

STRETCHING: MAKING A LITTLE MONEY GO ...

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Money. Don't we all wish we had more, especially in a small town or rural library, where budgets have been strained so greatly in recent years. A comment recently heard at a rural librarians' gathering indicates that as libraries go broke, librarians become bitter and burnt out. The three "b's" which relate to yet another "b", the budget.

What can be done to turn this situation around? Rural libraries are actually more flexible than the larger urban library in that there is a substitute available for cash, and that is time. Not necessarily your time, except in organizing people to help. Rural areas have a history of citizen activity and volunteerism, and with a rethinking of a library's direction, the time people are willing to donate can be used to find ways to assist financially.

Although there are a number of publications available which give valuable aid in saving dollars, (some are listed in the bibliography), it is not possible for a rural library, historically understaffed, to carry out all of the suggestions offered. A Friends group is, of course, one of the ways in which libraries have marshalled the assistance of interested volunteers, but there may be others who will help. Thinking through the library's priorities, and approaching individuals and groups with special interests, is a way of

getting things done without necessitating a large cash outlay. A number of examples of this creative process of matching people with library needs is given below.

What local organizations meet regularly in your building? Why not ask them to donate funds for purchase of materials in their area. For example, if there is a local kite-flying club, why not suggest that they purchase books on kite-flying for the library. Or suggest that money be donated to the library for purpose. An added advantage is that groups such as this one will begin to think of the library as a place which relates to their own interests, and not just a meeting room.

Similarly, the local Marine or Agricultural Extension agent should be asked to keep an eye out for free or low cost materials. If they know what your library is specifically in need of, in areas such as small business, animal husbandry, pet care or consumer issues, they can frequently provide excellent materials.

Sales of used materials, or trade-ins of paperbacks for new or used materials, are two ways often cited in which money can be saved. Try going one step further, and ask the bookstore owner to watch for materials for you. Used book stores should not be shunned. The help of the bookstore staff should be enlisted to ensure that you are notified when books in subjects you are interested in come in.

Be on the lookout for used equipment and machinery. Sources include federal and state surplus property warehouses, auctions for companies going out of business, and secondhand stores. While you cannot hope to attend all of these functions and peruse all of these places, the auction house may be willing to keep you informed, as may the owner of the local second-hand store,

when something you need comes in. Items which are particularly good buys are used file cabinets, office furniture, and paperback shelving and display racks. Obviously, you need to make the final determination as to whether your library is going to purchase an item, but it helps to know what is available.

Cooperate with local organizations when for special projects. For example, the local museum or historical society might be willing to help in preparing an index to a local history collection. Often, volunteers can be found to type index cards, assist in inventorying a collection of newspapers, or sorting and labeling photographs. A local garden club might be willing to rejuvenate neglected library grounds as a civic benefit. Ask a couponing club to save labels for a project such as the Campbell's "Labels for Education" program. A local service organization might be interested in a drive for recyclable materials, such as aluminum or newspapers, with proceeds to go for library materials in the subject area of alternative energy.

Rural libraries are typically under-represented in grants received from both private and public sources. No project is too small for funds, if it is worthwhile. Many granting agencies, in these times of small budgets, look more favorably upon smaller requests, as it allows them to get more from their own budget. Check upon grants for specific proposals, such as indexing a newspaper instead of a whole collection, or creating a local history collection in one specific area, such as logging or mining, rather than trying to get enough money to index the entire local history collection. Your chances of completing the work are better if it is accomplished in small increments, rather than attempting to get funding for one large project which will strain resources already overtaxed.

Sometimes, the act of writing a grant proposal, time-consuming though it may be, will focus the library's request to the extent that different agencies will fund different portions of an application. For example, a grant written by a small public library for funds for constructing a meeting room, purchasing audio-visual equipment and weatherizing the existing building was rejected. However, sufficient publicity was generated locally that the weatherization program was funded by another agency. The purchase of the needed equipment was made possible by both private individuals and local service organizations.

Finally, use the library. Use it to look up sources of grants, articles on fund-raising, and to act as a repository for this kind of information so that other local groups and individuals interested in finding ways to generate funds will look to you for assistance. Let your state library know what your needs are, and keep up your contacts there in order to keep informed as to what help is available. Although it may sometimes seem like it, you are not alone. There is guidance available.

The premise of this article is that "time is money." Many people have already used their time to describe ways to raise funds, to manage a tight budget, and many others are willing to give of their time in order to help libraries faced with financial problems, and will consider it a privilege. By creatively thinking through what your needs and desires are, and combining forces with groups and individuals in your community and beyond, library service can flourish despite cutbacks and tight funds.

PUBLICATIONS TO START WITH

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