a political process frequently occurs within a period of a few seconds. The proposed invasion of Normandy in World War II, for example, required years of planning and preparation as well as extensive political agreement among many nations concerning such factors as goals, resource commitment, and methodology. As late as the day before the invasion, weather conditions made the proposition a low odds gamble at best. On the night of June 5th, 1944, Dwight Eisenhower weighed the evidence and uttered those immortal, if uninspiring words, "Okay, we'll go" (Leckie, 1987, p. 678). The few seconds required for that simple phrase represented the culmination of years of political maneuvering and changed the history of the world.

Strategy 2: Develop Your Personal and Institutional Credibility

Always present a proposal as objectively and fairly as you can. If possible, present information which might undermine your case before your opponents are able to do so. This allows you to explain the problem in your terms (and in terms of the cognitive universe of your listeners), while also defusing any possible charge of concealing information. Never, under any circumstances, either lie or "shade" information beyond what can actually be verified. A primary objective should be the development of a positive and long-term relationship with the decision makers in your political process. An admission of ignorance, followed by a promise to find out, may lead to a short-term setback, but this same honesty enhances long-term credibility—frequently a political gain of far greater worth. In the library profession, we can all learn from those special librarians who prepare interest profiles on key personnel in their organizations and supply these individuals with resources and information as it becomes

available and without being asked. When decision makers in the political process are approached at budget time, it is usually fairly obvious why this is happening. On the other hand, a long-standing relationship enables the decision maker to count on the librarian as someone to be relied upon for honest information. Library requests and proposals are much more likely to find a ready audience in this case than if this long-term relationship did not exist.

Strategy 3: Understand the Players

Most political processes involve a wide spectrum of "players" ranging from actual decision makers, through information providers, to "hangers on" of many sorts. Who among these individuals opposes library issues? Is this opposition based on budgetary or philosophical grounds or perhaps even on simple misunderstanding? It is first necessary to learn what motivates opposition because only then can strategies be developed to overcome it. Understanding "friends" of library issues is as important as understanding "enemies." While library issues may be a real "bottom line" to some decision makers, frequently other priorities are likely to erode their support for these issues as the political process unfolds and more demands are made upon a limited package of resources. Even if library support cannot be obtained in the current situation, the failure of library "friends" to support library issues can often be translated into meaningful guarantees of improved support in the future.

Strategy 4: Use Activity to Overcome Inertia

Most people prefer not to expend energy without a fairly compelling reason, especially if such an expenditure involves risk, boredom, or complicated thought processes. If, in any political process, a situation can be arranged where library proposals are enacted unless someone takes direct action to stop them, the battle is already half won. An example of this involves the development of a positive long-term relationship of providing accurate and unbiased information to those individuals who write legislative position papers. If a legislative alternative favoring libraries can be introduced into such a paper through such a relationship (and especially if it heads the list of alternatives in the position paper), then even if the actual decision makers have little time or inclination to deal with the issue, your preferred alternative is nevertheless going to be discussed and may well be the one selected even if the choice is ultimately made by default.

Strategy 5: Understand and Utilize Power Bases Effectively

A wide spectrum of support must be enlisted in order to achieve specific goals in a political process. Such support is called a power

base. There are two primary power bases in political processes. These are the "grassroots" and the "power elite." The first, in terms of elective political processes, represents the mass of the people. This power base is hard to mobilize but, once this mobilization has been accomplished, this power base tends to maintain its direction and its frequently large size makes it hard to stop. The second power base, the "power elite," is often made up of small groups of "power players," including entrenched decision makers and wealthy special interest lobbies. This power base can act quickly and decisively but can easily lose momentum or change direction due to only minor changes in personnel. Elite power bases frequently silence opposition by intimidation. Your choice may be to give up your cause now or face the consequence of losing more resources, or perhaps even your job, later. The danger this intimidation presents, both to persons and to organizations, can be very real. In practice, it tends to function as yet another weeding process in the political arena. You must choose to take the risk or do without the resources you require. The best protection against this tactic is to build strong ongoing relationships with decision makers (in the case of many public officials, especially around election time) and to always be prepared to take your case to the "grassroots," for tactics of intimidation do not stand exposure to the light of day at all well.

Strategy 6: Develop Successful Presentation Techniques

Be brief. Almost every political process requires its decision makers to cope with incredible masses of information. One Wisconsin legislator is renowned for saying: "If you can't write it on a three by five card, make an appointment with my aide to discuss your issue next week" (J. Kiesow, personal communication, June 27, 1994).

