

**American Library Association  
LibLearnX  
Hammer, Vise, Lever  
Speakers: Steven Yates, Lisa Varga, Christ Stewart, Jessica Ross**

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>> STEVEN YATES: Hello, everyone.

>> Hi, Steven. Hello. Hello.

>> STEVEN YATES: That's right. It's such a large room.

>> Hello.

>> STEVEN YATES: I'm very glad you're all here. You're welcome to sit wherever you're comfortable, including -- yes, including close to us, but you don't have to.

>> That's nice.

>> STEVEN YATES: You determine your comfort level and join in. So thank you so much for making time in your busy conference schedule to join us here for Hammer, Vise, Lever: Better Tools, Stronger Advocacy.

So this group of people in front of you are only a part of the large group of people who made the work that you're going to hear about happen. So I do want to begin by thanking our fantastic staff for the Committee on Library Advocacy and the Chapter Relations Committee, along with our -- just in general our public policy and advocacy staff and our ALA staff, so many who are working and do -- and provide us with resources and the ability as members to get this great work done that we're going to talk about today.

>> LISA VARGA: Woohoo!

>> STEVEN YATES: So thank you staff. So what are we going to do for the next 75 minutes? Well, we'll tell you. We are going to start by giving you a little bit of insight into who we are. We have a question for you that you will need to answer, so

hopefully you have a device that can read a QR code so you can give us some insight to that. Then we'll hear about the hammer, the vise, and the lever, then we look at your responses, and then we have some questions for you guys but also some discussion, and then we'll share some great resources.

But what one I want to share about before we even get started is listed in -- so if you go into the conference app, you can find our handout, which has a variety of resources we'll talk about later, but one that I'm particularly proud of as chair of Committee on Library Advocacy is the updated ALA Advocacy Action Plan Workbook. So it is -- its digital premiere is this exact moment.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

>> STEVEN YATES: So yes.

(Applause)

>> STEVEN YATES: So that's pretty exciting. And I'm sorry we don't have the names of all of the people who worked on that, but I know we have some in the room, so I hope you are particularly excited to see the work that we have done come to life, and we hope it will be a useful resource for many years to come.

The great thing is that our panel up here are experienced and now how important it is to plan themselves, and so even though you guys haven't seen that great action plan workbook, I promise you, you will find many familiar pieces of the work you do and you'll be describing today in that workbook. But, again, that is a linked resource.

>> LISA VARGA: There's not a quiz; right?

>> STEVEN YATES: There is only --

>> LISA VARGA: We don't have to be quizzed today.

>> STEVEN YATES: -- a Kahoot! quiz.

>> LISA VARGA: Okay.

>> STEVEN YATES: So, yeah, we got to work that EdTech resource in; right? So -- but we will talk about that, but you did not come here to hear just from me. So let's hear more

about our panelists. I want them to introduce themselves, beginning with the hammer.

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: Hi, everyone. Gosh, my parents should have named me that. I'm Lisa Varga, and I am the executive director of the Virginia Library Association. I'm also a member of the ALA Policy Corps. I've served on the Chapter Relations Committee. And I love seeing so many friendly faces here and hopefully getting to meet some new ones, so thank you.

>> STEVEN YATES: Thank you, Lisa. Chris.

>> CHRIS STEWART: Hey, everybody. My name's Chris Stewart. I am the grassroots communications manager at ALA's Public Policy & Advocacy Office, and I am relatively new to ALA. I'm hitting six months next week. Thank you.

(Applause)

>> CHRIS STEWART: But my background is in state and local campaign work, so I tried to help bring that to our grassroots efforts.

>> STEVEN YATES: Excellent. Thank you, Chris. And Jess.

>> JESSICA ROSS: And I'm Jess Ross. I'm the executive director of the Washington County Public Library in Chatom, Alabama. It's a very small, rural community that we serve. And I also serve as the legislative chair for the Alabama Library Association. So very interested in how we all -- what ideas people have for advocacy in your communities and what the needs are. So I'm looking forward to this conversation today. And I guess I'm the lever.

>> STEVEN YATES: Yes. I forgot to say. Yeah, Chris is the vise, and Jess is the lever, but we'll talk more about that in a minute. But -- so and I, of course, need to introduce myself. So I am Steven Yates, chair of the Committee on Library Advocacy. I'm also a part of the ALA Policy Corps and a member of the United for Libraries board of directors, a friend at large. Happy to see some United friends out there. And just a former president of the American Association of School Librarians, as well, and just overall someone who believes in the power of advocacy and wants us to continue having these conversations in today's particularly eventful cultural climate.

So I think the skills that we're talking about today are more and more important.

So here's a question for you. I want you to think about someone that you consider to be an effective advocate, famous or not, libraries or not. I mean, it could be just someone who really was able to transform the offerings at the drink machine in your school library, you know, in your school cafeteria, whatever, just someone that was a particularly effective advocate, and what tool do you feel that they masterfully employed to bring their cause to their side.

So take a couple of moments, if you don't mind, and put your comments there with the full knowledge and understanding that they will anonymously be thrown on the screen later in this session. Give you a couple of seconds to think about that. And I'll tell you my answer to this when we do the share-out in a little while. It's a pretty good story.

>> It's so quiet.

>> It is quiet.

>> STEVEN YATES: Okay. I see lots of people thinking, and I like that. So I think it's time for the hammer.

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: Where is my entry music? I mean, really.

>> JESSICA ROSS: Right?

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: I hope you're all singing it in your heads. Okay?

So part of my job as the executive director for an ALA chapter is to advocate for libraries, and I do that using various tools we're talking about here today. And I think one of the reasons I was asked to be the hammer is because of a hardline tactic that I took with the Virginia Beach City Public School board meetings last September. And I think -- I need to take it back a little bit to the original start of this story in 2013 just to give you an idea of how long we have been dealing with some of these things in Virginia and how that led to my anger that I turned into a productive solution.

So in 2013 we had a parent in Fairfax, Virginia, who wanted Toni Morrison's "Beloved" out of schools. And through a series of her legislative gymnastics, the "Beloved" bill made its way to the Virginia General Assembly in 2016 and 2017 and was vetoed by then Governor McAuliffe both times.

In 2021, education was a key point in our gubernatorial election. It sounds like a lot of you; right? And Laura Murphy, that parent from 2013, just suddenly appeared in an ad on Twitter the day after the gubernatorial debate saying that Governor McAuliffe would not let her be involved in her child's education, an oversimplification and manipulation of the facts, but it got the clicks.

As election season ramped up, we saw a number of people showing up at school boards and across the state reading out-of-context passages from books like "The Bluest Eye," "Lawn Boy," "Gender Queer", insert the book here. You all have your list; right?

In May of last year, I saw a Facebook post of an acquaintance claiming a major legal victory over pornography in schools, inviting people to a celebration at a local restaurant. I do not think this message was meant for me, but I still got in my car and drove over to this local restaurant.

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: And I sat in the back, paid my own check for my iced tea, and listened as Virginia delegate Tim Anderson and Republican congressional candidate Tommy Altman took quotes out of books out of context and suggesting that librarians were grooming and indoctrinating students.

