

Techniques
and tips for
trustee
success

Cathi
Alloway,
Consultant



Working With Elected Officials



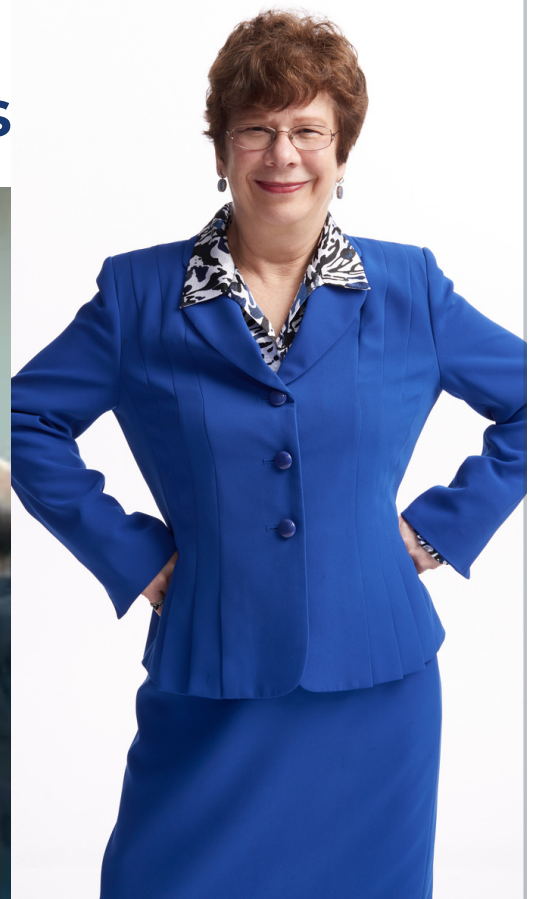
Welcome to the session, Working with Elected Officials. Thanks for joining me; I'm Cathi Alloway, a consultant with Library Strategies Consulting Group and a resident of State College, PA and am glad to be back working with NJ libraries.

Today's presentation emphasizes connecting with local elected officials, since 99% of NJ library revenue comes from local sources. But these tactics also work with state and even federal officials.

10,000 Hours of Government Meetings



Halfmoon Township, PA



I was a public library administrator for over 30 years and retired from fulltime work in 2021. In 2 of my jobs, the library was a department of a local government entity and I was required to attend many muni meetings. In fact, my last job, Schlow Library in State College, was funded by a coalition of 6 townships, so I was required to attend many many meetings of the "Centre Region Council of Governments." In addition to my experience, I asked over a dozen trusted colleagues for input for this talk today, including township supervisors and community activists. Not surprisingly, their advice was similar, and I've summarized and organized our collective wisdom for you today.

Agenda

Elected Official Profile - Who Are They?

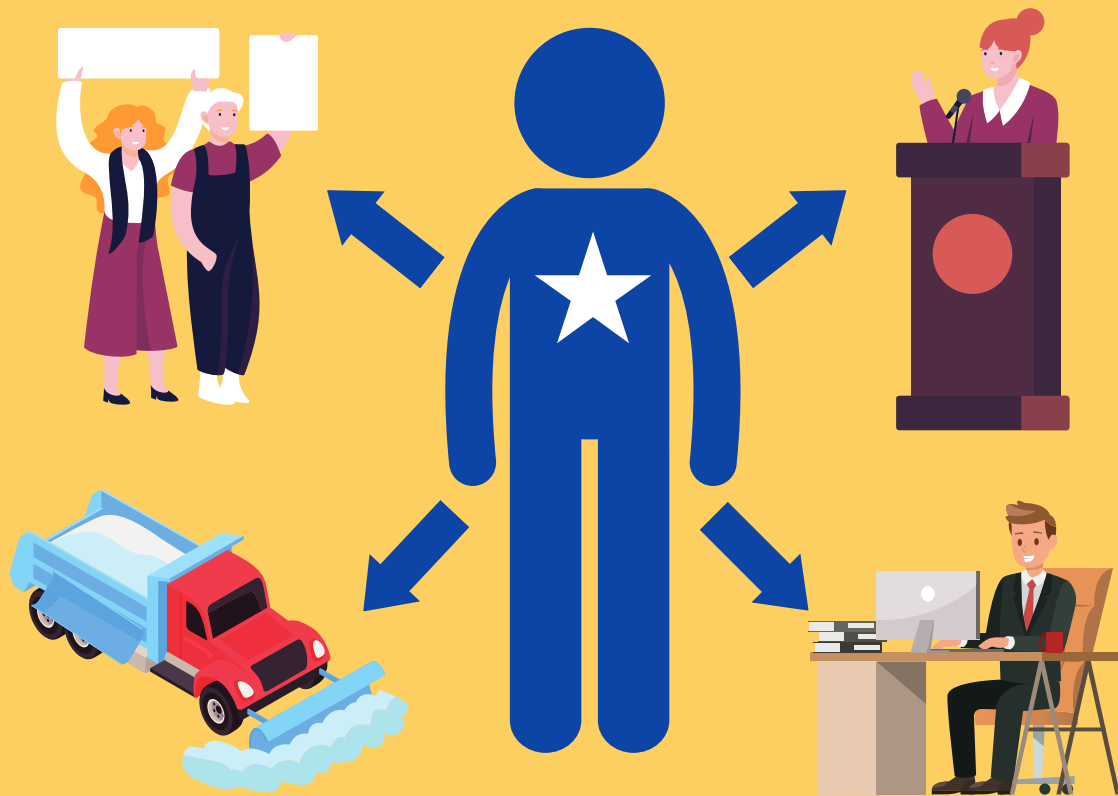
3 Steps/9 Best Practices:

