

WE WOULD IF WE COULD, BUT IT'S NOT IN THE BUDGET: SUCCESS STORIES IN THIRD PARTY FUNDING FOR PUBLIC LIBRARY PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

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Given Australia's economic wealth, public libraries across all states and territories are woefully under-funded on a per-capita basis. While changes and improvements to ongoing government funding may take many years of concerted lobbying, library managers and local councils need to be aware of substantial funding opportunities that exist through innovative partnerships in their own localities.

Universities, local employers, professional sport teams and associations and registered clubs are just some of the organisations that are proven or potential partners for public libraries seeking to expand and improve their service offerings. This paper will provide a step-by-step guide for library managers and local councillors who are keen to explore their entrepreneurial sides and seek appropriate, viable, long-term financial partnerships to deliver improved community outcomes. It will also provide case studies of successful funding partnerships to demonstrate the viability of such strategies.

Some examples: Several public libraries in western Sydney are amongst the first in Australia to source significant funding through a partnership with the University of Western Sydney to support after school homework programs targeting high school students. Many more libraries across New South Wales have received support from licensed clubs to run a range of programs and services for community education needs. In Queensland large corporations are looking at state-wide partnerships with public libraries and the state library.

Executed appropriately, these partnerships expand the reach of public libraries while leveraging their unique position and stature within their communities as trusted sources of educational information and services.

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Introduction and Background

Let's start with some facts: Australia's public libraries are the nation's largest voluntary membership organisations counting well over half of the entire nation – nearly 12-million adults and children – as members. (Friends of Libraries Australia, 2007) With more than 1,600 branch buildings serving nearly every community in the nation, they have a tremendous physical reach into their localities. In 2004, the most recent year for which data is available, Australians borrowed more than 176-million items from their public libraries. (State Library of Queensland, 2006) Public library web sites represent by far the most heavily trafficked portions of local council web sites. Research and surveys have also shown that public libraries are among the most trusted public institutions. (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2008) For every dollar invested in public libraries, a “multiplier effect” of about six dollars of benefit to the community is generated. (Friends of Libraries Australia, 2007, 2008, State Library and Archives of Florida, 2005)

Given all of the above, it can easily be argued that public libraries provide as much if not more social good per dollar invested than many other public institutions in the nation. And yet our public libraries are amongst the most underfunded public institutions in the country. On an international scale, they are substantially underfunded compared to our counterparts across the Tasman Sea in New Zealand, as well as numerous other nations, including Denmark and other comparable European economies. This paper will not be investigating the reasons for this chronic underfunding, except to note that, among other factors, public libraries have fallen into the gaps between federal, state, and local funding.

The issues surrounding long-term tax-payer funding of public libraries are politically complex. They will require the engagement of myriad stakeholders in a concerted, long-term effort to build a national strategy for increasing the community building capacity of our public library network. Assuming the nation's advocates for public libraries are able to overcome the challenges of institutional inertia, competing local, regional, and state-based interests, and the territorial arguments of the various library associations, we are likely looking at a five to 10 year process with, of course, uncertainty about the outcome.

In the short-term, what can individual libraries do? The thesis of this paper is that wonderful opportunities exist to grow library budgets, expand services and programs, and, in general, improve the quality of services to local communities. How is this possible when many library budgets are growing only at the rate of inflation, while others are flat or even decreasing? The short answer: by taking matters into their own hands. Based on their powerful and unique position in their local communities, public libraries are uniquely positioned to develop financial and other types of partnerships with local businesses, organisations, clubs, sports teams, and educational institutions.

Many libraries are already pioneering these types of partnerships and getting fantastic results – both economically and also in terms of the connections they are building with their partnering institutions. The rest of this paper will explore some examples of successful partnerships, the skills library staff need to develop to implement these partnerships, and, finally, a step-by-step guide to the process of developing a successful partnership model for public libraries.