Use easily understood anecdotes and examples to support more informal data. The library issues we must shepherd through political processes are often extremely complex. It is very difficult to get anyone to pay attention to even the primary components of such issues, much less to vote for the often intricate solutions required to adequately resolve them. We must make this complexity easy to understand, and one of our best tools to do this is by use of anecdotes or examples. Audiences remember these and, by remembering them, create a positive linkage in their minds among these examples and the more formal and complex points you are trying to get across.

For instance, in Wisconsin we have a library community which includes many different kinds of libraries and serves many different publics. Our libraries are operated by many separate units of government as well as by private agencies. Our libraries are also funded through many agreements and formulas which appear arcane, to say

the least, to the casual observer. To explain why state-level funding is required to enable cooperation among these many kinds of libraries, we soon learned to avoid boring audiences with masses of technical jargon. Instead we hit upon the metaphor of highways. Highways are also a complex network created and maintained by many agencies. Yet this network need not be understood by the traveler to be used. Instead, a map guides you easily from one place to another. Library customers wish to obtain information, much as travelers wish to reach their destinations. Cooperation among libraries is like a highway network, but a question directed to a librarian becomes the map to a destination. The library customer, just like the traveler, need not be concerned with how this information highway is built or funded. He or she only has to use it.

Of course the almost universal use today of the metaphor of the information highway to describe the Internet requires the Wisconsin library community to seek out new and improved examples to support our proposals. There is no lack of candidates for this honor. From the high ideals of the early exploration of space, to the task of restoring control of inner city neighborhoods to law abiding citizens, almost any social good can be used to create a valid example in support of library service.

In addition to theoretical examples, both anecdotes and personal testimony are very powerful ways to support library proposals. A few years ago, the Wisconsin State Senate was discussing the funding level for a public library system for the next biennium while in the throes of a politically charged pre-election austerity drive. The funding future for libraries looked bleak indeed until the joint finance committee began to take citizen testimony. One elderly resident of a rural county described how her failing vision was cutting her off, step by step, from all the things she loved most in life. She then discussed how large print books and other similar materials kept her door to the rest of society open. "Please," she said, "don't take my world away from me." The effect was profound. Although the services she spoke of only represented a tiny fraction of what was purchased with the funds under consideration, libraries escaped unscathed from that budget process.

Express yourself appropriately. You may be verbally challenged by decision makers in political processes, and frequently such treatment is both harsh and unfair. An angry response, however, is usually grounds for many decision makers to dismiss your testimony out of hand. Your best response is to continue to present your information in a cool, collected, and positive manner, and to simply outlast your detractor. Similarly, if an opportunity presents itself to make a cutting personal remark or to somehow cause a decision maker

to look foolish, do not succumb to the temptation. Most politicians commonly attack each other's parties, philosophies, and ideas. Clever politicians, however, seldom attack each other personally. This is because personal attacks shift the focus away from the issues and frequently destroy any real hope of voluntary compromise. Additionally, issues come and go. Today's enemy may be tomorrow's ally but only if a professional relationship based on mutual respect is maintained and nurtured.

Similarly, if presented with an opportunity to win on a technicality—for instance, due to a misprint in a hastily drafted amendment—do not be too eager to take advantage of the situation. Once again, the long-range cost to a working relationship (even with your strongest opposition) may well outweigh the short-term gain.

Ask for what is really wanted, not just for what is easy to obtain. Libraries are often referred to as a "white hat" issue, which means that they are popular, at least in theory, with almost everyone. This makes it very easy to ask a decision maker if he or she will support libraries. The answer is almost always yes. This answer is usually also meaningless. Ask instead if the decision maker will vote for, or even introduce, your program or request. Positive responses to this question are much harder to obtain but are far more worthwhile.

As a corollary to this principle, never enter a critical stage in the political process voluntarily without a fairly good idea of how the decision makers will vote and without a good chance of winning. All too often librarians fail to adequately investigate the positions taken by decision makers and thus enter key segments of political processes lacking the motions, seconds, and majorities required to win.

Be satisfied with victory. All of us have encountered advocates for causes who become so enamored with their issues that they become known more for their tedium than for their insight. The first priority of the library advocate in the political process must be to obtain required resources. Converting everyone involved in the process into experts in library affairs is usually not possible and certainly not desirable if such attempts begin to conflict with the primary goal of obtaining resources.

Choose appropriate modes of expression and presentation. Dress for the occasion. Do not wear a T-shirt to a finance committee hearing, but also do not wear either an evening gown or a three piece suit to a county fair. Learn to speak naturally but professionally. A brief course in public speaking is an investment that is usually repaid many times over.

