

SATURDAY_3_Room_395_396

Speakers: Angela Hursh, Michelle Schusterman, Deborah Caldwell-Stone

**Transcription provided by:
Caption First, Inc
P.O. Box 3066
Monument, Colorado 80132
877-825-5234
www.captionfirst.com**

>> ANGELA HURSH: Good afternoon, everybody. It's the end of the afternoon and hopefully you're not feeling the slog after lunch, and we're going to get revved up about a topic that probably will make most of us angry but we'll try to bring it up by the end of the session today.

My name is Angela Hursh and I work for a company called NoveList. I'm the manager of engagement and marketing. I also have a blog called SuperLibraryMarketing.com. I love library marketing. I love libraries. If you're interested and you want tips to help out with your library marketing, you can head there and follow.

I always like to also give out my contact information at the beginning of these sessions because if you're like me, you're going to go back to your library and you're going to have a question or a comment, or if you just want to talk about library marketing or promotion in general, my email address is ahursh@ebsco.com. The slides, by the way, are also in the app today, so if you want to see them later and get the - get my email address later, that's totally fine too.

I'm on all the social media platforms, Twitter, and Instagram. Yes, I'm still on Twitter. Going to hang on for a little while longer. And I'm there as @Webmastergirl.

My favorite social media platform right now is LinkedIn. So, if you want to connect there, that's where I spend a lot of my time these days.

I know the folks at LibLearnX would really love it if you talked about this session on social media using the hashtag, but

I do have a little statement that they have asked me to read which goes like this.

ALA is aware of growing concerns related to the safety and security of library workers across the nation. Due to the sensitive nature of this session and the wellbeing of its participants, please refrain from capturing and sharing photos, videos, or other identifying information from this session. However, we welcome and encourage all to share their experiences and excitement for LibLearnX on social media throughout the weekend.

So, you can take pictures of me and you can take pictures of this slide, but maybe not of each other just to make sure that all of your fellow participants stay safe.

That's a very downer way to start this session. I got one more piece of housekeeping to do before we get into the meat of it, which is that I made a handout. So, if you don't like to take notes and you just want to listen, you can go to the app and download the handout. It's got links to a lot of the examples that I am going to discuss today and a little special code for you at the bottom of the handout.

So, Bonnie Brzozowski is a librarian, you may have guessed. She works for the Corvallis-Benton County Public Library in the state of Oregon. She's been there for ten years. She's actually here somewhere at ALA and I haven't met her yet in person - hi, Bonnie.

I am talking about you now.

Okay. So, Bonnie has been there for about ten years, and like you, Bonnie does a lot of work at her library. She wears a lot of hats. She does collection development, she does readers advisory, she creates promotions, she works on events. And she is just, you know, one of those librarians that's everywhere doing all the things all of the time.

When I first started talking to Bonnie by email, I kind of asked her like, why did you take a job in the library industry? That's a weird question I always ask librarians but I'm curious. And Bonnie said that she really loved and appreciated working for an institution that values and promotes intellectual freedom.

And it's a good thing that she does because she's faced some issues, like I know many of you have. It would be so nice if you just came up here and told us what happened but I don't want to put you on the spot.

So, Bonnie, at her library, some folks have come in and hidden books or tried to throw them in the garbage or like hide them in garbage cans, books about race, African Americans, Black people, with LGBTQIA content in a misguided effort to get those books off the shelves.

Of course, this, in addition to that national trend that we're all seeing with an increase in book challenges, Bonnie has taken a different approach which I really wanted to highlight, which is that she has decided not to back down. She wants to educate her community about what it really means to embrace intellectual freedom and what the library - the library's place and its role in her community in that way.

So, she decided to use her marketing skills to mount a campaign to educate her community and add diversity to her reading recommendations.

So, she setup a display of banned and challenged books, particularly from states like Texas and Florida, that was at the front entrance of her library. She did that during the month of July, not during Banned Books Week, in July, probably because she knew there was going to be a lot of traffic there for summer reading.

Her library also stocks a tri-fold brochure that has a list of banned and challenged books and Bonnie has said she has a really difficult time actually keeping that brochure stocked because it has become very popular at her library.

And then in - during Banned Books Week, basically for the entire month of September, Bonnie dedicated every single display space in her library to displays about books that were challenged, books on intellectual freedom, on authoritarianism, on fascism, and she says her efforts have had some unexpected impact on her library. In particular, because she is now marketing and talking about banned and challenged books, she has to buy more of them because she has created demand from her marketing efforts.

This goes without saying, First Amendment challenges are a growing problem across the United States. You probably know that

the ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom tracked about 729 challenges in 2021. That is twice the number from 2020. Individually, that was about 1,600 books that were challenged by individuals or groups.

In August, which was the latest - August of this year - sorry, 2022. I keep forgetting we're now in 2023. You think I'd know after three weeks but here we are.

Anyway, in 2022 in August, we were already at that level. So, I haven't seen the full list of numbers for 2022 but I am assuming that we have surpassed that, unfortunately.

