

# Expanding Community Connections

## Goals

In 2011, leaders at Solano County Library, headquartered in Fairfield, California, saw a growing need for staff at all eight branches to prioritize community engagement, and a district-wide stakeholder summit confirmed the importance of taking action sooner rather than later. This new strategic directive increased efforts to get out into the community and fueled participation in the Geek the Library community awareness campaign.

“In order to position the library as something vital for a healthy community,” said Community Relations Coordinator Ann Miller, “we don’t need to tell the people in the library about what makes us valuable, we need to get the message to everybody in the community.”

The Geek the Library campaign aligned well with what the library was already doing, such as its Outreach Ambassador Program, which trains staff to talk to the public about the library. Most importantly, Miller added, was that the campaign solidified her team’s goals for making the library more visible and relevant throughout its wide and diverse coverage area.

An additional goal was to expand the library’s support network—something Miller points to as a major benefit to running the campaign.

## AT A GLANCE

- Service area: 630.6 square miles
- Service area population: 360,323
- Staff: 97 full-time, 19 part-time

Her approach was simple: Look beyond the usual suspects. For example, when given the opportunity to work with one of the local newspapers for a ‘Geek of the Week’ article series, the Solano team worked hard to find interesting personalities with broad networks that were not already connected with the library.

“They all had this wide network of people who knew them, so our hope was that their pictures in the paper would elicit a lot of interest—and they did. Not only did people see their picture, but also their link to the library. All of this has improved our network of contacts because now these people are associated with the library in one way or another.”



## Campaign

Pre-launch planning and educational efforts were critical. In addition to visiting every branch to educate and engage staff, Miller took the time to present campaign information to other library

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# Geek the Library Case Study: Solano County Library *Continued*

stakeholders, including the library foundation and the Friends of the Library, the library advisory boards and managers of the local county departments. According to Miller, this foundation work—made possible by the support of the library’s director—set the stage for a smooth launch.

Without additional funds for advertising, Miller and her team wanted to kick off the local campaign in a very public way. To be successful, they used the infrastructure and resources already in place to the fullest potential. For example, the team worked with an existing community partner and rallied the library volunteer troops more often and in new ways. It was an exercise in delegating, added Miller. “If you really want to make an impact, you have to think big, and that will necessitate giving up some control because there just aren’t enough hours in the day.”

The launch was an afternoon party at a local shopping mall—complete with live entertainment, interactive elements and staff and volunteers excited about talking to community members. The event was a huge success, said Miller, as it gave people involved a taste of how the campaign could further community engagement and it initiated a nice buzz outside of the library building.

The team worked with a volunteer who organized a lineup of entertainers who were willing to donate their time, but integral to the success was the marketing manager at the mall who provided the signage and promotion, and assistance with tables and a stage. “I learned to not try to do it all myself and trust in people to do what they do best.”

## Outcome

An important outcome of the local campaign, which wrapped up in June 2011, was the immense learning experience for both library leadership and staff. It provided a unique opportunity to develop an approach for a large-scale campaign—and test out marketing and advocacy tactics—that the team can use moving forward for similar initiatives.

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Overall, added Miller, the campaign was a success because the community really took notice, the library’s brand was elevated and it will probably be easier to get attention from the public in the future. She also mentioned that a recent local library ballot measure passed with an 80 percent approval rate.

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