A member of the Virginia Beach City Council was in attendance and asked, "When can we get these books out of the public library?"

So from the parking lot of that restaurant, I immediately activated my network, texting Megan Cusick and Deborah Caldwell-Stone, in addition to the director of the Virginia Beach Public Library. I happen to be on the board there, so, you know, I knew the people.

So all of this is happening at once, so it's hard to describe it in a real linear way, but lawsuits were filed in Virginia Beach city court by Anderson on behalf of Altman, the congressional candidate. The suits named the plaintiffs as

authors and publishers of "Gender Queer" and "A Court of Mist and Fury" and sought an injunction against the school board, Barnes & Noble, hilariously misspelled Barnes & Nobel.

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: So if I call it Barnes & Nobel, that's just why. And against Amazon, too, to prevent the titles from being attributed to minors. And this was very strategic. They named both of these books so they couldn't be accused of just targeting LGBTQIA+ materials.

And we had a hearing on August 30th, 2022, in Virginia Beach. So the media coverage is obviously intense; right? It did what Anderson and Altman wanted it to do. It got them clicks. It got them attention. But by the time the court case came about, Altman had already lost his bid for the congressional nomination; right? So, in my opinion, he was there for the show of it, but Anderson just really wanted to stand there and hold up these books and tell people how terrible they were. Well, the judge didn't agree with him.

So it got people -- this whole strategy got people to question the intent of librarians, to erode the trust we had built up over decades, and it created confusion amongst parents who didn't understand the application of the words "pornography" and "obscenity."

And as a side note, I did go to that Barnes & Noble or Barnes & Nobel and introduced myself to the manager, who told me they never even actually had "Gender Queer" in stock because it was always out from the publisher. They couldn't even get their hands on it.

So we had a lot of legal support in the courtroom, and I want to mention that there were representatives there from The Family Foundation in support of Anderson; right? This is a big network. It goes really wide and far, and I'm sure you all have seen them in your locations. And Vicky Manning, who was a member of our local school board, was also there.

Now, even though the lawsuits were vacated and the judge found in favor of the authors, publishers, book sellers, and distributors and librarians, it didn't stop the antics in Virginia Beach, especially by Manning, who continued to file reconsideration requests, 16 of them.

Once the hearing was over, I felt empowered to speak up in a way that I wasn't comfortable with prior, so I went to a meeting in mid-September. She wasn't even in attendance, which is a whole other issue, but I did my three minutes directed at her empty chair, and I submitted an invoice to her for \$400,000 to reimburse taxpayers for wasting their time. Because --

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: Oh, thank you.

(Applause)

>> LISA VARGA: Because every reconsideration takes time; right? So two weeks later, I went back, and she was there. And this was very strategic, because after I approved -- I'm sorry -- approached with my first invoice, she noted on Facebook that she had found a hundred more books; right? Found I should say. Found a hundred more books.

So I went back and I calculated 40 hours per reconsideration at a rate of \$1500 per hour, and I extrapolated a bit because of these extra hundred books, and I told her I was going to go to city council and ask for a \$7 million budget increase to the school budget to cover the money that she's wasting. Oh, yeah, slides. Slides.

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: Sorry. To cover the money she was intending to waste, and I told her that I was going to name the Manning tax so when everyone saw their tax bills increase, they would know it was her fault. So just side note, no, she hasn't submitted another reconsideration since.

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: But if you stop and think for a minute of all the people involved in a book challenge, we're talking about the admin, who has to field the initial email and distribute it; we're talking about library staff and the school system researching statistics; talking the principal in the school, the superintendent, the school board attorney, the FOIA officer, the public affairs office, additional copies of the books that you have to buy so that everyone can read this book to review it; and then what an average person serving on the boards might make as an hourly wage, because they're going to have the book. And I calculated it at five hours. I have no idea if that was

accurate or not, but evidently if you can come back with answers to where did you get 1500 -- oh, yeah, there's my invoices. So losing the lawsuit didn't stop Anderson. He's filed an outrageous bill in our general assembly, which I went and spoke against last week, and I kind of lost my temper with him at one point and used his own words against him.

So he testified standing right here, and then when people came up to oppose him, he stood right here to intimidate people, and it really made me angry. And so at one point when he had been presenting his case, "Parents don't know what they don't know." And I just said, "You don't know what you don't know." And I sat down. And our supporting attorney was, like, maybe don't get so angry next time.

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: And I was, like, no! I'm getting angry. So I will say I'm not as vulnerable as a library worker in my position, and so I have the opportunity to speak up and bring the hammer, as we're calling it, Megan, in a way that other people might not be able to, especially because as part of Anderson's involvement with these initial -- with the school system, he tried to FOIA a list of librarian names. I guess he doesn't know that you can click on the name of the school and then go to the staff and all -- he doesn't think about that stuff.

So that said, for people who are vulnerable, there is the Merritt Fund. I was asked to mention the Merritt Fund, if you all haven't heard of it, which supports librarians and library staff who might lose their jobs because of intellectual freedom retaliation.

And so the tactics of these groups -- Family Foundation, Moms for Liberty, insert name here -- I don't want to give them clicks or attention, but they are really good at providing just enough information to get people who align with them riled up without giving a full story. So sometimes we got to bring the hammer out of the toolbox.

>> JESSICA ROSS: That's right.

>> LISA VARGA: So thank you very much.

(Applause)



>> STEVEN YATES: Thank you, Lisa. And as you know, the slides are available in the app, so if you want to make your own invoices in your own community. But I do think -- one of the things I loved about Lisa's contribution is that it really does highlight the importance of the broader community and especially those that are -- our best advocates are often the ones who do not have "library" in their title.

So that is a shout-out for United for Libraries and those other groups who are doing and supporting and love the work that we do as -- you know, in libraries and as library workers, but it's often -- you know, they have powers and tools and the ability to use them that maybe we aren't able to in our role.

>> LISA VARGA: So if I could just say one more thing. Our logical and legal arguments were not working in my community, and so I needed to do something a little different to gain attention, and I think that we could probably all come up with examples as we're brainstorming in the room today of other ways to do that. So thank you.

>> STEVEN YATES: So our next tool is the vise. Here comes Chris.

>> CHRIS STEWART: Yeah, I got it.

>> LISA VARGA: Remember, you have slides.

(Laughter)

>> CHRIS STEWART: I don't have that many slides.

(Laughter)

>> CHRIS STEWART: So thank you. So Lisa was the hammer. I'm the vise, so I'm here to advise you --

(Laughter)

>> CHRIS STEWART: -- on advocacy. So let me --

>> STEVEN YATES: That wasn't in the script.

>> CHRIS STEWART: That was not in the script, absolutely.

(Laughter)

>> CHRIS STEWART: So by show of hands, can I see who here has gotten an ALA Advocacy Alert in their email inbox? Okay.

That's pretty good. Now keep your hand up if you've clicked through and taken action on it. Okay. I'm hoping you're all being truthful.