And the books that are being challenged obviously usually have some of the same themes or characteristics. So, they are LGBTQIA themes. They have protagonists or characters of color. Pregnancy or sexual content, talking about abortion, issues of race and racism, but also things that I, as a person who does not have a library degree, would not have guessed. So, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, and stories with religious minorities.

And these challenges often happen so quickly that the authors of the books don't even know that their book has been challenged. You can play the video.

>> MICHELLE SCHUSTERMAN: I just found out that last week, apparently, a Pennsylvania school district attempted to or temporarily ban the Girls Who Code middle grade series, of which I wrote the third book, "Spotlight on Coding Club."

So, my book was among all of the books in the series that were banned. And interestingly, this was reported - I don't know how I didn't hear about it - but it was in Newsweek and Mashable and a bunch of places which all said I condemned the ban. But like, I didn't actually know about it. I'm just now finding out. I find that weird.

But anyway, just to make it real clear, I condemn the banning of a book about girls who want to learn to code because why?

>> ANGELA HURSH: Yeah. So, what was happening there was a school district in the state of Pennsylvania had created a diversity resources list after the racial unrest of 2020. So, in the fall of the 2021 school year, they were going to use this list and the school district found out about it and told them

they couldn't use it. The school district said, we didn't ban it, we just said they couldn't use it. Yeah.

So, that's what was happening there. And Michelle, the author of that book - and the only reason her book was on that list, by the way, was because it featured characters of color who are coding.

So, it doesn't always make sense, these different book challenges.

Oh, I wanted to talk about this which is there is this notion I think in the United States that book challenges are kind of individual things. They're just like a parent who happens to notice a book come home in their child's bookbag or just somebody walking through the library. But this is a strategic and organized effort.

PEN America did a study that just came out a few months ago, I think it was November. There were about, according to their analysis, fifty books - fifty groups that are working together to push for book bans. Most of them were formed in 2021 and we know that they're working together because they use common language and tactics.

So, it's strategic, and I say that in case your library has faced a book challenge. It's not you. It's not personal. This is something these groups are working to do across the nation.

And I wanted to highlight a little bit, we talk a lot - my background is public libraries but school libraries in particular have had some really detrimental effects from book challenges.

So, the Wheelock Education Policy Center released a study in the fall and they found that school libraries that have faced book challenges often have fewer books in their collection overall. They have fewer diverse books. They usually have more titles centered on Christian themes and they have more of the problematic titles that are in the Dr. Seuss series.

And these book challenges happen every day. It's really a constant battle for the folks who are working at the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom.

I have a secret co-presenter today. Her name is Deborah Caldwell-Stone and she's the Director of ALA OIF. I interviewed

her and the day I interviewed her, as I was like waiting for her to come into the Zoom meeting, I went on the Twitter for ALA OIF and I saw they had just posted about a challenge. If you can't read it, they had received some reports of individuals checking out all the books on a library's Pride Month display in a weird effort to try to make sure nobody could read those books. And I asked Deborah about that the beginning of the interview. And you can play the video.

>> DEBORAH CALDWELL-STONE: There was a conservative advocacy group that advised its members to go to their public libraries and check out all the books on the Pride display and keep them for the entire month just to prevent people from accessing information about LGBTQIA people or to prevent the library from having a display that highlighted the lives and concerns of LGBTQIA people.

They said they were engaging in this to protect children but in fact, it is just an old form of censorship. We've seen it happen over and over again in a number of challenges where individuals would simply check out the book and keep it with the idea that they were somehow protecting others from the book that they felt was unsuitable for people.

>> ANGELA HURSH: So, we know book challenges are scary, obviously. They're really demoralizing for libraries and their staff. They sap money and productivity from a library.

I actually was speaking to a library in Wisconsin on Thursday and they were asking for advice from other libraries about how to handle it because they have near constant challenges all the time.

The lady I was speaking to said, we really could just have one person whose whole job would be to handle these book challenges.

But most importantly, they really threaten the existence of your library because they are trying to compromise the service that you have pledged to provide for your community.

I decided to put this presentation together in March of 2022 after I saw Deborah at PLA. I sat there and I thought, there's got to be something that we can do to give some of the power back to libraries. So, that's what this presentation is intended to do today. We can't prevent these challenges but we can certainly make it more difficult for these groups to mount the

challenges and to win these challenges. So, we're going to do that through intentional marketing and some other tactics.

So, by the time you leave this room today, my hope is that you will have tips to help strengthen your public's perception of your library by marketing your mission, vision, and values, and your policies.

You're also going to have some great examples to follow of libraries that are rallying their supporters ahead of book challenges and building support for their library in their community around the work that they are doing.

And we're also going to talk a bit about what to do if you are challenged both as a library and then what to do around your marketing if you face a challenge.

And I like to center this presentation on something that Becky Spratford, who runs the blog RA for All, and Robin Bradford, who is a collection development librarian in the state of Washington, this is something they taught me. They have a course that they developed that I got to help out with called Actively Anti-Racist Service to Readers. And a central element of that course is that libraries are not neutral. We never have been and we never will be. Because our mission is to create a place where people of all points of view, all races, can come together and talk about things and learn about each other, and therefore, we have never been neutral and never will be.