What do Partnerships Look Like? Four Examples

1. Fairfield City Library Service yourtutor Program

In 2003 Fairfield City Library Service was the first library in the Southern Hemisphere to bring a new service called online tutoring to its patrons. Full disclosure: The service, called **yourtutor**, was developed by the company that I founded and run, Tutoring Australasia. We worked closely with Fairfield Library staff – and in particular their Community Outreach Librarian for Children and Youth, Carolyn Bourke – to source funding through a previously untapped source of funds: the New South Wales Community Development Expenditure Scheme (CDSE). CDSE is a program whereby registered clubs and RSL's contribute a portion of their profits from poker machines back to community organisations to support important health, education, and recreation initiatives. The initial grant, for about \$10,000, allowed Fairfield to launch **yourtutor** at one of its branches where it was already running a face-to-face homework program.

The CDSE grant is a good example of a partnership, and it is an example that in recent years has been emulated by dozens of libraries across New South Wales to fund a broad range of programs and services that otherwise would not fit in library budgets. The process is straight-forward, with a simple application that can be completed with relatively little effort, and a rapid response time which means libraries usually find out if their applications are successful in as little as eight weeks.

In the case of Fairfield Library, they have taken their idea of a partnership to another level. By 2007, their online homework program had grown to more than three times the size of its initial CDSE funding, and to the library and council's credit, it had managed to incorporate it into its annual budget. However, demand for online tutoring was burgeoning with at least twice as many Fairfield residents seeking to use the service as the license could support. Working creatively with the management team of the library, we tried to think of an organisation or institution that would want to support educational achievement in the greater Fairfield community. We concluded that the ideal partner was the University of Western Sydney, and after several months of discussions, they agreed.

The UWS-Fairfield partnership represents a win-win for both partners and is a true example of a symbiotic relationship. Core to UWS's community engagement mission is to work closely with schools and students in the 13 local government areas its campuses serve and to encourage educational achievement and awareness of tertiary learning opportunities for high school students. UWS is particularly interested in providing additional support and opportunities for students living in disadvantaged areas of Sydney, and Fairfield, with its high population of first-generation Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds has a tertiary education matriculation rate less than half

that of greater Sydney. By partnering with Fairfield Council, UWS is able to achieve its goal of closer ties with the local council, as well, and also to leverage the library's excellent existing outreach efforts to area schools, students, and families.

To make the most of the partnership, a joint marketing effort was initiated, which included a major launch event at the Gough Whitlam Library, Fairfield's main library in Cabramatta. The event was hosted by the library manager, Anne Hall, and the attendees and speakers included UWS Vice-Chancellor Janice Reid, NSW Minister for Western Sydney Barbara Perry, NSW State Library Regina Sutton, and Fairfield Mayor Cr Nick Lalich.

Note: UWS's vision in pioneering this type of community engagement and marketing partnership is now being emulated by a growing number of universities across Australia who are seeking to work with local libraries to increase capacity to generate positive educational outcomes.

2. Mornington Peninsula Library's "Babies Love Books Too" Program

In 2001, Zita Canning, a speech pathologist with the Mornington Peninsula Community Health Service, learned about a Babies Like Books Too project and was inspired to bring the service to her own community. However, funding to realise this vision was non-existent, so, the Mornington Peninsula Hastings Library teamed up with the Community Health Service's Maternal and Child Health division and applied to the Telstra Foundation for a grant.

The Telstra Foundation is a branch of Telstra that provides grants to not-for-profit organisations to support community and educational projects across Australia. The Foundation provided an initial \$20,000 grant that carried the program through its first three years.

At the conclusion of the Telstra Foundation grant, further funding to continue the program was provided by two major local employers: BHP Billiton and Hillview Quarries. As a result, the program has been able to grow from serving 750 babies in the Hastings area in its first year to more than 2,000 babies annually Peninsula-wide today.

Now in its seventh year, the Babies Love Books Too program is funded via the library's budget, assuring that this valuable early literacy program will be available for years to come.

3. ConnectED City Library and Melbourne Citymission Homework Program

This partnership, which is designed to deliver learning support to students who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, involves three key stakeholders: Melbourne Library, Melbourne Citymission, and the University of Melbourne. It's an ambitious program which differs from the others described above in that it does not rely on external financial support to establish or expand a library-delivered program. Instead, its partners contribute to the program in their existing capacities.

