

Doing Outreach

General Tips

- Use clear and appropriate language to convey your message
- Know your target audience and be clear about whom you are trying to reach
- Demonstrate respect and sensitivity
- Listen and learn about the priorities of potential partner organizations
- Meet people where they are most comfortable

Outreach is what we do to make contact with individuals, organizations, and businesses that will assist you in running a successful program. Those individuals in your community that you reach out to will provide insight into your target population's interests, culture, and help you guide your program to target them while making your efforts more effective with their information and contacts.

There is no one way to provide outreach, and a combination of approaches is more effective than relying on just one, and it can be as simple as putting brochures up in a public area or as detailed as partnering with an organization on a project.

Keep in mind: Outreach can easily be a part of your overall marketing campaign.

Define Yourself

It's important to understand that not everyone understands the concept of a public or school library. Be prepared to articulate who you are and demonstrate why the library is important.

GET YOUR STORY OUT

Recently I joined in a fight near my community to save a middle school library position. The public perception was that it wasn't important to have a librarian or media specialist on staff. The problem was that despite decades of research saying otherwise it was only librarians telling other librarians this information - tell others why you're important, it may not be old news to them. Don't wait until there is a crisis, start now.

Go Back to School

Schools are the cornerstone of many successful teen outreach programs. Make time to visit your school – get to know them and make sure they know who you are. Schools can promote, assist, and support you.

6 Quick School Outreach Ideas

- Contact your school principal and/or specific department heads and get on the schedule for the school's next in-service day. Ask for 20 minutes, 30 minutes, an hour -- however much time you feel comfortable with -- you can booktalk, invite teachers to bring their classes for tours, talk up forthcoming programs, distribute your card, hold a small-scale focus group for teachers asking about what they need out of the library.
- Attend PTA meetings. This is a wonderful way to introduce yourself and promote your library's services and collections to the parents of your community.
- Ask the school what their curriculum is. Offer to create booklists based on the curriculum requirements and distribute them to teachers.
- Ask to attend faculty meetings, including meetings of the school district's school media specialists -- find out what they need from you, if they're interested in collaborative work.
- Invite the school librarian out to lunch - they can be your best friend in the school system.
- Create a card with your name, phone number, email address, website - easy contact information to give to school staff.

Take a Field Trip

Leave the library and meet with community groups and service agencies that share the same target audience. Hop in the car, bus, or taxi and drive around to see what organizations, businesses, religious institutions, or public agencies exist to serve your target population. Keep notes and put together a list with addresses, names, phone numbers, then introduce yourself to them, explain yourself - reach out to them.

Where's Waldo the Community Leader?

All communities have natural or "unofficial leaders"; these are often the people whose names you will hear mentioned repeatedly. Ask someone to introduce you. These leaders are connected and can help you within the community.

Schmooze

You know someone, your staff knows other people, partners know even more people – get them talking to you and to each other. It will help build trust and give you a better chance of forming an ongoing relationship with people you are introduced to. Personal connections mean that they will be more likely to recommend the library. Always update contacts and occasionally ask current contacts if there are other individuals or groups in the community that you should reach out to.