And because there have been so many historic inequities and discrimination in the library industry and in the worlds beyond, the work that we're doing in this area is not only essential but it's imperative, and so much so that in 2021, the ALA introduced a ninth principle to their Code of Ethics, which I have put a link on that handout if you've never read it. It just - it really is a charge for libraries and the work that we are supposed to be doing around social justice.

But here's what I really want you to know. You have the public on your side even though it may very well feel like you don't. The ALA did a study that came out in April of 2022 and they found that 7 in 10 voters oppose efforts to remove books from public libraries, and that's 7 in 10 voters across party lines, republicans, democrats, and independents.

Also, this study showed that three quarters of the parents of public school children have a high degree of confidence in their

school librarians in terms of picking out books for their children.

And a more recent study that was done by the organization Every Library in August of 2022 found that more than half of voters across party lines again are concerned about legislation that has been introduced to regulate access to books.

And Deborah wants to talk a little bit more about that. You can play the video.

>> DEBORAH CALDWELL-STONE: And what we've found, amazingly, was that the vast majority of individuals opposed censorship as a tool for the government to use to control what people read. And this was across political parties. This was across affiliations. This was across race and gender. Overwhelmingly, it was a majority of voters who disapproved of the use of censorship or book banning as a tool to target libraries and schools.

>> ANGELA HURSH: One thing I asked Deborah about when we were talking, I know there are a lot of libraries who are afraid to do any kind of marketing or education around banned books or challenged books because they feel like it's going to draw attention to their library and therefore cause these challenges. And Deborah just told me, there's just - there's no way. Not talking about it is not going to prevent a challenge. So, we need to be proactive and to talk about it, because pretending that this isn't happening is not going to prevent a challenge from being mounted against your library.

So, the first step, the biggest step that you should take is to update your library policies and then to promote them. And we're talking about your collection development policy, your materials acquisition policy, your standards of library behavior policy. All of those, we want them to be updated and aligned with your mission, vision, and values. And we're going to do that because policies are actually a defense in these instances. So, they do - they allow for due process. They help your staff when it comes time to address these challenges. They show that decisions made, especially around collection development, are deliberate.

I think we take for granted that people understand what collection development librarians do, that they understand that we use - they use reviews and they spend a lot of time and careful thought making these purchase decisions.

But I think the public thinks it's just a person sitting in a cardigan, buying books on Amazon that they like that they think other people should read.

So, you probably have a collection development policy. I just want you to make sure it's updated and aligned with your mission, vision, and values. And then you're going to promote it.

The other thing that I learned from Deborah is that those policies are admissible as evidence in court. If your librarians are charged with a crime - which has happened. I think it was the state of Wisconsin, there was a librarian who read a book in a story time and she was charged by the sheriff of that county with pandering obscenity to a minor. And her library's lawyers were able to get the charge dropped because there was a policy in place that explained why she was reading that book in the library and why that book was included in the library's collection.

So, policies are admissible in court.

So, you're going to go back to your libraries after LibLearnX and you're going to make sure your policies are updated, aligned with your mission, vision, and values, and you're going to do work in your marketing and promotions to explain how items are added to your collection and how patrons or community members can make requests of your library.

And we don't often do these kinds of marketing but I think it serves us well to show people that they can make requests for the collection, and in fact, when your community members ask you to add a diverse book or a book with a subject matter that may be viewed as a challenge for some people, you can say, my community wanted that book. Somebody in the community made a specific request and asked us to add this to the collection.

If you're doing donations around your library, Deborah's advice was to position it as your money is here to help make sure that everybody in the community has the information they want and need. And what your neighbor wants and needs may be different from what you want and need, but our job is to provide information for everyone in the community and that's what your money goes toward.

And then to make sure that your library patrons and community members know how to contact or call, write letters to your legislators asking for more laws that protect the freedom to read.

Great story from the Missouri Secretary of State. So, in the fall, he proposed a rule that would basically restrict funding for libraries for collection development based on some arbitrary rules that he had for the kind of books that libraries were supposed to put in their collection. And the library decided to take this fight to their community.

So, they made this - they wrote a blog post and they shared it in their email and they shared it on social media. The Secretary of State's office got 16,000 comments, letters, calls in support of the library because the St. Louis County Library asked their community to rally around them and they did.

No decision has been made. The decision is to be made in February, but 16,000 comments in favor of the library is pretty powerful and it's just because they asked their community to do it.

The Maitland Public Library does regular promotions. So, you can see here, this is a Facebook post where they put two links on here, first, how to make materials requests of their library. Second, encouraging people to read their collection development policy, and some little testimonials that kind of explain.

One says, "I never go to the library because they don't have what I want."

And then the bottom one talks about how requesting materials is something that this particular community member finds to be a very valuable service of their library.

In West Virginia, the Parkersburg and Wood County Public Library also called on their community members for support when their city council tried to censure them because they had the book "Gender Queer" in their collection.