- **Super-Trustee Habits**
- **Build Relationships**
- **Communication Skills**



The information and stories I share are primarily from my PA experience and colleagues, but has been customized for NJ, where I have completed a variety of consulting jobs over the years. We will discuss the reality of being an elected officials, and then get into the three areas of best-practices: you will learn to be a community-minded library trustees, and how to build personal relationships and effective communication skills. with EOs.

Elected Official = Tough Job



Let's start with a look at elected officials - who they are and what they do. Only about 3% of Americans have ever held an elected office because it's hard work and now, is viewed as disreputable. According to Pew Research Center, the majority of people think most politicians run for self-interest, only 15% say they run for the public good. NJ has 21 counties and 564 municipalities and I have a different view from the poll. Based on my experience, many of local elected officials ARE dedicated to public service. They endure midnight phone calls, angry residents, arcane municipal law, campaigning, and more, dealing with many different constituencies, (citizens, fellow officials, paid staff, contractors...) and have to keep government services going in challenging situations.

Elected Official = Everyone Wants Something From You*



***And will be upset if they don't get it**

Creator: Robin Nelson
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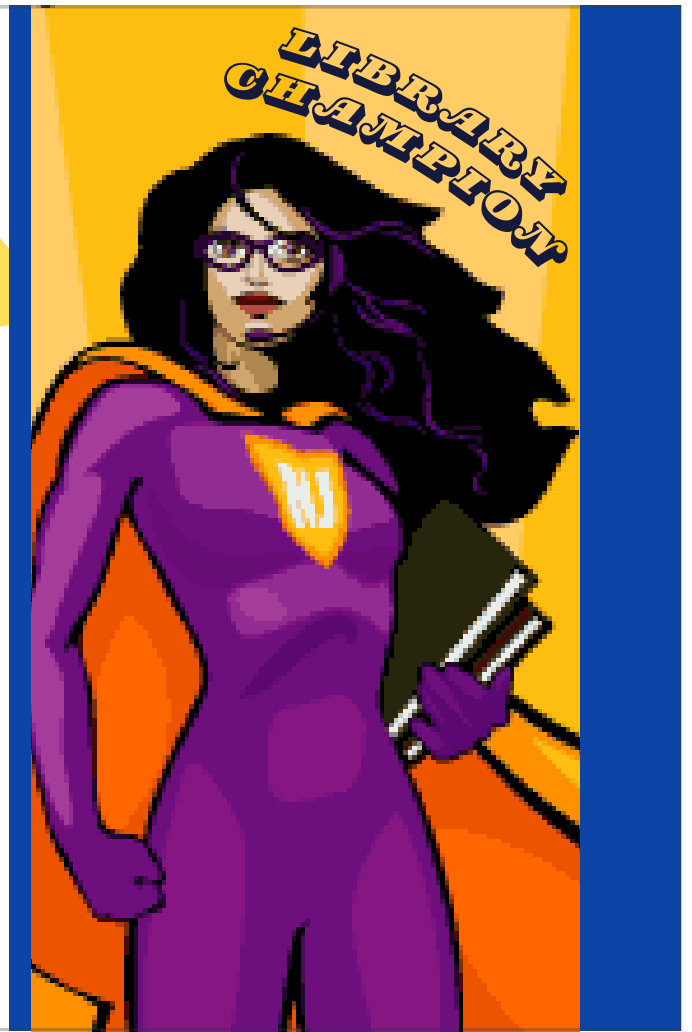
Early in my career, before I was a library director, I saw that my bosses were often deferential, anxious, and edgy about interactions with elected officials. As a library manager, I was conditioned to jump when a county commissioner or township supervisor called or visited the library for any reason. We worried - did we solve the problem, make a good impression?! Did I do anything to make hurt our library appropriation or reputation intact?! But I gradually shifted from fear to appreciation and even respect. The best practices seem simple, but the execution requires effort.