Started in June 2005, the program operates as follows: Citymission identifies and refers at risk, young adult clients who could benefit from additional support with their VCE

studies. As the key stakeholder, Citymission covers the operational costs of the program. The library provides a safe, convenient, and accessible physical space for the tutoring and learning support to take place. Library staff also support participants with any needs they may have and provide photo-copying free of charge. The third partner, the University of Melbourne, supplies the volunteer tutors who work with the students. Citymission pays for police checks of all volunteer tutors, trains them and connects each to a student client for quality, one to one tutoring. In 2007, 21 tutors worked with 23 students. The partnership results in not only positive outcomes for young people in need, but heightened awareness of the services and facilities of each partner as well.

4. Upper Murray Regional Library Mobile Library Wireless Broadband

The Upper Murray Regional Library Service covers a large and predominantly rural geographic area, and to do so it maintains three mobile library vans. This project involved two separate pilot programs to implement NextG wireless broadband internet connections into all three mobile vans. Funding for the project was provided by the State Libraries of New South Wales and Victoria (Upper Murray straddles the NSW-Victoria border) as well from a federal program called Networking the Nation.

While this project did not require a long-term funding arrangement, it is noteworthy in that the library managed to bring together three funding organisations to achieve a goal that otherwise might have not been attained. It is important to recognise that this sort of collaboration is achievable, even though each additional stakeholder may add a level of complexity to the design of the project in order for it to meet everyone's objectives. In this case, the goal was clearly defined, and the need to provide a level of Internet access to communities that can only be served by a mobile library service was obvious.

The Right Stuff? Critical Skills to Developing Partnerships

For those familiar with Tom Wolf's historical look at the first generation of astronauts, *The Right Stuff* (later made into a movie with Sam Shepherd and Ed Harris), you are already familiar with the significance of the phrase in the title. In reference to space travel, "the right stuff" refers to a rare quality some astronauts had to remain cool under pressure, know what to do and when to do it, and not to blow it or "auger in" at a critical moment.

Fortunately, when it comes to developing "the right stuff" to successfully implement library partnerships, we're not talking about rocket science. However, there are several essential skills that public librarians need to develop and foster in their staff in order to achieve the kinds of outcomes this paper suggests are possible. All of them fall under the general rubric of entrepreneurship, that is, having a desire to build something new from scratch that creates lasting value.

Within this framework, the first and most important skill is a desire to innovate and to try new things. This may sound obvious, but it is not the most common trait amongst public librarians and it needs to be encouraged and sought out. Before a partnership project can even be considered, library managers need to decide if they and their staff are motivated enough to take on a project with an uncertain outcome, that may require extra hours of work and lead in unexpected directions. Out of the ordinary experiences

are highly prized by some while greatly feared by others. With that said, without giving library staff the opportunity to develop an interest in innovation, it's impossible to know what their capabilities may be. Most of us are capable of far more than our workaday lives ask of us. When opportunities present themselves, we often surprise ourselves by rising to the occasion.

The second key trait is creativity. Library staff need to think creatively about the types of programs, services, or projects they would like to bring to their communities and then identify likely partners who can help them realise their visions. This can be a great task for a small group when done within the context of a series of brainstorming sessions. By involving a number of members of your team, any nervousness or hesitancy about suggesting ideas can be mitigated by sharing them anonymously and giving the group opportunities to provide feedback and develop them. The team approach also works well in this context as these projects will undoubtedly require the "buy-in" of a large portion of the library's staff. If everyone can take some ownership of the project, it's more likely to be successfully implemented.

Finally, librarians need to have some "commercial sense," in the broadest sense of the term. By this I mean an understanding of the values and assets the library brings to a partnership and some knowledge of the types of organisations that are likely to want to support and enhance the library's mission in the community.

It's important to note that none of these skills require any previous experience, business knowledge, or negotiating skills. Enthusiasm, if not outright passion, is the key to developing a successful partnership. By being positive about the good work you are doing and communicating your excitement effectively to likely community partners, you may be surprised by the results you are able to generate.