(Laughter)

>> CHRIS STEWART: But as I said, I'm Chris Stewart. I'm the grassroots communications manager at ALA's Public Policy & Advocacy office. So I manage those Action Alerts as well as other grassroots activities, and that's really what we're trying to think about when we think about the idea of using sustained grassroots engagement as a vise, that it would be a system we're developing to kind of hold the engagement and so that we're ready to build capacity and then exert influence at the time when we need to. So that's kind of what I'm going to be talking about today.

So when you're building grassroots capacity, I want to talk about a few keys to engagement. One of them -- sorry, I should not have gone to that slide yet.

One of them is consistency in talking to advocates. You have to keep a regular tempo of talking to people, not just when a certain issue is hot. And that's something that we can struggle with a lot. It's hard to stay on top of something consistency -- or consistently, but in order to build capacity, you have to.

Another thing is understanding your audience. So targeting your communications in grassroots advocacy requires that you have data on those people that you're talking to, what they care about, what they fear, and, frankly, how your advocacy can help protect them from it.

Another thing that you have to focus on that's a key to grassroots mobilization is using urgency and using issues that are timely to create that urgency so that people will go and take action on whatever is affecting their community, and that can be a difficult balance, because you have to both be consistent in your communications and be ready to step up when a timely issue emerges. I'm sure a lot of you have dealt with those types of -- those types of issues.

And then, finally, reducing friction to taking action. So I'm going to be talking about an example of a specific issue that some library advocates in Missouri faced as a way to show you how these themes play out in action.

So in Missouri, we had an issue where there was an adverse regulation that was -- that came down and that was proposed, as I'm sure you've all seen happening in your states. And it was proposed by the Secretary of State, Jay Ashcroft, who was -- if you recognize the name Ashcroft -- a political dynasty in the state of Missouri, as well as someone who's mentioned as a possible candidate for governor. So as so often happens, political ambition and censorship coincidentally line up sometimes. Have we ever seen that?

So this is the careful balance that we strike, and that's why the vise is not the hammer, because how do you talk to an elected official that you know is going to be in your life in the long run? How do you talk to someone who is a potential future governor? How do you build capacity and exert influence but also build a relationship? And that's the exact challenge that these Missouri advocates faced.

So this is -- what you see on the screen is one of these action centers through ALA's advocacy software, and this is an automated tool that all state chapters have access to that can help you easily automate, reaching out to whether it's a member of Congress or, in this case, with a few clicks it allowed advocates to submit comments on the proposed regulation. So here you'll see the language that was used and the site that was set up to automate the comment on the regulation. So this is just one of the digital advocacy tools that we use.

So we got in touch with the Missouri Library Association. They told us about this regulation, and we were able to advise them on language, on how to deploy these tools, and on, you know, what kind of language they should use in the actual comment that they were submitting, and that was when they went out and did the work.

And they got with partner organizations. They sent out targeted communications. And, actually, at the Public Policy & Advocacy office, at the Washington office, we were able to send out to all the Missouri advocates on our list. And the results of that advocacy were really, really striking.

So from our action center alone, we had 3,554 comments submitted. And you can see here local coverage -- press coverage of the comments that were submitted. Not all of these were through ALA, but, you know, tens of thousands of comments that were civil in tone but forceful in their message.

And something that I think about as someone who works to engage grassroots and build capacity is that almost all of those who commented using this tool were new advocates who were brought into the process. And that's why it's so important that the Missouri Library Association worked with their partners to get this digital advocacy tool in front of as many eyeballs as possible, because now they're able to go back and talk to these new advocates that they brought into the process who they didn't know before.

So this was a great example of using something that was timely, using something that was urgent, but using it to build long-term capacity so that when they're in a funding fight, when they have -- you know, let's say a build -- perhaps builds on this adverse regulation in the next legislative session, they can go back to these people that they know now and that they know care about library issues and, you know, engage them for the betterment of the issue.

So if you haven't yet, those of you who didn't have your hands raised, go ahead and scan this QR code and join ALA's advocacy list. But that was -- that was just one example of how a chapter was able to really effectively use our digital advocacy software to both deal with a timely issue and build capacity in the long term. Thank you.

(Applause)

>> STEVEN YATES: Thank you, Chris. And I do think, as you said, you know, please be a part of this. This is also a fantastic benefit for all chapters to take advantage of and build your own state lists in this way but also rely on the wonderful expertise of ALA staff to help you do that and advise at the point of need and between points of need. So thank you for that, Chris.

Now, that is the wise. Again, that long-term -- the pressure and, you know, tweaking when needed, but now we hear from the lever. So how do we build in maybe a little bit of quiet diplomacy at times, but pressure when we need to to move toward our point.

So now take it away, Jess.

>> JESSICA ROSS: Those arm movements look more like I was going to a Harrah's casino.

>> STEVEN YATES: Soon to be Caesars.

>> JESSICA ROSS: Yeah, right.

>> LISA VARGA: That's later.

(Laughter)

>> JESSICA ROSS: Well, thank you all for being here today. I get so inspired hearing Lisa talk about those instances, those situations that we have coming up, you know, in our own communities, in our own libraries, where we have to, you know, move to be more forceful and aggressive and stand up for ourselves and fight for what's right. And it makes me crazy, it makes me angry just listening to those stories. And I hope that I will have it -- one day I hope all of us will have the fortitude and the courage to take a stand when we have to, to use the hammer when we have to.

And so I appreciate what you were willing to do. We're fortunate to have our state associations to lean on and have those -- the toolkits that ALA provides and, you know, those resources -- all of the tools in our belt to utilize at different times.

And so there are different ways to persuade and different tools to use when you need them. And Chris talked about, you know, the tools that ALA provides, and I think that, you know, the idea of building relationships and building capacity for libraries, like you mentioned, it's a long game. You know, you have to -- I think that's that part of leverage -- I appreciated the quote that Megan included on this slide about, you know, give me a lever long enough. And when you're moving the world, that doesn't happen overnight. That's something that takes time. And you have to rely on the relationships that you build.

And it's not about necessarily a database with phone numbers and email addresses; you have to have relationships behind those contacts. It's not just knowing who to call; it's having time spent with them and having your trust built with those people.

So I think that lever, the leverage that we employ in those relationships, you don't want to -- I don't like to think of it as transactional because that feels shallow, but it really is -- it's important to take the time to build relationships. And I always think, you know, not every library director may be comfortable doing that or not every administrator, but there needs to be somebody in your library world on your team. Like Steven said, you know, if it's not you, find somebody that's

going to be that advocate for you. Sometimes they don't have librarian in their title. They're other people in your circle.

So I'm going to talk a little bit about the importance of relationship building over time. And like I said, I'm in a very small community, and I still feel like no matter what size your organization is or your community is that you serve, you have a role to play to make an impact there, and I'm going to bounce around in my slides just a little bit because I kind of reorganized these thoughts.

This is a picture -- and mine are more examples of things that anybody can do. No matter what size community you're serving, these are things that every library I feel like could utilize and could use and take back to find -- you know, you can interpret it for your community.