So, they posted this. It's a very long post on Facebook but - I don't know if you can see this. You can look at the slides later. They had 148 reactions, 80 comments, 184 shares. This is a small library. That is a lot of engagement.

And what happened? A whole bunch of people showed up at the city council meeting in support of the library, spoke out, and the city council withdrew their censure resolution because the library asked their community to stand up for them and they did.

And Gilroy Library, which is part of the Santa Clara Library System in California, also does regular promotions, really a little bit more of an explanation here of how to suggest a purchase, and then a link to their collection development policy.

And then they also just kind of say in here, hey, usually it takes us two to four weeks to process these requests, just so you know.

And they do this regularly because we have to communicate this with our public, and not just once. There's this thing called the marketing rule of seven, which was a theory in marketing that started in the 1930's around movies. And basically, what marketing executives in the 30's found is that you have to tell people about an average of seven times before they are going to take an action.

So, I think, I mean, I hate to get stuck on a number, but that's a good number to think about. You've got to continue to do this in not just one social media post but have it as a continuing part of your rotating promotions.

And it doesn't have to just be your library's job to do this. The Johnson Country Library in Kansas asked their foundation to help promote them, promote their collection development policy. So, they provided a photo and they provided the text and that made it really easy for the foundation to share that with their social media platform.

And think about, it's a whole different audience. Even though those folks are supporting the library, they may not actually go to the library, and they may not be signed up for the library's newsletters. So, it's helping the library to reach a whole new part of their community that we know are supporters of their work.

I would suggest that you put somewhere on your website that is really easy for people to find, a very clear statement about your mission, vision, and values, and your work in terms of collection - the collection, social justice, however you want to phrase it.

This is the statement from the Oak Park Library in Illinois. And I actually didn't take this from their website because what they do is they take this statement and they put it in the about section of all of their social media channels. So, this came from their LinkedIn page.

And again, very clearly, we know what Oak Park is. We know what they stand for. We know who they are and what we can expect when we're interacting with them. And then even came up with a tagline that they printed on vinyl that they put at the front entrance of their library. Clearly, when you walk in, they are stating this is a library for everyone. Now, vinyl signage is a little expensive and I know that is not something everybody can do and that is okay.

I talked with a librarian called Perry Stokes who works for the Baker County - Baker Public Library System in the state of Oregon. So, Baker Public is in a very conservative area of the state. They're also very religious. And so, what Perry decided to do was position the marketing of their collection statements in such a way as to say, the First Amendment right to read is just as important as the First Amendment right to religion and to worship in the way you want, because that message resonated with their audience.

They also put a big old American flag right at the front entrance of their library to show that we are supportive of our community and we know these are the values that you espouse, but they also have a whole bunch of challenged books right there on the front desk. They have the ALA's Library Bill of Rights in a brochure at the front desk. And so, they do these things to start conversations with their community.

And Deborah Caldwell-Stone loves this because she says you should never take it for granted that your community knows what your mission, vision, and values are.

>> DEBORAH CALDWELL-STONE: And if you think carefully about it, you know, those who are asking for the banning of books dealing with LGBTQIA persons, are asking for the banning of books that reflect the lives and experiences of Black persons, persons of color, which are really the targeted books in this campaign, are really dividing us. Are telling people that we don't - we are not one community and that not everyone belong - deserves to have their lives reflected on the shelves of libraries. And that's absolutely false.

And so, the library can develop a message about unity and service to the community and inviting everyone in, that libraries are welcoming and inclusive places for everyone in the community to come together to share their lives, to share their stories, and to make use of a resource that is just invaluable in the community for promoting education, opportunity, economic development, and learning.

>> ANGELA HURSH: And as you've probably guessed, I am an advocate of celebrating and promoting intellectual freedom all year long, not just during Banned Books Week. This is a great example from the Dallas Graham Branch of the Jacksonville Public Library. The librarian who put this bookmark together is named Skylar Cox (ph). And they've actually turned this into kind of a scavenger hunt at their library.

So, they'll hand the bookmark to the patron and ask them to either pull the books from the shelf and bring them to the desk or like write down the Dewey decimal thing or take a photo of them. And there's a purpose to that, not only just to kind of get them to think about books that are banned or challenged but also to start a conversation with the patron about the library's place in the community and about their mission for intellectual freedom.

And I really love what Skylar says here. In a sense, reading is direct action, and they can use this bookmark to encourage people to expand their reading into diverse areas and make sure that they really understand what it means and the value of diverse books in their collection.

The York Public Library in Maine has added something about intellectual freedom to their monthly newsletters. They have a yearlong banned books club and because I love marketing and emails and analyzing them, I was curious if - so, I don't know if you can see it on here; there's a couple of links in this email. There's the blue links up at the top under the all ages banned book challenge, and then we've got two calls to action at the very bottom. We've got a Twilight Book Club and we've got the "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood.

Can you guess which thing was clicked on most frequently in this email? Just, you can shout it out.

Okay, louder.

