

Lobbying and Political Advocacy: Lessons for Transportation Librarians

Transportation Librarian's Roundtable

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Two Journal Articles

1. Million, A. J., & S. Bossaller, J. (2015). Strike while the iron is hot: Change management in the context of a new political administration. *Journal of Library Administration*, 55(2), 92-113.
2. Million, A. J., & Bossaller, J. (2020). Lobbying and Political Advocacy: A Review of the Literature and Exploratory Survey of State Library Associations. *The Political Librarian*, 4(2), 8.

Article One

- In 2013, Missouri elected a new Secretary of State (SoS)
- Shortly after assuming office, the new Secretary completely restructured the library
- This was unexpected
- My paper presents it as an ineffective case of change management

Background

- In 1991, to increase the visibility of the Missouri State Library, it moved from the Department of Higher Education to the Secretary of State's Office
- This gave the Secretary of State authority to enact unilateral changes
- Prior changes were rare
- Upon taking office, the SoS asked that staff reapply for their jobs
- He then rehired them, but undertook a restructuring just 3 months later that eliminated 13 positions

What Does the Literature Say?

- Stueart and Moran (2007) argue bureaucracies are stable, but during periods of turbulence, organic organizations perform more effectively (Burns & Stalker, 1961)
- Elected officials may see librarians as bureaucrats, because they are funded by government and subject to it's rules
- Librarians see themselves as professionals
- Strike (1993) defines a profession as a guild of practitioners who are ceded significant control over their practice because they possess and are masters of a knowledge base that is sufficiently esoteric such that other forms of social control are less efficient
- This justifies autonomy
- **Librarians and knowledge professionals know best about their work and change managers should act accordingly**

My Study

- Seven semi-structured interviews with people involved in the restructuring of the Missouri State Library and FOIA request for emails
- Created themes by looking for patterns in the interviews
- No model of change management focused on professionalism and autonomy
- Found five themes:
 1. Discourse and communication
 2. Bureaucracy, authority, and hierarchy
 3. Professionalism
 4. Values and missions
 5. Creativity and innovation

Findings

- Discourse and communication related to the top-down approach taken by the SoS and his not soliciting feedback
- Bureaucracy, authority, and hierarchy had to do with the authority of the SoS
- Professionalism related to how librarians felt they were best prepared to make these changes and possessed overlooked domain knowledge
- Values and missions showed there were conflicts about objectives
- Creativity and innovation showed that the SoS was focused on trying to be innovative, but his plans were ill-conceived

Conclusions

- The models of change management we examined (Armstrong, 2007; Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Kotter & Cohen; 2002, Thurley, 1979; Beckhard, 1969; Lewin, 1951) failed to account for professionalism and bureaucracy
- There is tension inherent in top-down, mandated change
- Changes should be informed
- To determine if change makes sense, in government, professionals need to make their voices heard

Article Two

- No prior study had documented the lobbying and advocacy practices of state library associations
- We surveyed the legislative chairs of state library associations and the Chief Officers of State Library Associations
- My paper examined these practices
- We also contextualized lobbying and advocacy with legal and funding considerations

Background

- Librarians have a history of trying to be neutral
- However, libraries are funded by public dollars and already advocate for themselves
- Four historical phases in funding (Jaeger et al., 2013)
 1. The local years
 2. The wartime years
 3. The funding years
 4. The intervention years
- As a result, funding programs are opportunistic and lack a coherent national policy (Jaeger et al, 2017)
- Federalism also plays a role in shaping funding and advocacy

Professional Associations

- National funding is limited
- Most public library funding comes from localities
- State associations, friends of the library groups, EveryLibrary, and others take lead at state and local level
- **Professional associations are tasked with most lobbying advocacy**
- The *Lobbying Disclosure Act* defines lobbying as contacts and efforts in support of such contacts, including preparation and planning activities, research and other background work that is intended, at the time it is performed, for use in contacts, and coordination with the lobbying activities of others
- Tax status influences lobbying: 501©3, 501©3, and 501©6 status

Tax Statuses and Regulations

- I am going to skip over this
- Read my paper for more information, and keep in mind I don't say much about state and/or organizational rules
- As transportation librarians, we can advocate for certain things, **but work should be done to figure out how and what in a systematic way**

Advocacy

- While all lobbying is advocacy, not all advocacy is lobbying
- Advocacy is any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others
- Examples:
 - Public education
 - Regulatory work
 - Litigation
 - Work before administrative bodies
 - Voter registration
- Advocacy can be done by public-sector employees in some capacity

Literature Review

- Lobbying and advocacy occurs for more than funding: examples include Carla Hayden, K-12 libraries, and anti-censorship
- Most academic literature focuses on practical guidance
- Nothing talks about special or transportation libraries, that I know of, so there's a need to look at this!