Step One: Be A Super Trustee

Use the library

**Know community
issues**

**Deliver your elevator
speech**



The first 3 tactics are about YOU, the trustee. You need to champion the library. I know many of you are appointed by elected officials as trustees. There may even be a few of you volunteered for generic civic service, wanting the sewer or mosquito control authority but you got a library board appointment. However you got here, you have entered a special space in community life, and I thank you all for your work on behalf of public libraries. PS - graphic from the renowned NJ "Super Librarian" marketing campaign of the - 90s.



USE THE LIBRARY

*"All board members
must have and use their
library card."*

*Dennis Hameister, Township Supervisor,
Harris Township, PA*

USE THE LIBRARY: From my friend, Denny. You should use the library, drop in and visit at a variety of times, watch a storytime or program - even 30 minutes a month will give you insights and info you need to do your job and ability to champion the library.

(Story about "Ronny", a special needs adult with physical and behavioral challenges who was observed being treated well at the library by an elected official).

FOLLOW COMMUNITY ISSUES

“Develop services and resources to help address...get on municipal committees or task forces...”

Rich Bowra, Retired Executive Director, Dauphin County Library System, PA and Library Consultant



Photo: Fanwood, NJ Website

KNOW ABOUT COMMUNITY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES. In 2012, the Fanwood NJ Memorial Library was a beacon of light after Hurricane Sandy. It was a safe haven for over 5,000 people for a week, with a natural gas generator and functioning internet that allowed people to stay warm, get online and charge their devices. Residents could contact FEMA, friends and family. Many other NJ and NY libraries did the same.

Govpilot, a government tech company, says some of the most prevalent challenges for local governments are natural disasters, aging infrastructure, opioid use and economic declines. How can a library help in those areas? Hurricane photo exchange, heat relief shelter,

Idaho telehealth example, social services. The staff and board can position the library is a valuable partner in tackling community issues.

DELIVER YOUR ELEVATOR SPEECH



*Make the elevator speech
“your personal library
story. Why are you a
trustee? What are you
hoping to accomplish in
your community?”*

*Denise Sticha, Executive Director,
Centre County Library and Historical
Museum, PA*

You've got reservations at the VUE Rooftop Bar at the Claridge Hotel in Atlantic City and whoa, is that - Sen. Cory Booker on the elevator you're going to enter?

Make sure you have your elevator speech, a persuasive and concise summary of your experience and purpose. Tell Cory why you love the library and the federal grant you got last year.

"Hi, I'm Cathi, and I am a library trustee for the best library in NJ! We're proud to be the only free internet lab in the community, heavily used by many residents, and it's possible because of a federal LSTA grant for JerseyConnect..."

Step Two: Relationships

**Go to municipal
meetings**

**Attend their
community events**

**Support, empathy,
GRATITUDE**

Photo: Monmouth County,
mycommunitysource.com



This is about the ONE BIG THING I want you to take home and remember: to succeed with elected officials, you need to slowly build a RELATIONSHIP of familiarity with them where they know and trust you. This is the true key to success, and I'll elaborate on each step. The trustees AND library director should be sharing this responsibility.



Photo: Avalon NJ Borough Council, Avalonboro.net

ATTEND MORE MEETINGS!

Not just when you are asking for money!

- Heartwarming stories
- Transparency about problems
- Hot topics and trends
- Observe and absorb
- Arrive early for chitchat

Nancy Davis, retired owner/consultant with the Ivy Group, and others advised that trustees request time at municipal meetings to give short reports, making sure "elected officials have reliable information about key issues, such as library collection policies and book banning procedures." Former PA township supervisor Steve Miller advised giving a heads up about budget or expense problems. Library director often does this BUT a trustee can go along or alternate, go 3-4 times a year in addition to the budget request meeting. They need to know that the board is high-functioning! My COG reports, trustees to munis... Rotate; they get curious if you show up without a report!