Twilight? Anybody else have another guess?

What'd you -

It was indeed "The Handmaid's Tale." Fifty-six clicks. This is a small library, guys. Fifty-six clicks for information on a book club I think is pretty darn good. I think it probably - like, I guessed Twilight before I looked at it, but I think it's because this newsletter is sent to mostly adult patrons, so that makes a lot of sense to me.

But people - there is a demand for this in the community and it's not just on your minds. It's on the minds of the public as well.

Thank you for indulging me on that little interactive activity.

So, Batavia Public Library in Illinois adds news to their newsletter that is not related to the library directly, but they put this link to the CNN article that talks about book banning efforts as ongoing education for their community. Just making them aware that there is a nationwide conversation going on and ever so slightly getting them to think about what this means for them in their community and what it means for their library.

Dayton Metro Library did this for Banned Books Week but my personal thing is that they should just like, take the - go back in and edit this LinkedIn post, take the hashtag out, and just do this all year long. They made a quiz. They gamified intellectual freedom and diverse books. And I think it was very easy to put together. They got a lot of engagement around it. And it would be something that they could promote all year long.

And Boon County Library, which is very near to where I live, did a video that I am going to play for you here in a second around Banned Books Week, but again - well, first, I want to tell you, this again is a small library. This thing got 2,000 views on YouTube which is a lot for a library - I watch a lot of library marketing videos on YouTube. 2,000 is a lot and all they would have to do is change the title of this and they could continue to promote it all year long. But it's really, really cute, so I would like to play it for you now.

It starts out quiet.

>> LIBRARIAN 1: Did you know the Diary of Anne Frank was once banned by a textbook committee for being a real downer?

>> LIBRARIAN 2: Uh, no?

>> LIBRARIAN 1: Have you heard of Banned Books Week?

>> LIBRARIAN 2: Banned Books Week? Is it a week dedicated to books about bands and musical marchings?

>> LIBRARIAN 1: Not quite.

The American Library Association defines a book challenge as an attempt to remove or restrict materials based upon the objections of a person or group. A ban is the removal of those materials.

Banned Book Week encourages libraries, authors, educators, book sellers, parents, and readers of all ages to defend and support reading material for all.

Hundreds of books have been banned over the years and this number will only increase if books continue to be censored or challenged.

We shouldn't have to hide the books we want to read.

By banning books, we are restricting the voices of people that deserve to be heard. This is a reminder that we have freedom of expression. This is a reminder that we discover ideas and information through this expression. This is a reminder that books are for reading, not burning.

>> ANGELA HURSH: I just love that. And like, I know sometimes it feels like videos are difficult to do and marketing, but you could do that with a cell phone. It's not that difficult. The shots are not that complicated or sophisticated. And you could use - and videos - oh, social media loves videos.

So, a video is a great way to educate your community about intellectual freedom.

Another point that I want to make is we talk a lot, and I know again, I said this is kind of a downer subject, but one way you can talk about intellectual freedom in your community is to promote the joy of reading, because we all feel joy and

connection with diverse characters when we read them and that's where emotion happens and that makes your promotions memorable, it makes your points memorable.

So, Springwater Public Library does this very simply on social media, just asks people, what are you reading? And they talk about it. They also do a little bit of readers advisory in this post which I couldn't show you because I, you know, Facebook, it's so long.

Anyway, so, people will say what they're reading and then they have a librarian who replies back. If the book that the person is reading does not involve diverse characters but has some themes or appeals that they can pick out from the name of the book, then they find a diverse book that has those same appeals and themes and suggest it to the reader. Just kind of ever so slightly challenging them to expand their reading.

The Toronto Public Library has intellectual freedom and information literacy as part of their strategic plan. I was lucky enough to hear their city librarian talk about their strategic plan and when she unveiled it and I never forgot this point number four. I've never seen a library do this.

So, if you're in the middle of your strategic planning or if you're thinking about doing strategic planning in the next year or two, I would encourage you to actually put this in your strategic plan.

What happens? When it's in your strategic plan, it gives you not only permission but you have to start marketing around it because it's part of your plan.

So, Toronto does a lot - if you look at their social media accounts and you sign up for their newsletters, they do a lot of programs and they do a lot of promotion around point number four in their strategic plan, which helps to educate their community about intellectual freedom.

But if you don't have the ability to do that, you can do what this tiny little library does and basically just do something on social media. They do this every Friday. And in this post, they are driving home the point that you can't trust everything that you see on the internet. If you want the truth, if you want accurate information, you go to the libraries and they are putting themselves out there. Before Google, ask a librarian and

we're going to tell you whether the statement is fact or fiction.

I'm going to talk for a few minutes about what executives and directors and library board members can do in the fight for intellectual freedom. The Stark Library Executive Director posted this on the library's blog after the social unrest in the summer of 2020. And it got a lot of traction because a lot of the time, directors don't come out and directly say, this is what our library stands for, this is what we're going to be doing in this area of social justice.

