

## TABLE TOPICS: TAKING LIBRARY ISSUES TO THE PUBLIC

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In 1982, the need for a luncheon program for Friends and Trustees at the Wisconsin Library Association (WLA) convention prompted development of a series of programs called "Table Topics." Positive responses of users at that convention and other works during 1982 suggested that this series of topics could serve programming needs for trustees, librarians and friends groups throughout the nation.

In use, "Table Topics" demonstrate a tremendous ability to stimulate thoughtful communication between individuals of diverse knowledge and experience. The opportunities they offer for information and experience exchange between users make them particularly valuable for fostering communication among and between trustees, librarians, and friends groups within the library. But their portability also gives them the potential for performing outside the library . . . as programs which take vital library issues to the membership of other organizations.

"Table Topics" are easy-to-use packaged programs which stimulate and manage discussion on issues of current concern to the library. Their design is simple; they provide seven different information cards and a carefully coordinated question card for each topic. Directions to users are printed on the front of an envelope which stores the cards for each topic.

To use "Table Topics," the program organizer simply distributes envelopes containing sets of cards to discussion groups of eight to ten participants, reviews the printed directions (which calls for a one hour discussion time), keeps track of the time, and at the end of the discussion period, calls on groups in succession for capsule summaries of major points or conclusions.

The three topics of this series: "Censorship, Taking a Stand"; "Living with Reduced Budgets"; and "New Roles for Volunteers"; can be used individually or together as programs for luncheon or dinner meetings, general meetings or workshops. Each topic supplies questions/information cards for eight participants. A set of three topics adequately serves 24-30 users.

Content of questions supplied to each discussion by the questions-card holder are tied closely to content of the seven different information cards supplied to discussion participants. For example, in "Censorship, Taking a Stand," discussion focuses extensively on what constitutes censorship. Information supplied to participants highlights the opinions of Justices of the Supreme Court in the landmark Island Trees (1982) censorship case and includes the court's comments to local school boards on their liability in censorship decisions.

Questions for "Living with Reduced Budgets," focus discussion on challenges brought to public libraries by alternative information centers and changes in tax-payers attitudes toward funding of public services. In use, questions for this topic stimulate examination of anti-intellectualism as a factor influencing the financial support given to public libraries. Much of the information supplied to users in this program centers on the debate over alternative methods for funding library services and their implications for the future of free libraries.

"New Roles for Volunteers" questions how monetary constraints on government have changed the use of volunteers in public libraries and examines the organizational structure behind volunteer efforts. Information cards focus on future service needs and uses for library staff and library volunteers.

The potential outreach use of "Table Topics" makes them somewhat unique in the marketplace. Their easy-to-use format and carefully coordinated content give libraries, regardless of size or location, opportunities for reaching out and taking vital library issues to local constituents.

"Table Topics" are carefully designed to stimulate thought, to increase public knowledge and involvement with library issues, and to generate creative and problem-solving attitudes toward issues of vital concern to modern public libraries in both urban and rural settings. How they are used, will depend to a great degree on whether or not librarians and other members of the library family see value in taking current library issues into the public forum within and outside the library.

Topics of this "Table Topics" series focus attention on censorship, library funding, and roles of volunteers. New topics, scheduled for release in 1984 will include such titles as: "The Library's Role in Vanquishing Illiteracy" and "Rules and Roles for Library Lobbyists."

Copies of the first series of "Table Topics" are available from the publisher: W-G Publishing, P.O. Box 225, Pewaukee, WI 53072, or from distributors to the library market. Prepaid orders mailed directly to the publisher (checks payable to W-G Publishing) are mailed without handling or postage charges. Sets of three different or the same titles retail for \$9.95, individual titles are available at \$3.50 each.