**ATTEND
THEIR
EVENTS**



"Attend benefit golf outings...try to get close to them and politely get their ear when you can"

Rich Bowra

Josh Berk, Library Director at the Bethlehem PA PL said, as did many others, "engage with EOs on a regular basis, not just when you need something...be that rare person who doesn't come to them only with a complaint or ask." He admits he's not great at it, but this is where trustees can help. Go to the charity golf or fly-fishing tournament, the mayor's pierogi booth at the county fair...gives you a connection to talk about, builds relationships. Takes time and effort.



RELATIONSHIP EVENTS

- Takes time, some \$
- Board - divide and conquer
- Slow but steady familiarity and trust
- Make friends with staff

"Give elected officials exposure - at storytimes, new program or service launch, even create events that can honor and showcase them; let them speak."

*Steve Miller, former
Supervisor,
Ferguson Township, PA*

Go to their campaign or meet-and-greet events, and create library event opportunities for them. Public expressions of gratitude that showcase your EOs really work. Libraries have done a number of things: ask EOs to attend the volunteer banquet, read at storytimes, open the doors of the annual booksale...ALWAYS give them a few minutes to speak. Some county systems or regional consortia will have legislative breakfasts where they thank the EO, let them talk, showcase library donors and partners.



Before, after and during budget season - thank them.
(Schlow anniversary and picture books named for elected officials story.)

Step Three: Communications

Tell the Library story

**Library = government
services satellite office**

Recruit citizen advocates





STORYTELLING

- **Children**
- **Job-seekers**
- **Disabled**
- **Volunteers**
- **Book clubs**
- **Program impact**
- **Social contacts**
- **Personal growth**
- **Inspiring authors**
- **Audio experiences**



**New Jersey ANCHOR Property
Tax Relief Program**



GOVERNMENT SERVICES

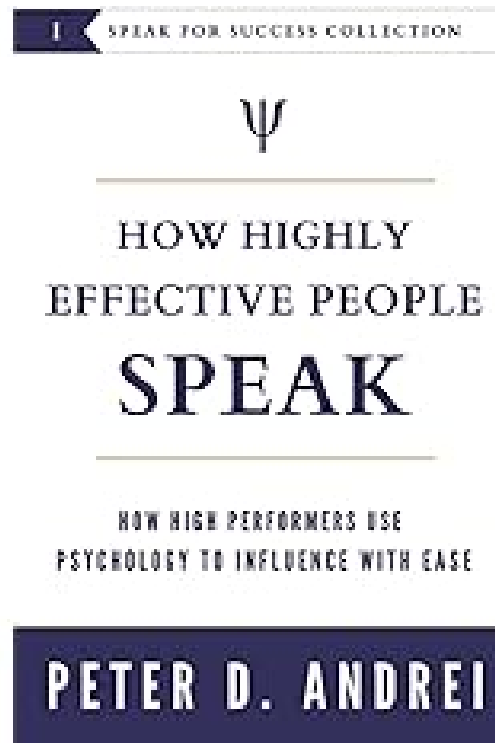
*"We're posting flyers from
our state Senator's office
about informational events
and sources."*

*Brady Clemens, District Consultant,
Central PA District Library Center*

Libraries are positioned to provide something truly valuable for our elected officials - namely, helping them in connecting residents to government services. First, we can distribute information our local and state EOs are trying to push out...it could be a flyer about a property tax/rent rebate clinic at a township building....

Second, EOs don't realize how many offices REQUIRE COMPUTERS for unemployment filing, taxes, license applications, permits - many offices have few or no open hours and you can only do things online! And can't fill out the forms on phones.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS



Dig deeper with these two recommended titles. They will really help you with the chit-chat skills to build familiarity and trust, and navigate the conversations when you disagree, i.e. book banning.

RECRUIT CITIZEN ADVOCATES



Virginia Squier's middle school students have been very effective advocates. Don't underestimate the impact of youth.

Nine Steps for RELATIONSHIPS with Elected Officials

1. **Use the Library**
2. **Know community issues**
3. **Deliver your elevator speech**
4. **Go to municipal meetings**
5. **Attend their events**
6. **Show empathy and gratitude**
7. **Tell the Library story**
8. **Share Library role in government services**
9. **Recruit other citizen advocates**



When It Doesn't Work

- Listen calmly, respectfully
- Identify common ground or compromise territory
- Offer solutions
- Educate
- Rally supporters
- Take a long view



Strategies for really difficult situations with elected officials....

Techniques
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www.linkedin.com/in/cathialloway

Thank you so much for your volunteer work as trustees, and I'd be happy to take questions or you can share your success stories.