And when you do this and you're a director or someone in a position of power, it really raises the morale of your staff and it gives your staff permission and they feel like they're being seen and their efforts to want to work on intellectual freedom are supported by your library's senior staff.

The Chillicothe Public Library staff decided to get together and write a blog post this summer about intellectual freedom, censorship, and book challenges.

This is another option if you're worried about putting your name on a blog post or in front of a promotion. You can do it as a staff, as a library. You can see they talked a lot about intellectual freedom in here. I have a link to this particular blog post in the handout. And it's just a really great way. And they can use this blog post as a source for marketing. So, they can pull pieces of this blog post and put them on social media. They can make a video about it. They can put this in all of their email newsletters. The blog is a landing page and a source, a funnel for all of the other marketing that they can do around this area.

Jennifer Bush Pearson is one of my heroes. I got to meet her at a conference last year. She is the director of the Marshall County Memorial Library. Her library was not targeted in a book challenge but the schools in her area in Tennessee were. And on her personal Instagram and LinkedIn page, she made it clear that her - she and her library will not stand for it and she stands with the schools and she gave information to her followers so that they could take direct action and contact legislators to try to fight back against these book challenges. I just thought that was really cool and something that other directors could do.

So, I know I said earlier, all of this marketing is wonderful and helps strengthen your library but we're not able to prevent challenges, so what happens if you end up dealing with a challenge?

Preparation is key. Planning is key. And Deborah Caldwell-Stone has more to say about that.

Play the video, please.

>> DEBORAH CALDWELL-STONE: Preparation in advance is the most important thing. Working with a friends group, working with your community organizations, your elected officials, and your board members, as well as your staff. Preparing them in advance before a challenge takes place so that they know that there are policies in place, so they know what the legal environment is. Because as public institutions, of course there are court opinions and court cases that affect book challenges that everyone should be acquainted with.

Developing that relationship of trust that's so important. Many of these challenges are successful because they - the disinformation and misinformation that is shared about a book finds ready purchase when people don't understand how books are acquired for a library, the policies that are in place that govern that. That process of reaching out to a Kiwanis or rotary, church groups, to talk about collection development, the purpose of the library, the mission of the library, and its role in serving the entire community can go a long way to either preventing challenges altogether or making sure that there is a community of support in place when a challenge does occur so that the disinformation or misinformation that is so frequently feeding into some of the most controversial challenges can't find ready purchase in your community. And they turn to you as the expert on librarianship, as well they should.

>> ANGELA HURSH: Okay. So, we're going to prepare ourselves and we're going to prepare our staff, because we want to make sure that when they're faced with a challenge, our staff are not making fear-based decisions.

Unfortunately, I think this should be a part - I think you should have - if you're having staff meetings monthly, I think you should put it on the agenda every single staff meeting. And maybe there is nothing to talk about that month around intellectual freedom, but maybe there is. Maybe there are things

happening in your community or across the nation. Your librarians will want to talk about it.

Practicing and roleplaying how to answer those challenges is something you can do at staff meetings and you should be doing. When I do a presentation - I don't know if you guys do this when you do presentations - but I practice over and over and over again, because you want it to kind of be embedded in your mind so that you don't have to think about what you're going to say. So, it comes out naturally and you're not scared.

Same thing with these challenges. We want our librarians to feel comfortable when they are faced with a challenge by a patron, so we'll have them practice. It should also be a part of your onboarding experience for your libraries. You should let new library staff know that intellectual freedom challenges are happening and how to deal with them.

Getting into this a little more in-depth, everyone at your library should know how to handle a challenge in person and online, even if they don't have access to your social media accounts. Again, we're just - we're just erasing that fear and making sure we're transparent in how we handle these instances and how the process works, so everybody feels comfortable with it and knows with it.

In line with practicing, talking points are always really helpful for library staff. Maybe creating a list of talking points and practicing them during staff meetings or in other training sessions. Maybe your staff development day.

Everybody should know what happens after a challenge is made and who gets notified. And so, speaking of policies, you may want to put another one in place regarding intellectual freedom challenges.

So, the Springfield City Library was kind enough to share their process with me and this is the six-point process that they teach all of their library staff and that they talk about in training, in meetings, et cetera. I'll just go through it really briefly.

The first thing they tell staff to do is to listen to the person making the challenge but don't argue, don't debate. Thank them for sharing their views.

If that doesn't diffuse the situation, they are instructed to show the patron their policies. If that doesn't diffuse the situation, they are asked to give the patron a challenge form, which the patron fills out. And then they tell the patron, someone will get back to you about this.

100% of the time so far, this has worked for their library to diffuse the situation at the front desk.

After the challenge form is filled out, it is given to the collection development manager, because that person needs to know what's going on with his or her collection. The collection development manager gives it to the director of the library who personally responds to the challenger.

If the director cannot explain to the challenger why this book is part of the collection and why it is where it is in the library, the patron is invited to come to the next board hearing and make their comments known.

About half of the time, those people show up at the board meeting. About half the time, they don't.

Everybody at the Springfield City Library knows that this is the process. Again, this helps to alleviate fear.