Use humor but with care. Legitimate humor may generally address achieved characteristics (such as pomposity), but must never be directed at ascribed characteristics (such as race or physical

disability). Your own shortcomings, or those of the group you represent, are usually a fair target for your humor. Lacking either the talent or the urge to be witty, at least smile.

Always remember that every word has an emotional component in its meaning. Fillet of sole, sautéed to a delicate golden brown, is nothing more than a piece of dead fish fried in fat. This description, however, is very unlikely to keep a restaurant in business very long. Choose key words and concepts in presentations to evoke desirable emotions and connotations and to avoid negative ones.

Use appropriate presentation modes adapted to known characteristics of the audience at hand. It is entirely appropriate to use audiovisual aids in making a presentation to a group of educators. The audiovisual presentation made to a county board, however, can be disastrous. In one case in which a slide presentation concerning county libraries was made during an evening meeting to a county board largely composed of retired farmers, when the lights were turned off, thirty-four members were present. When the lights were turned back on some twenty minutes later, only two members remained.

Learn how to use mass media effectively. All too often, librarians consider it sufficient to communicate only with the "already converted" through such means as in-house surveys. In reality, obtaining scarce resources through political processes frequently requires appealing to a wide spectrum of the public. The mass media, including newspapers, radio, and television, are often the appropriate tool for this task. Just as in the case of political officials, long-term relationships built on honesty and mutual respect are invaluable. Remember at budget time that everyone wants coverage, but news must be produced all year round. Libraries and their activities always provide good filler material, but be sure to offer appropriate items to each media format. For instance, a television station may rush to cover a fairly bombastic summer children's program, complete with local celebrities, but a shelf of books, no matter how valuable, lacks visual appeal and is better covered in print.

Strategy 7: Provide Solutions Rather than Problems

Decision makers in any political process usually face difficult problems at the outset. As the process unfolds, as resources are expended, and as the full magnitude of the task at hand becomes apparent, remaining problems can appear to be insoluble. Approaching decision makers and asking them to make hard choices violates the principle of activity versus inertia. It also faces these decision makers with even more problems than they already had.

Such a strategy is unlikely to earn either their gratitude or their approval of your requests. A far better alternative is to offer a means by which your request can be granted and yet which has no negative impact on the decision makers involved.

An excellent example of this kind of strategy was the small public library which faced massive budget cuts because newly elected local officials determined to honor certain rather ill-advised campaign promises about cutting taxes. This library calculated that the cost of maintaining, and even increasing, their budget so that they could undertake several badly needed services, was only an additional fourteen dollars on an average property tax bill. Having built up an excellent relationship with both their public and local media, this library appealed directly to the citizenry. Several hundred individuals approached their elected officials and volunteered to pay the additional amounts required for the purposes of improved library services (Schmeling 1986). The mayor and the city council, provided with this solution to a difficult problem, passed the library budget at the requested level without further objection.

CONCLUSION

On the one hand this is an era of dwindling resources. A growing lack of public trust in traditional solutions to social problems, especially solutions proposed by government, is clearly evident. Yet, on the other hand, the capability to provide information to the general populace, in ways unheard of only a few years ago, is almost within our grasp. Libraries, and all the services they offer, may become central to this "second stage" of the information explosion, or they may become peripheral and ultimately just fade away. Our ability to effectively utilize political processes may go a long way toward making the difference. Do not think of this article as a theoretical treatise on politics. It is, instead, a call to action. Two alternative futures await—the choice between them is ours.

REFERENCES

- Some are willing to pay for service. (1986). *Capital Times*, (November 12). Madison, WI.
- Leckie, R. (1987). *Delivered from evil: The saga of World War II*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Platte, S. (Ed.). (1989). *Respectfully quoted: A dictionary of quotations requested from the Congressional Research Service*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress.
- Romney, A. K., & D'Andrade, R. G. (1964). Cognitive aspects of English kin terms. In A. K. Romney & R.G. D'Andrade (Eds.), *American anthropologist*, special publication, *Transcultural studies in cognition*, vol. 66, part 2, no. 3, pp. 146-170 (Report of a conference sponsored by Social Science Research Council Committee on Intellectual Processes Research). Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association.
- Schmeling, S. L. (1987). Asparagus may green farm future. *Capital Times*, (May 11). Madison, WI.

- Sills, D. L. (Ed.). (1986). *International encyclopedia of the social sciences* (vol. 13). New York: Macmillan Co.
- Van House, N. A.; Lynch, M. J.; McClure, C. R.; Zweizig, D. L.; & Rodger, E. J. (1987). *Output measures for public libraries: A manual of standardized procedures*. Chicago, IL: American Library Association.