This is a picture of our senator visiting our library, and what I think is special about this is he contacted us because he knew we had space. And because he's visited us before, we have invited him in for in-house programs, but we made our resources available. We reached out and said, hey, we have meeting space. We have a beautiful space. We can make this easy for you when you visit our community. It's a one-stop shop. You can invite all of the people that you want to meet with, whether it's constituents or other organizations.

This is our local Native American Tribe Council that came to receive funding. And they came to our library to receive a check that had nothing to do with us other than we had a space that was comfortable and inviting for everyone. So the school representatives, the tribal representatives, us, other organizations all gathered at the library because the senator knew that we had the space to offer.

So the idea of library is place and space for these types of town hall meetings I think is something that sometimes we take for granted, because they could just as easily go to a school. They could have just as easily gone to the tribal office or the courthouse, but they chose the library because we had a relationship with them already.

I think that the more convenient we can make our resources -- because they're our patrons too -- they are our -- you know, the people -- our citizens that we serve. And so including them in our space I think is really important. And we love to have them there because then we can also brag on the things that we're doing really well but also show them that we really need funding

for this project that, you know, is a need and a challenge for us. So that was with our local senator, and we loved that we're in the front of his mind.

Our congressman, Jerry Carl, we had something similar for him. He's very passionate about veterans, and we happened to have our Veterans Affairs office in our library now, because during COVID, we secured grant funding to incorporate more things in our library like a career center, Small Business Development Center, and a V.A. office. And so it brings in different constituents, but it really -- it gave value to the library in the minds of our elected officials that it was new and exciting and it gave a new energy and momentum to what we were offering our community, and so now we host veteran programs, which are very appealing to our elected officials. I mean, most of them, I mean, it's something that everybody is proud of is our military and our veterans.

And so we hosted a veterans' program for the congressman to come to. We invited our veterans. We also took a lot of pictures and posted them on social media and tagged him. And then just in the importance -- I know there -- you know, some people -- you have to be careful when you're tagging people on social media just in general. That's something we try to be conscientious about, just the optics on those things, but when it's a positive story that they're passionate about and it happened in your library, it's great to tag them.

But the reason both -- in both of these examples, the reason they wanted to participate with us is because we have a long-standing relationship with them. We reach out to them. We include them in things. And I don't think the first meeting that you have with an elected official or a decision maker should be a request for funding. That needs to be way further down the line.

And I think that, you know, whether they need a projector when they're in town or they need space or the skills of our staff, our media resources, whatever it is that we can help provide them with, we're happy to, and we just want to be relevant to them and useful. And over time, then we can get to the funding requests and the favors and the grants, the support letters, and all the things that we really need from our representatives.

So this -- in this particular example, we followed up -- and that was the other point I wanted to make, that, you know, your fortune is in your follow-up when it comes to having a

relationship with an elected official. And we create a folder of all the pictures that we take. We assure -- we make sure to email those pictures to them so they can use them in their own media publicity materials and on social media that they create.

So we always tag them, include them on social media, and then email them a thank you for being here. Here is a folder of the pictures we took during the day. I hope you can use them. And, also, here's some pieces of the ALA toolkit that are relevant to our library. Here's the Alabama Library funding facts. Here's some additional information about the needs of libraries in our state. We want to make sure that you have this information.

And all of these resources are made freely available through these toolkits that have been mentioned. And so including that along with the pictures just gives them more of a reminder of the good work that we're doing. And that's really -- you know, promoting yourself is hard to do for libraries. People feel uncomfortable with that for some reason. I never do. I'm, like, I'll brag on our library all day.

(Laughter)

>> JESSICA ROSS: But I saw Paula Laurita out in the hall, and we were talking ahead -- earlier, and she said, "You know, for a lot of librarians, we have to reframe advocacy as marketing," because it really is just a positive promotion of what libraries do well and the role we serve in our community, the impact we have on people's lives, and then what challenges we face and what needs we have and how we can use their support to meet those needs.

And I think marketing -- maybe it is -- or promotion, you know, PR is more comfortable than advocacy or lobbying, you know, but I think that it's important to show human interest stories and make sure that those are the -- you know, I know that's what -- LSTA loves a human-interest story. And so whatever we can do to showcase the way we are impacting lives, that's what's most important.

All right. Last slide. We do a year in review with statistics. A lot of our state organizations do these statistical annual reports, and those are also great to interpret through social media and tag the heck out of. I mean, we tag every sponsor. We tag every grandmother that we can find. You know, really just showcasing how the library is meeting the needs of our population and our -- you know, our



citizens, and then, also, what we're doing to raise money and how we need their help.

So these are just a few tools that we use -- a combination of in-person face-to-face interaction, the relationships that we build that way, and then also how we say thank you and how we recognize the support that we're getting and how they can continue to help us in the future.

So I appreciate you guys being here, and I'm going to hand it back over to Dr. Yates. Let's see. There we go. Thank you.

(Applause)

>> LISA VARGA: Great job.

>> STEVEN YATES: All right. Just a couple of notes I want to be sure you see. Down at bottom, the 1 Purrrrr-fect Library Cat.

(Laughter)

>> STEVEN YATES: I just want to make sure -- they do have a library cat.

>> JESSICA ROSS: That's Potter.

>> STEVEN YATES: Yeah. So go ahead and give a little --

>> JESSICA ROSS: Her name is Potter. It's Beatrix Potter, not Harry Potter. And she has been at the library as long as I have. She's been there 18 years. So she is a staple and a mascot and we love her.

>> STEVEN YATES: Yeah. So she might be the most famous --

>> JESSICA ROSS: She's outside, but --

>> STEVEN YATES: She might be the most famous person, but yeah. So if you notice, too, from there, so people who are worried about her being outside, her domain is this walled area right behind these windows. So she has -- she rules a lovely roost. So...

But thank you, Jess, for giving us some ideas. And just a reminder that always advocacy is not a four-letter word. And I think that there are times where people do feel like, you know, oh, it's that thing I don't like, but it also is this thing that can happen in ways that we don't traditionally think of as times

of crisis but that can really pay dividends as we move forward and need them to later.

So we have the audience response. So we are about to see those results. And I think they're coming.

(Laughter)

>> STEVEN YATES: Unless you all left me unread and did not respond. Are there things? There's no things? Oh, it's not popping up. Oh, man.

>> Did somebody pay for the Internet?

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: I can Apple Pay right now if we need to.

>> STEVEN YATES: I know, it's, like, I mean, how can -- we can pull it up and make it happen. Well, while we're figuring that out or maybe seeing what options there are, I'll tell you my story.

So my story is not unlike a piece of Lisa's story, but it had a little bit of a different outcome, I think. So the first high school I worked in, my co-librarian and I wanted to start a -- just a book exchange; right? So, like, I mean, pre-days of Little Free Library. We just wanted a chance for mainly our faculty and staff to have a way to exchange books that happened through the library that also went on to have a book club -- it sparked a book club that is still in existence. This was probably in 2008 when this happened.