The Library Partnership Approach: A Step-by-Step Guide

Step 1: Choose an appropriate project. Try to identify a project that is self-contained or that has defined limits. Projects with specific objectives and requirements to achieve desired outcomes work best because it's easier to communicate the benefits to potential partners. It is also much easier to measure outcomes when it comes time to acquit your results to your partner.

Step 2: Assemble your team of key library personnel. Keep in mind the list of key personnel characteristics described above when doing so. Every library has some staff members who will do just what is required in their job description while others are willing and eager to put their best effort into whatever is asked of them. It's also important to task someone as the "owner" of the project so that the process doesn't die a slow "death by committee." All those involved in the process should also be able to speak to the various aspects of the library's service delivery that the project will impact upon.

Step 3: Think strategically about your library's strengths. Every library holds a unique, essential, and yet often under-appreciated role in its community. Consider your library's intangible assets, that is, the population you serve, the physical locations of your buildings, and any unique features of your main library and any branches. These

strengths will be perceived as valuable by potential partners to the extent you communicate and highlight their existence.

Step 4: Identify a short-list of likely partners. Who are the largest employers in your local government area? Are there associations, clubs, sporting groups, universities, or other organisations that have high profiles in the community and would also like to build closer ties with the council and the library? Keep in mind the potential appropriateness of a partnership. For example, are you seeking to develop a series of speakers that will appeal to local business people (who may not be aware of the library's offerings)? The chamber of commerce or a similar business association could be an ideal partner.

Step 5: Prepare your "pitch." Before arranging a meeting with your short-listed prospects, put together a "pitch" or presentation. This should include some background about the library, its membership, circulation, and role in the community. It should also describe exactly what sort of support you are seeking. Generally a financial contribution will be at the centre of the partnership, and it is important to give a clear idea of the size of the commitment you are seeking. It is likely prospective partners will be unaware of the extent or importance of the work the library provides to the audience the partner is seeking to engage. A well executed PowerPoint presentation can go a long way toward telling a story that will whet a potential

Step 6: Hold a launch event. Public events that allow partners to share in the aura of goodwill and community support that surrounds the work the library does are a great way of thanking the partner for their contribution. Depending on the type of project being launched, they're also a great way to raise public awareness of the new service or program you are offering. Finally, they can be a great way to raise the library's profile at the council level, which, in the long-term, can have a positive impact on the library's budget.

Step 7: Follow through. A well-executed partnership has the potential to become a long-term relationship. For this to happen, it's critical to maintain good communication with the partner, keep them engaged with the project, and provide them with ongoing acquittals about the benefits to the community that their support is delivering. This may involve engaging not just your senior library management but also council personnel, including the mayor and other councillors.

Summary and Conclusion

There is a final, critical reason why many different types of organisations may seek to partner with public libraries. The trend in Australia (and internationally) toward socially responsible business and community engagement practices means that most organisations are actively seeking ways to meet their revised missions. Public libraries' unique position in their local communities positions them ideally to leverage this trend to enhance their services and programs. This goes far deeper than the typical sort of corporate sponsorship that museums and other cultural institutions normally pursue. Public libraries' work at the grass-roots level to deliver education-related services to the entire community means that partners can benefit from a level of local engagement that is unique and unmatched by other institutions. It is nothing but wise for Australia's

public libraries to take advantage of this situation to benefit their organisations and the communities they serve.

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BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PRESENTER

Jack Goodman is the founder and chief executive officer of Tutoring Australasia. Tutoring Australasia is the only provider in Australia of live, one-to-one, on demand homework support and tutoring services to public, state, and territory libraries, schools, and departments of education. The company’s service, **yourtutor**, is available at more than 250 library locations in Australia, and more than 200,000 Australian students have connected to expert Australian tutors for live study support in core curriculum subjects. Mr. Goodman received his B.A. (magna cum laude) from Princeton University where he majored in American History. After Princeton Mr. Goodman was one of 40 recipients of Marshall Scholarship from the British Government. He used the scholarship to attend Jesus College, Cambridge University, where he earned an M.Phil. in 17th and 18th century British and American political theory.