One of the stories that Deborah Caldwell-Stone told at PLA in March of last year was about a library - I think they had maybe two people at the front desk and somebody came in and challenged a book. And the staff got scared and so they took the book off the shelf right away and put it in the back.

That's not what we want our staff to be doing. So, we want to train them and let them know that there is a policy in place for these things to be handled.

If your library is facing a challenge, first report it to the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom. You can also report it to the Every Library Organization. They have been very helpful with some libraries in fighting back against challenges. Also, the group United for Libraries can offer assistance to your library. And your State Library Association can step in to help. So, you're not alone and you don't have to face this all by yourself.

One thing folks always ask me is like when in the process should we start reporting? I'm going to go back a slide

actually, because the answer to that, at least I think in this instance, if you have a policy like this, if it gets to the board hearing, I think that's the time in which you need to be reporting it to ALA OIF and the other organizations. Anything above that, you've diffused the situation, you've explained the situation, and you don't really need to report it. You can keep it for your own records but you don't have to report it for an overarching organization.

ALA OIF also has a consulting service that can help you to fight those book challenges.

So, if the challenge does get to a board hearing, if you know that the challenger is going to go to the media, if you know - if they have threatened to go to the media, if they are talking about it on social media, two steps in that instance.

First, let your staff know what's going on, all staff. Just let them know what's happening. And then go to the media yourself.

I worked for twenty years as a television broadcast news journalist. I'll tell you, if your library gets to the media first, you are going to set the tone for that story. It's just how it works.

So, if you know this person or if this group is going to raise a ruckus, you go to the media first and explain what's going on and that you have policies in place to support your decisions and that you have supporters who are going to come out and help rally around your library.

And speaking of a little bit of media relations training here, when you are taking questions from the media, it's okay to say, we don't know yet or I can't answer that question, and to forward all questions to your lawyer, your State Library Association, or the ALA OIF will speak to the media for you, so you can forward messages to them.

I know ambush interviews is a scary notion. I am sorry to confess this to you but when I worked as a journalist, we did this thing where we would try to find out who was working at the organization that we were doing a story on and investigating and this was usually done through social media or somebody knows somebody, and then we would reach out to those employees on social media. Some of my former colleagues have even - this happened to me when I worked at the Cincinnati Library. They

waited outside for staff members to come out and staff members, you know, they've got their badge on or they've got their official shirt on. They know who's working at the library. And so, they would come up to them and ask them questions about certain things that they were doing stories on.

So, let your staff know that could happen and that they shouldn't answer questions and they should forward all questions to whoever your designated spokesperson is.

Also, if you're facing a book challenge, it's really important to keep an eye on all of your social media accounts for the duration of the challenge. I know this is difficult for a lot of small libraries, but again, from personal experience both on the side as a media person and then working in a library, those comment sections can get out of control.

Those groups will go comment on posts that your library are putting up for marketing of things that have absolutely nothing to do with the challenge. They just are there to take over the conversation and keep driving home the point that they think your library is bad. So, you have to keep an eye on your social media accounts and have some kind of plan in place for who is going to be monitoring them for the duration of the challenge.

But here's a fun thing that can happen on social media. So, the Lake County Public Library put this up during Banned Books Week. They had a display and they put a nice little photo of their display on Facebook.

And again, I don't know if you can see this in the back but wowee, did it take off. 319 comments, 285 shares. It got out of control. I actually gave this talk at a conference and I didn't know it but the person who ran the social media account for this library was in the audience and she jumped up and like told this whole story.

The bottom line is two things. You can see, where I have the arrow, they used their standards of behavior policy to get the comment section under control, because there were people who were violating it. So, they were just like, hey guys, don't know if you know this but we have this policy in place and we will hide or delete your comments because you're violating our standards of library behavior.

But actually, what she said was, she didn't really have to respond to any of the negative comments because her library

supporters came out and came to her defense and basically took care of all the trolls for her.

So, it was really affirming for her. It was affirming for her staff. Side note: her library's Facebook got a whole lot of engagement because Facebook doesn't care what the comments are saying. They just see the fact that a little library in Indiana got 319 comments and they're like, oh my gosh, something - this library is doing amazing work. Let's boost all of their organic posts. So, they got some benefit out of the debate, which is great.

But your library supporters will come to your defense and you don't always have to be the one fighting back, because you've educated them about what your library's mission is and they love you and will come to your defense.

And you may be wondering if these fights are even winnable. They are. Martha Hickson is a school librarian in New Jersey. In January of last year, her school board was targeted by protestors who demanded a couple of award-winning books with LGBTQIA themes be removed from the shelves. Martha was labeled, because she's the only school librarian, she was labeled a sex offender. She got hate mail. She was the victim of vandalism. Her judgment and integrity was questioned but she did not back down.

She organized a defense for keeping those books on the shelves. She got students to come to meetings and to write letters of support. She got a letter of support from author David Levithan. She went to board meetings. And the board then voted to keep all the books on the shelf because of all the work that she did, and she ended up winning the ALA Lemony Snicket Prize for her work.