And so, anyway, when we mentioned that, our principal was, like, yeah, I don't think -- I don't -- I mean, why would you want that? Now, this was a big reader, but he didn't quite understand why. And so we had a chance -- we said, well, just try. We know you read. You're a voracious reader, so, please, just bring us -- you know, maybe we can advertise that you started, you know, you started the book swap -- or, you know, the book -- you know, this book space.

So he brought some books, and we were allowed -- we had what we called the Library Minute at each faculty meeting. And so the next Library Minute, we took one of the books and found -- and so some of those books were straight-up romance novels. So we found the most bodice-ripping moment we could find in any of

those books, and we -- so I read it a little bit -- you know, and interpreted it a little bit maybe.

(Laughter)

>> STEVEN YATES: So I read it dramatically while my colleague, my co-librarian, had a whistle in her mouth. And so whenever it would get to a particularly racy moment, she would just blow the whistle into the microphone, and so it was very dramatic. So anyway, it was just, like, we would talk about, you know, as he touched her, and then she would blow the whistle.

(Laughter)

>> STEVEN YATES: Anyway, it got a -- it drew a lot of attention. And anyway -- and then we said, and so would the person who donated this book please stand up. And so -- yeah.

(Laughter)

>> STEVEN YATES: So we turned it into this, you know, a censorship thing. But, anyway, he stood up. He was totally embarrassed. But, anyway, it spread like wildfire after that.

So we took a little bit of a chance with him, but we knew that -- you know, we finally -- we knew he was a big reader. People loved that we were making fun of him, but he was fine to be in on the joke and it was fine. So it was sort of a roundabout story, too, but it really has paid so many dividends because we are four -- there have been four principals in that building since. The book -- that book space is still very -- a very lively part of the school library there that faculty and staff love, and they have a dedicated book club that reads sort of out of that, and it's inspired from that book spot -- book swap space. So, yeah, so that's my story. And --

>> LISA VARGA: Can I jump in on something real quick --

>> STEVEN YATES: Please.

>> LISA VARGA: -- while we wait for the audience response? So when I was telling my story, I'm certain what was going through a lot of your brains is, oh, that's great, but what about the money? What about when you have budget requests and things like that? And so I was hoping we could maybe have a little bit of dialogue about that balance between our

intellectual freedom and the funding that keeps us afloat;  
right?

So in the school board case, with me going to the school board, there was no worry about jeopardizing budget to the school or anything. But when I showed up last week at our general assembly to speak against bills, there's a real risk that the budget amendments that we have presented -- if I'm too vocal and angry at these points of intellectual freedom things, does that jeopardize the increase to -- I see a lot of heads nodding; right? And so finding that balance with your lever, with your vise, and with your hammer is often really delicate.

>> STEVEN YATES: Yeah.

>> LISA VARGA: Joe. Can you please come to a microphone for me?

>> JESSICA ROSS: Oh, there's a -- oh, okay.

>> LISA VARGA: Yeah, he's got that right there.

>> STEVEN YATES: Oh, yeah, I can run around with the mic.

>> LISA VARGA: Please, run around.

>> JOE Hi, Lisa.

>> LISA VARGA: Hi, Joe.

>> JOE I was just thinking, like, in that case, if you're trying to separate your official role as the director of the Virginia Library Association, could you, like, seek out, like, an advocate in the community who doesn't have that multiple, you know, responsibilities maybe that --

>> LISA VARGA: Yes.

>> JOE -- could serve in that capacity in speaking to the legislature?

>> LISA VARGA: I think absolutely. And that's a great suggestion. One of the things that happens, though, when you go to these legislative meetings -- and raise your hand if you've been there -- where you've been prepared to speak for a minute and they say 30 seconds; right? And you have to cut -- right, you've got to cut yourself down real quick.

Being able to say, "Hi, I'm the executive director of the Virginia Library Association representing more than 5,000 librarians and library staff in the state," holds a lot more weight than, "Hi, I'm an advocate for libraries."

And so there's this -- what is the correct balance there. And I think what we decided this legislative session is that I will speak up against the intellectual freedom issues, and our legislative liaison will be working on the budget amendments and so that we're a little bit separate, because it's important to give him that bubble rather than me not say anything; right?

It's so -- it would be easy to not say anything, but how many people in here are angry, like, by what you're seeing; right? Right? These inflammatory words, these clickable headlines that don't really say anything other than you are damaging our children. And, like, let's be honest, there's a lot of other things that are doing damage to our kids. Can we talk about mental health instead of what's a line item in a book?

You know, and they want us -- they're shocked to find we don't read every single book and every single line of every book in the library; right? It's hard to explain to these folks. And they just are using some really bizarre logic to try to get their point across, but they're scooping up lots of people in that process. I'm just babbling at this point. This is the advocacy tool.

>> STEVEN YATES: All right. I could just stand here, couldn't I?

>> LISA VARGA: Yes.

>> STEVEN YATES: Yeah. All right. So we see here a word cloud of our responses that have come through. We see the ones who were mentioned by multiple people are -- what was that advocacy tool? Passion. If you know me, you know I love the word "passion" and how that really can help you get your point across and show that you are -- really believe in what you are advocating for. So passion is important.

Some other ones -- hopefully you can see in there, but I'll just read a few. Persistence, protest, lobbying, storytelling, relationship building. So this came even before you heard from our panelists here. I see respectful dialogue. Refused an answer of no. I love that one. I've been guilty of that. Granny. Man, that's quite a story. But, I know, I do know Jessica's grandmother is quite an effective advocate, so that

could be -- she could have been the one who put that in. I don't know.

So listens, relatability, personal letters, op eds, press releases. So, again, I love that, you know, you see from this that some people are thinking about how you are able to deploy these tools, and then others are thinking about from the time of, okay, well, that really worked in their case.

One of the topics, which is a great segue, is social media. So the first question I want to ask our panel and then get us to think about as a group -- and I know you heard a little bit of Jess' thoughts on this -- but where does social media fit into all of this? And I know that's a large question that entire books have been written about, but we're going to solve it in the next five minutes.

(Laughter)

>> STEVEN YATES: So I'm glad you're here. You'll be the first to know.

So when is it most valuable? When is it most problematic? Or how does it all fit in? And I'm going to ask by social media channel. So, first, what about LinkedIn? Tell me about LinkedIn.

>> LISA VARGA: Ooh, let me speak about LinkedIn, because when I said this on an initial meeting, Steven was, like, LinkedIn? What are you talking about?

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: So I put the videos of me speaking at the school board on my LinkedIn account. Now, they got a lot of traction on Facebook, but mostly on Facebook I'm friends with a lot of librarians, library people, teachers, so they got it.

Being on LinkedIn, I've got a much broader network. A lot of people that I'm involved with are in the Virginia Society of Association Executives and some other things. And it got really interesting traction on LinkedIn from the people who were not library people. And so I think that there are different ways to apply the different tools.

I also want to say that while I might stalk the Facebook pages of some of our opponents in Virginia Beach with this work, I never reply. I never try to argue with them on social media.

I am not going to change their minds with a Tweet or a certain number of lines on Facebook. They're just -- some of the people that follow them are just vile.

