



KAREN LUTTRELL COMMUNICATIONS

Strategic copywriting. Words for action and results.

Case Study: Advocacy and Media Relations Friends of the Ottawa Public Library (FOPLA)

Challenge:

- The City of Ottawa was considering deep budget cuts
- The proposed cuts would force the Ottawa Public Library to close community branches, reduce hours and resource collections at remaining branches, cut community programs offered by the library, and lay off many staff members.
- The library had already faced a year over year series of budget cuts and could not operate effectively with further budget reductions
- FOPLA, a charity mandated to support the library undertook an urgent advocacy campaign

Solutions:

- Developed a full advocacy and community mobilization plan
- Plan included key messages to be used in a wide variety of communications materials, such as letters to the editor, media releases and media interviews, speeches to city council, postcards, flyers, websites, and social media sites (Facebook)
- Messages were succinct and memorable and highlighted the societal benefits of a properly funded library

Results:

- Massive public response in support of the library included thousands of postcards mailed to City Council
- Compelled by overwhelming public support for the library, Council broke a cycle of successive annual cuts and maintained the library budget intact.
- The mayor offered recognition certificates to FOPLA volunteers
- FOPLA won a number of awards for it's ongoing support of the library, including the advocacy campaign. Awards included Ontario's inaugural June Callwood Award for Outstanding Achievement in Voluntarism, presented by Premier Dalton McGuinty

See the following pages for talking points and a media release from the advocacy campaign

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For immediate release
December 3, 2007

Friends of the Ottawa Public Library Call on Council for Vision and Planning NOT Cuts and Crumbling Buildings.

Ottawa, Ontario – Members of the Friends of the Ottawa Public Library Association (Friends) addressed the Ottawa City Council Committee of the Whole today, calling for an end to the pattern of budget cuts that have been so damaging to the city's library system.

In response to the massive outpouring of public concern over proposed cuts that would close community branches, City Council passed a motion to reduce the cuts. However, the new proposal would still see important library services for youth, seniors, new immigrants and small businesses cut or reduced and it would prevent or delay the replacement of the crumbling and partially closed main branch with a new, safe, and effective building. The motion also spoke only to the 2008 budget and did not offer community branches any protection in future years.

"Library funding has been too long neglected. Now the main branch is actually crumbling around us. You can see the library floor sinking," says Lori Nash, President of the Friends of the Ottawa Public Library Association. "It's not enough to simply stop branches from shutting their doors completely. The doors must be open when and where families need their library. And the doors must open onto well-staffed and well-stocked libraries in safe and structurally sound buildings."

In her presentation Ms. Nash called on Council to step up and offer a vision for long-term, stable, and strong library services and to commit to end library budget cuts. "We need more books, more Internet terminals and more librarians because we need more of the opportunities they bring us. We can accept no more threats of closure. No more crumbling buildings. No more cuts," Ms. Nash told City Council.

Ms. Nash's ongoing message not to cut library services has been backed by massive community support in the form of SOS Ottawa Public Library postcards, emails and letters to City Councillors, petitions, newspaper coverage and letters to the editor, and concerned residents attending the meeting in SOS campaign t-shirts or buttons and addressing Council to advocate for library services.

"Ottawa residents who value our libraries as safe places to gather, learn and build the collective knowledge and prosperity of our city will not be complacent and will not accept any more cuts," concerned resident and Friends volunteer Karen Luttrell told Council.

Details about the SOS Ottawa Public Library campaign are available at the Friends website, including information to help residents tell City Hall they want to keep libraries open and strong this year, next year, and every year. Please see www.ottawapubliclibraryfriends.ca for details.

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For more information, please contact:

Lori Nash, Friends President: lori.nash@rogers.com or 613-824-5385

Karen Luttrell, Friends Member and Volunteer: karen.luttrell@gmail.com or 613-276-4344

KEY MESSAGES AND SUPPORTING TALKING POINTS FOR THE SOS OTTAWA PUBLIC LIBRARY CAMPAIGN

Well-funded libraries build strong communities.

- Libraries are safe places to learn, gather, share information and build community capacity.
- Library branches offer critical support for youth and students, seniors, newcomers to Canada, researchers, small businesses and other important and growing sectors of our community

Cutting the library budget will weaken our economic foundation and devastate the community.

- The Ottawa Public Library operates efficiently, offering high service levels at low cost. However, funding has not increased to keep pace with the growth of our communities.
- Further funding cuts proposed for the 2008 budget will force the library to close 1 in 3 branches, close remaining branches one day a week and fire over 60 employees
- Ottawa residents and businesses simply cannot keep pace in a global knowledge-based economy without access to a strong library service and the research tools it provides.

Current Library services are well used and well loved by Ottawa residents. Please do not cut them.

- Last year alone the Ottawa Public Library recorded almost 5 million visits to its 33 branches. Imagine every single resident of Ottawa visiting their library at least 6 times throughout the year.
- Please don't tell Ottawa residents they must give up one third of their branches and have fewer places to gather, fewer hours to use those facilities, and fewer books and materials to go around.
- Please don't tell Ottawa students they can only research and study 6 days of the week
- Please don't tell Ottawa seniors they can't access large print reading materials
- Please don't tell Ottawa youth in poorer communities that they can't have a safe place to gather for community programming
- Please don't tell small businesses that help the Ottawa economy thrive that they can't access training, research, and best practices through a local library branch.
- **Please do not cut the library services Ottawa residents love and depend on**

Cutting 1 in 3 library branches would devastate Ottawa communities. Please protect our libraries and protect our communities.

SAMPLE LETTER TO MAYOR AND CITY COUNCILORS

RE: SOS Ottawa Public Library

Dear _____

Please protect Ottawa Public Library funding during finalization of the 2008 city budget.

Ottawa library services are well used and well loved by the residents of this city. Last year alone the Ottawa Public Library recorded almost 5 million visits to its 33 branches. Imagine every single resident of Ottawa visiting their library at least 6 times throughout the year and borrowing a total of 10 million books, videos, CDs and other items.

The Ottawa Public Library is cost-effective and world class. It offers a high return on investment for community members. However, funding has not increased to keep pace with the growth of our communities. This has left our libraries stretched to the maximum. And now the city proposes to cut the library budget by 10%.

This library budget cut would be disastrous for the people of Ottawa. We rely on the library for information, Internet access, access to public services, and a safe place to learn, gather and share. These budget cuts would force the library to close 1 in 3 community branches, close remaining branches one day a week, and fire over 60 employees.

I understand that budget decisions are always complex and difficult. Nonetheless, I urge you to consider that Library branches offer critical support for children and youth, seniors, newcomers to Canada, researchers, students, small businesses and other important and growing sectors of our community and our economy. In the current age of rapid global information-based business practices, Ottawa residents simply cannot keep pace without access to a strong library service and research tools. Library branches are at the heart of our community and they form the foundation for our city's growth in a knowledge-based economy. We simply cannot afford to lose them.

Ottawa residents are counting on you to protect the Ottawa Public Library.

Sincerely,

CC: Lori Nash, President, Friends of the Ottawa Public Library