And I wanted to congratulate her, as I was putting this presentation together, and she tweeted me back which was really, really cool.

And by the way, you should follow her on Twitter, @Sassy_Librarian. She's amazing. Her tweets are great. But she said thank you. And she talked about using your tools to help fight against book challenges.

My hope is now that we have gone through this whole presentation, that you now have the tools that will enable your library to build support and to fight against book challenges.

And I want you to remember that you are not alone in this fight, because I know it can feel very isolating, it can feel like your library is the only one being challenged, but you're not. And the work you're doing is important. ALA knows that it is. I know that it is. Library supporters know that it is. You are not alone. You are going to strengthen your public's perception through the intentional marketing of your policies and your mission, vision, and values. You're going to rally your supporters ahead of time so that they're there for you when and if - hopefully if but maybe when - you face a challenge. And you're going to know how to respond to challenges should they come.

I am going to take questions in a moment. I just wanted to share with you, I talked a long time ago, it feels like an hour ago, probably was, about the Actively Anti-Racist Service to Readers course that is on the Learn with NoveList platform. I do have a code for you. LIBRARY2023 gets you 20% off that amazing course. It's probably the most popular course on our platform right now. And I will take questions now and I have a microphone that I need to bring to you if you have a question.

Or you could come up here and say hello to me too.

>> AUDIENCE: I just wanted to add to your story about Martha Hickson. My name is Ewa Dziedzic-Elliott. I am the President of New Jersey Association of School Librarians, so Martha is my girl. And I was actually the one who brought the award that she was awarded for her fight against censorship.

She actually did something completely unheard of because she mobilized the whole community. So, what actually happened was the banners recommended five books to be removed. The committee was formed. The committee recommended to keep only four. And the Board of Education voted against them and the Board of Education kept all five. But the Board of Education, to this day, did not apologize for the fact that they never stood by her side. They never took back or requested for the community members who spoke against her to defend her. She is actually not allowed to still speak at the board meetings. And when I was bringing the award to her during the board meeting, I was allowed to speak for her but she was not allowed to even come to the mic.

So, the board is still working against her, so it is still happening.

>> ANGELA HURSH: Thank you for sharing.

>> AUDIENCE: Hi. So, I'm from a library system where we still are experiencing challenges but not to the level as other libraries. But like, our neighbors are really experiencing it. We're really lucky that our supporters far outnumber the people challenging it. But I do think that a threat of censorship to any library is a threat of censorship to all libraries, so I'm kind of wondering if there is something that the libraries that don't experience that challenge as often, if there is something that they can do to support the libraries that do experience that challenge.

>> ANGELA HURSH: That's a great question. I think the first thing would be to ask them what they need from you. And then secondly, to kind of do some of the things that we saw in terms of education, so sharing news stories about how book bans affect the community, maybe sharing the Wheelock Education Policy Center's study about how book challenges impact school libraries. I'm sure there are other studies out there that talk about how they impact public libraries. Just sharing those educational. And there's a term in marketing, it's called content marketing. So, it's basically like, educating your community about things and not directly promoting your library, and I think that would be helpful.

But I would say first, to ask them what they need from you. Maybe they need help letting the community know how to contact legislators or to contact whoever is going to be making the decision about the book challenge, whether it's the library board or the city council or whoever, and how they can make their voices known and supportive of those - of that library.

Does that help? Good.

Any other questions?

One thing I don't talk about in this presentation because I don't have an answer to it, but I do get asked this question quite often, is what happens if your board is working against you like Martha's is? I don't have an answer to that honestly, except that we need to be better about getting good candidates to run or supporting candidates running for school boards, library boards who we know will be supportive of the library. That is really, really hard. I'm acknowledging that that's hard. But I've thought about this a lot. I think that's the only answer to that question. Otherwise, the monster is in the room

and that - there's no amount of marketing that's going to help you with that.

Boy, that was a downer. Goodness gracious.

Hi.

>> AUDIENCE: I think the other part of that is board education, is doing some proactive training of your board about why we have these policies and what they mean and how they play out in the larger library field. And sort of inoculating them against, you know, the public challenges that might freak them out and cause them to kind of close down and go in a poor direction.

>> ANGELA HURSH: That's a really good point because like, my library board in Cincinnati was a bunch of judges and physicians. They didn't work in a library. They don't know what libraries do. So, that is a great point. Thank you for bringing that up.

>> AUDIENCE: So, in New Jersey, we have very active group of school librarians in our association, and what we have been doing over the past couple of years through the elections, we actually - and whether it's for offices on local boards, school of education boards, library boards, what we have been doing is we prepare a set of questions, we send it to the candidates, and then we publicly announce the responses. And basically, this is our way to help our communities to know who are they voting for.

>> ANGELA HURSH: Thank you for sharing that. That's excellent.

All right. Any other questions?

Okay. I want to thank you all for coming and listening so attentively today, and wish you a great rest of the conference.

Oh, and don't forget to fill out your session evaluation because I really appreciate that feedback.

Thank you so much.