But back to LinkedIn, I think it can be a really effective tool to broaden your network when it comes to things like this. And it was gratifying to see people connecting with the concept that wasting people's time is not something we should be putting up with. Because I'll tell you what, in other industries, you've got to calculate and keep track of every -- of your five minutes, your ten minutes, that sort of thing, they wouldn't put up with it; whereas, in libraries someone comes to us with a new thing or a problem, and we're, like, drop everything. We must figure this out right now.

And we have to start thinking more I think like businesses when we think about the time we're putting into responding to things. We need to help put out the fires, right, absolutely, with our skills, but we can't let other people's drama dictate the way our workday is going.

>> CHRIS STEWART: So I think that where -- that is such a good point. And I think that -- well, you're better than me, first of all, because I love to argue on Facebook.

(Laughter)

>> CHRIS STEWART: But I think that this piece of social media really gets into reaching new audiences and reaching new people who could be advocates. And one thing that I found really interesting -- and I think this fits into talking about LinkedIn -- is that, you know, your best library advocate might not be a librarian. It could be a community member, a trustee, and those are people who are within your professional network.

So if you're, you know, sharing advocacy actions to take on LinkedIn, which everyone should do, you know, you don't know who is going to suddenly be brought into the process and becoming a really effective advocate through that.

>> STEVEN YATES: So you've mentioned LinkedIn -- in the LinkedIn response we got some Facebook. So in Facebook and Twitter, are there any -- do you have any lessons learned that you would like to share, anybody on the panel, or just anything that you -- that was particularly impactful or other -- and I know that you mentioned some things earlier, Jess, but anything you'd like to add?

>> JESSICA ROSS: Yeah. I think that any opportunity, whether it's in person or social media, any opportunity to engage with different groups of people -- and there are just different people -- the same people that come to our in-person events are not always the same people that engage on Facebook. It's people that don't live in our community but were impacted as a child or we helped them find a job and now they live somewhere else and have a new career, and so they can engage with us in a different time in their life.

I think social media is imperative in this day and age. Like you can't really avoid it. And we're a small community, so we don't use LinkedIn and Twitter very much. For our library we have an Instagram and a Facebook account, but I think that however -- I think each of our communities are unique and you have to figure out which social media platform is going to be the most effective for your community and how people communicate. Word of mouth is really big in small towns. I mean, you know, that's -- the Coca-Cola banner at the red light gets a lot of attention.

(Laughter)

>> JESSICA ROSS: So -- but something that changed everything -- I mean, COVID just changed everything. And I don't want to, like, totally segue away from the social media topic, but COVID required us to rethink how we were advocating and how our campaigns were driven. We couldn't go -- like we've talked about, we couldn't go to our state capitol and meet as a group. We had to do something different. And, actually, that's a slide I didn't make it to because I get so excited, and I just ran out of time.

But the slide that showed the video that we did, it was -- we -- during COVID last year, we didn't get to do a legislative day. We had to come up with a different idea. So we had a film crew come in that were -- it was really low cost. We went to the university -- a couple of university settings. We went to some school libraries. We went to public libraries. And we filmed what we do during the day and pasted it into a really tightly, like, very professionally worked video.

It was two and a half minutes long, two minutes -- you know, we were able to cut out sections for smaller 30-second spots for particular divisions. But that video, we shared it on Facebook, we sent it to the governor's office, we tagged all of our elected officials and sent it to their offices. We put it on social media, though, and encouraged libraries to share it



because it promoted what we were all doing. We could use that -- I mean, that's a radio -- you could interpret that for radio or TV, but for us social media is free, and it is effective, and it is broad reaching, and you have to use it. So that was something that we did kind of in lieu of gathering and storming the capitol steps --

>> STEVEN YATES: Too soon.

>> JESSICA ROSS: -- we blast them --

>> LISA VARGA: Too soon.

>> JESSICA ROSS: Yeah. We -- oh, yeah, forgive me.

(Laughter)

>> JESSICA ROSS: But we sent out video.

>> STEVEN YATES: So that brings up a question we wanted to ask the audience. Again, we're bouncing around a bit, but we welcome -- we'll get to the full Q&A if we want to continue bouncing. But our next topic we wanted to ask you guys about. Beyond traditional in-person legislative days at the state capitol, are there other ideas that you have seen work for connecting librarians and legislators?

>> LISA VARGA: Raise your hand. I'll bring you the microphone.

>> JESSICA ROSS: There's somebody there. Yeah, we want to steal all your ideas and take them all --

>> STEVEN YATES: This is a thought sharing --

>> JESSICA ROSS: -- and use them.

>> STEVEN YATES: -- session. Thank you.

>> While not in a library, if you use your customers and your clients to tell the story about what has happened to them because of using, in this case, the library, you've -- the legislators are looking at their constituents and saying now I have to. So make sure that you tell the stories, since not all the stories are great, but make sure that they come from the heart.

>> JESSICA ROSS: Yeah. That was actually one of the pictures in that slide, Steven, of the video, we had testimonials --

little clips of testimonials from business owners who were using our Wi-Fi hotspots when their Internet went down and business owners who were, you know, starting a business and used the resources at the library to make that process easier. Those testimonials and human-interest stories are the most valuable thing, nuggets that you can take to your elected officials, I agree.

>> REBEKAH CUMMINGS: I think I get to go next because I have the mic. I'm Rebekah Cummings. I'm from the Utah Library Association. And we do a lot of the normal stuff. We do Library Down the Hill. We sponsor a legislative dinner. We try to empower people to build those relationships all year. But we did one thing kind of differently this year, which I'm really proud of.

On Tuesday night we hosted a read-in at the Utah State Capitol, and we had over 200 people show up with books reading in the state capitol. We had 12 speakers, mostly Utah authors. We had a couple of high schoolers come out and talk about how important the freedom to read is for them. And it was just really exciting, and it felt different and really fun, so we're pretty proud of that.

>> JESSICA ROSS: Oh, I love that.

>> LISA VARGA: Round of applause, please.

(Applause)

>> JESSICA ROSS: Big star on that one.

>> LISA VARGA: And I'll that we were going to try to do a banned books read-in on our first day that our Senate Education Committee was in session, and things moved too quickly, and we couldn't get it done this year, but we look forward to doing it, because just having people lining the halls reading books, whether they're banned books or not.

>> REBEKAH CUMMINGS: And I'll just say we had local book sell -- oh, sorry. Ah. I'll just add one more thing, that we had local book sellers, all of our small, you know, book shops in the neighborhood, they all donated books as well. So everyone got to leave with books. It had a lot of media attention, and it was just really cool. So I highly recommend it in all the other states too. Thank you.

>> LISA VARGA: Got another one.

>> I know everybody probably already knows this, but if you are doing anything like that, make sure that you have good relationships with your local paper, with your local news stations, with radio, because all of that fire that you see on social media from people who want to ban this, it gets put out really quickly when there's a reporter in the room who's got their recorder out and puts it right in the middle of the table, all this rhetoric just disappears pretty quickly.