Research Study

- Sent a survey to all 50 state library associations and COSLA representatives
- Asked five research questions
- There were 35 respondents representing 31 states
- Most were 501©3 organizations (n=22), eight were 501©6 organizations, and three were both
- No nationally generalizable findings, but it is arguably the best data available to the profession

How Do Associations Lobby and Advocate?

- Most advocate for library services and users but not themselves
- Examples respondents brought up included:
 - Fighting proposals cutting taxes for library services and construction
 - The arts
 - Reductions in state aid
- National issues that affect libraries and library users, such as net neutrality, rural broadband, and copyright transfer were listed as priority items
- Some could not advocate

How Do Associations Set Priorities?

- There were varying methods to set priorities
- Typically by committee
- **The top priority for legislative committees was, unsurprisingly, funding**
- Respondents described looking to ALA, lobbyists, and their state librarians for leadership on national issues and their members for local problems

When are Lobbyists Hired?

- State library associations hired lobbyists and worked with a variety of professional groups, individuals, and organizations to accomplish goals
- Most (n=20) of our respondents invested in lobbying and political advocacy by hiring lobbyists
- While **thirteen** associations did not have a lobbyist, **nine** hired one part-time, **six** hired one full-time, and **five** employed more than one full-time lobbyist to communicate directly with legislators

Do Associations Avoid Politics?

- Most of our respondents said they avoided partisan politics, and this reflects a commitment in librarianship to neutrality
- Some issues were inherently partisan
- Aside from trying to avoid politics, most of our respondents said they still try to seek out common ground with those whom they disagree

Teaching about Advocacy

- Respondents were in agreement librarians should be taught to lobby or engage in political advocacy
- Twenty-five (80%) said that advocacy should “definitely” be taught in LIS programs, and six provided more tentative answers – three answered “probably yes,” two “maybe,” and 1 “probably not”

Discussion

- Four findings:
 - Library advocacy is best framed in terms of users
 - Legislators require continuous education about the issues that affect libraries
 - Libraries depend on political support
 - Association advocacy strategies vary dramatically from state to state
- Respondents recognized the importance of the voice that associations provide in elevating issues that matter to libraries

Best Practices

1. Set priorities by tracking legislation and work with state librarians and maintain an informed legislative committee that is willing to push an agenda through communication with legislators and the public
2. Communicate priorities regularly
3. Create and maintain close relationships with legislators who can craft and fight bills that will impact library users
4. Make an impact by working with like-minded groups and allies
5. Be prepared to shift gears when necessary, and remain nimble in the face of changing priorities

Lessons for Transportation Librarians

- Today's presentation focused on public librarians, but there are some applicable lessons
 - You have knowledge decision-makers do not have
 - Advocacy is different than lobbying
 - It is OK in many circumstances to advocate for issues
 - Brining about effective change requires librarians to speak up
- **The legal circumstances governing and lobbying and advocacy are complex, so there is a need to learn more**
- I suggest a group like D-TRAN take lead
- This guidance would allow future lobbying and advocacy to take place

Lessons for Transportation Librarians

- Knowledge of the law is not enough
- In my paper, I talked about how public librarians advocated, but these strategies are not the best for transportation
 - Brainstorming session for which groups do what
 - This information is required to successfully bring about change and elevate issues that matter
- **Let's open the floor to discussion on this topic**
- I will conclude my presentation after we spend some time talking about what advocacy in this space might look like

Conclusion

- To drive change, the people with knowledge about the value of transportation information must elevate it
- Investment in transportation libraries depends on decision-makers

Conclusion

- I started my career as a transportation librarian
- An ongoing issue is the question of how to get support for information resources and knowledge networks
- Hopefully, my research can help you think about addressing this issue
- Last thoughts:
 - What limitations exist on lobbying and advocacy in the transportation information space?
 - Who should do what and where?
 - Ultimately, it is up to you to elevate the priority of the things that matter and communicate your value