>> STEVEN YATES: Thank you for that. And I think he might be recording. I think I saw him holding a recording device. But I do think we are being recorded, actually. I think we have a hand behind you.

>> So one of the things we did the last few years with our state association was gave an award to a legislator who was particularly supportive, the head of our Appropriations Committee, and got us some extra funding, so we gave him one of our annual awards, and he really liked that, and funding continued for several years.

Now, he just lost his election, so we have to find a new advocate. These things don't continue forever, but honoring them and giving them the opportunity to feel good is always a positive.

>> STEVEN YATES: I'm so glad you mentioned that, because I think one of the things -- one of the things that our three panelists have in common is their modesty. And so they are -- they're all doing -- I mean, you heard the great things they're doing, but they're doing lots of other amazing things. And one of the things that I've always been inspired by in the work Jess does in Alabama, she has an uncommon skill for nominating her people for awards. So she --

>> JESSICA ROSS: And they have egos to stroke. It's human nature.

>> STEVEN YATES: So we at the Alabama Library Association have gotten to know, I think, most of her board, local judges, and other things. But, like, again, those advocates who are making a big difference, she thanks them publicly, and they win those state awards and things. So that is -- that is a skill.

>> JESSICA ROSS: And their spouses.

>> STEVEN YATES: And their spouses.

>> JESSICA ROSS: And everybody else that we can bring in on our team. So we're shameless.

>> STEVEN YATES: Yeah. So, like, bringing vanloads of people to the state conference to -- you know, like from her community to see them win their awards. And so they're -- and they're all registering for the conference, and they're hanging out doing -- so, like, but those are not -- you know, they may not be at the top of your list of those skills and those tools, but they are definitely a part of that toolkit.

>> LISA VARGA: I'd like to share something we've never gotten off the ground, and then I'll come bring that microphone to you. It has been suggested that prior to our general assembly we send a copy of the Library Bill of Rights and some freedom to read documentation to every member of our general assembly, so even before any bill goes through, just to showcase how important that information is.

Like I said, we haven't gotten to it yet, but if you want to steal that idea, please feel free, and remind them that the freedom to read -- they exist because the freedom to read exists. And we've got a question in the back.

>> MAURA DEEDY: Hi. Hi, everyone. It's more, I guess, a comment, suggestion. My name's Maura Deedy. I work at the Mass Board of Library Commissioners, our state library agency in Massachusetts, (Inaudible) [01:00:03] for library's board member.

So I -- in my work, I do a lot of thinking about connecting -- because all of our libraries are municipal -- so helping our local public library directors and boards of trustees build those relationships with their elected municipal officials, who sometimes run for state office. So I think sometimes this can even start much more at the local level.

I think it's the mayor of Salem is now our lieutenant governor in Massachusetts, so a lot of those folks have aspirations for higher office. So starting to build those locally, as well, for the state level. Thank you.

>> CHRIS STEWART: So that is such a great point. And I want to bring up something that one of my colleagues at the Washington office talked about. He talked about appealing to new members of Congress, and he likened it to something that maybe we could all relate to right now, which is when you go to a conference and you make conference friends, okay, the people

you meet at the first session are the people that you wind up having lunch with and dinner with and drinks with and see the next day.

(Laughter)

>> CHRIS STEWART: Okay? You want to be your elected official's conference friend. Okay?

(Laughter)

>> CHRIS STEWART: So get them when they're at the local level. Talk to them, present that information when they're new to the office, because you will be a consistent and reliable person that they'll go back to.

>> JESSICA ROSS: I love that advice, and I will just follow that up with their staff are also very important. In my experience, I've worked with several chiefs of staff that went on to run for election and win and became our congressman. That has happened recently with us with Katie Brit, who is a new senator, new to the Appropriations Committee.

I mean, those are people that we started working with as staff members. They were field staff representatives and then had political aspirations. And so being kind and staying in contact with the staff that are working with these elected officials is also really important to building that, you know, relationship and long-term network.

And, you know, we've seen that, also, with people who ran for office and then went on to serve. You know, they don't immediately come in usually and go straight to the Appropriations Committee, but, again, just knowing who is who and who their staff members are and becoming friends and being conference friends is great advice. I think that's great, yeah. But don't forget about their receptionists and their chiefs of staff and all the people working in the office in the field.

>> STEVEN YATES: All right. This is the point where you guys either try to stump us or if you have other questions or topics you'd like to hear people's views or thoughts on.

>> LISA VARGA: It's Q&A time, folks.

>> STEVEN YATES: That's right.

>> LISA VARGA: You can either raise your hand to have the microphone brought to you, or we have the microphone over here that we made Joe run to.

>> STEVEN YATES: You can do the Q part or the A part. We're open.

>> STEVEN YATES: Okay.

>> LISA VARGA: Yes.

>> JILL MANNING: So I'm Jill Manning, not related to your Manning.

>> LISA VARGA: Thank you.

>> JILL MANNING: I'm from Canada. And I've been sitting here biting my tongue the whole time because I'm just new, brand, brand new. I'm a baby in the library world, and my professional experience is with supervised consumption sites, where people can legally use illegal narcotics under medical supervision.

So the community that I live in in Canada was very adverse to this service. And we had a live bomb left in our parking lot, and we had someone drive by and shoot our staff with paintballs in the middle of the night at point blank, like -- and so I moved to library-land not expecting to have that level of vitriol. And we don't have that towards the library in the community that I'm from, but this has just been so on point for me, and I wish that I had sat through this presentation five years ago when I was dealing with all that. And just so thank you very much.

>> LISA VARGA: You're very welcome. We're sorry you had to go through that.

>> This is something I just personally wonder, but what do we think the dark money is behind censorship for? I mean, what is the end game do you think in your opinion?

>> LISA VARGA: Breaking education. Breaking public education and charter schools and vouchers, things along those lines, they want to erode trust with teachers and librarians. And we're just part of the web that they're weaving. We are seeing I think music -- you had an issue, Shirley, if I'm not mistaken, where people opposed the music of a band in a high school last year saying it had witchcraft in it. And so we're seeing -- I think we're going to see art teachers next. Because you think

about the most vulnerable positions in a school, first of all, because a lot of this has been geared towards school libraries. I will say, I do not represent the School Library Association, but I have seen this happen, and I think they're going for the vulnerable people.

In a school you have one, maybe two library media specialists. You have one art teacher, one music teacher, if you're lucky, because those positions are often floating school to school to school. It's very hard to mount a defense. And so -- Megan, am I on the right track here? Sorry. Okay. You're looking at me like maybe I should -- okay. All right.

So I think that it's part of a much larger plan. And after being at the legislature last week and seeing the number of people standing up to support the concept of vouchers and charter schools in our state that just -- it's -- they're knocking down pins. And I say that, my own thoughts and feelings, based on what I've seen.

>> CHRIS STEWART: And same. I'll just speak for myself and say it's -- I mean, the culture war is ongoing, and it's the issue du jour. And, you know, my colleague, Megan Cusick, she always says that she has to believe that this is a moment. So that she can get out of bed in the morning and do her job, she has to believe that this is just a moment, but the truth is that we don't know how long this moment is going to last, and we don't know how deep it will go.

The good news is that there are more of us than there are of them, so that's -- that to me is the power of grassroots is that we can take our greatest advantage, which is our numbers, and turn it into a strength in the real world.

So I would say that it's scary, it's hard, but it's also a time where you can build a lot of capacity right now and that people are willing to stand up and stand with libraries. So I would just encourage anyone.

>> JESSICA ROSS: I think y'all covered it. I think that -- I agree with what you said.

>> STEVEN YATES: I think that, you know, one of the things that we're so -- every four years in Alabama we start our legislative session a couple of months late, so they have to get everything organized, they say. So our prefiled bills that are hitting just now before the session begins in March. So we have our first big parental rights bill that has just been filed. And

so we're going to have -- and I know that hit last year in a lot of other states, but I do think, and to echo what you're saying, it does get into the point of, like, really eroding what is seen as the power of public education, it really does seem to be a lot of the coordinated efforts of those groups for sure. Thank you for that question.

>> LISA VARGA: It can be really isolating when this comes to your community, when this comes to your school, when this comes to your town. And I just want to suggest that if you hear about a challenge in your schools and you don't happen to be in those schools, reach out to those librarians, offer them your support. I think we do have a lot of siloing in our industry, surprise, and the academics can really come in clutch for our public and school librarians when it comes to speaking out at board meetings, whether they're city council or school board, in support, because they understand these issues and can speak up in a less vulnerable way.

>> STEVEN YATES: I will say, also, if you are not following or a part of the Unite Against Book Bans, that is -- and, yes, I see some people showing off their pride and their ribbons. But I do think the information that is available in the Unite Against Book Bans site as well as the number of national partners who are signed on to that initiative are really assigned that, you know, a variety of groups recognize what's at stake here and are willing to work with us toward -- you know, towards the most positive future when it comes to these topics in our communities.

So other tools that I hope -- don't touch -- aha. So more tools to think about as you are building your toolkit. And if you have anything that pops to mind, you know, we can still bring you the mic, but I wanted to make sure that we had a chance to talk about these tools.

As I mentioned earlier, the Advocacy Action Planning Guide. And these are, again, on the session handout, which is available in the conference app, and they are linked there as well. Also, we have the State Legislative Toolkit. Regardless, I know some of you sound like you have highly developed and functional legislative action at the local and state levels, but no matter where you are on that spectrum, we think these are useful tools for you.

And, also, the Unite Against Book Bans, you can sign up to be kept in the know on that or, you know, and explore the research and reports that are available there.



Also, we'll give a plug. There is a session at 5:30 today that is the Unite Against Book Bans session. Please join us there. Will be great. Also, the kit on Hosting an Elected Official. You can always just ask anyone at this table about it, but also -- because they do it so often, but, also, we have a kit if you need to work on how to make that happen in your library.

Also, the guide to using social media and the best ways on how to avoid those pitfalls. The ALA Ecosystem Initiative. I know there are some people who have worked on that through various iterations who are here at the conference. I don't see -- I mean, I know we have some people in the room who've worked on it, but, again, if you've not explored that, just really thinking about how you're able to tap into that ecosystem at any time. So as part of the hammer, as part of the vise, or as part of the lever and beyond.

Also, we have links to the VLA Intellectual Freedom Resources, the ALLA promotional video that Jess mentioned, and then, of course, the links to other associations as well.

>> LISA VARGA: Can I -- I'm going to jump in again because this is my nature.

>> STEVEN YATES: I wish -- well, I mean, I expected it.

>> LISA VARGA: So for the VLA Intellectual Freedom Resources, we had two very resourceful librarians, volunteers for us, create a book résumé database recently. The idea was that when a challenge came on to a school or to a librarian, it's very chaotic to try to track down the reviews and all the information -- other oppositions to that book. So we had our volunteers say I will take this book and I will create a paper about this book and all the reviews for it and all the other ways it's been challenged, and that went into a database that we actually -- I will say it's the first thing we've ever done -- the first time we've ever put anything behind our paywall, and the only reason we did that was because we didn't want our opposition getting access to that documentation.

But if anyone here is interested in seeing what a book résumé looks like, please feel free to email me. I'm sure our email addresses are -- or friend me on LinkedIn -- find me on LinkedIn, and you can watch my videos too.

(Laughter)

>> LISA VARGA: And so we are working on making this happen on a more national level. We want to make sure that not every state is creating these because it's just duplicating work over and over again. But the goal of it was to help save time during a panic moment if you have a challenge on a book to know that someone else has already done that research for you.

>> JESSICA ROSS: And, Steven, I have one little comment.

>> STEVEN YATES: Can you just --

>> JESSICA ROSS: Just, you know, in general for advocacy, so much of what we talk about is -- for me, is funding related and it's -- I guess it's more important to me because we just don't have any money, and we're constantly fundraising and begging.

But some of the best -- one of the best pieces of advice that I got early on from a very seasoned librarian -- and Steven has heard me say this a thousand times -- it was Dr. Shirley Spears, who said, you know, ask for money and you might get advice. Ask for advice and you might get money.

And I think that there's a lot of truth to that because everybody just wants their voice to be heard. We all deserve -- whether it's the voices of our patrons that we represent at our funding agencies or our libraries, we want people -- people want their input included. They get invested in something when they are able to contribute toward it with their advice and their input.

And so I think as we work with elected officials, especially if we ask for their advice and we get their input and ask what's important to them and find ways that we can help them with those issues, they're just much more likely to give us money and to also help us when we come to them with a need if we've already helped them meet a need that is important to them.

So I will continue to preach Dr. Shirley Spears' advice, and I think that's just a good motto to live by when you're thinking about advocacy when it's related to funding especially.

>> STEVEN YATES: So if any of you would like to get in touch with us, here are our email addresses on the screen. Also, a big shout-out to the fantastic and often utilized but so critically important resources of the Office of Intellectual Freedom. So if -- I believe those are --

(Applause)

>> STEVEN YATES: Yes. So their --

(Applause)

>> STEVEN YATES: That -- their work is perfectly integrated into the work that PPA is doing on these topics now. But, again, there is no better time to start than now on building your toolkit. We hope that you have some ideas to go back. You realize the wide variety of resources that are already available and the people who are always willing to help however we can.

This concludes our program today, but I cannot move away from this mic without thanking Megan Cusick and her wonderful accomplishments through being the staff liaison to the Committee on Library Advocacy. Thank you very much, Megan.

(Applause & Cheers)

>> STEVEN YATES: Thank you. Thank you all for coming. And, please, as you're doing the work and you need help or encouragement or to share out the excitement, please include us and keep us involved. So thank you so much.

>> JESSICA ROSS: I'm so so (Inaudible) [01:16:05] she's, like, ah, give me all your beautiful ideas.

>> CHRIS STEWART: I know. Y'all have got me jazzed up. Y'all have got me jazzed up.

>> JESSICA ROSS: I know; right? It feels, like, inspiring and it's motivating.