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South Carolina Library Association's Advocacy Committee: Campaign Efforts and Best Practices.

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South Carolina Library Association's Advocacy Committee: Campaign Efforts and Best Practices.

Abstract

Annually, the South Carolina Library Association Advocacy Committee presents an advocacy update discussing the past year's legislative practices and campaign efforts. This paper details the committee's work from 2017 until 2020 and discusses succession planning.

Keywords

Library Advocacy, Library Funding, Library Campaigns, Legislative, Advocacy, Grassroots, Funding, Activism

Before renaming and restructuring the advocacy committee in 2017, the legislative committee chair managed all legislative work by coordinating the annual National Library Legislative Day (NLLD) visits in Washington, D.C, fielding any legislative concerns to and from SCLA members and relaying any legislative needs to the American Library Association through the chapter councilor. It was an unspoken rule that the SCLA/ALA chapter councilor attended and assisted with each NLLD visit. After evaluating the committee's work, each incoming SCLA/ALA Chapter Councilor was asked to formally become an advocacy committee co-chair with the legislative chair to help lift the burden of work from one sole person. This restructuring sought to ensure that the SCLA/ALA chapter councilor would attend the NLLD visit and take an active role in the committee. It is still the recommendation of the committee to keep this structure although this restructuring nor the committee's name change have been updated in SCLA's bylaws as of Fall 2020.

To further the work of the committee, advocacy agendas were created each year to reflect current library trends and illustrate advocacy and legislative needs. In effort to reduce duplicative work, a five-year advocacy agenda was created in 2019. This work is set to expire in 2025.

SOUTH CAROLINA LIBRARY ASSOCIATION 2020-2025 ADVOCACY AGENDA

Mission

- Connect with officials at the federal, state, and local level.
- Engage current membership with frequent and timely action opportunities.
- Grow our advocate base.

2020 Issues

Funding/Appropriations	
Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding	SCLA supports increased funding for LSTA, especially the boost of \$17 million for the Grants to States program. This increase will help ensure that South Carolinians of all ages will have access to well supported libraries equipped with innovative technologies. See FY20 Senate Letter on LSTA (April 15, 2019)
Innovative Approaches to Literacy (IAL) Funding	SCLA supports increased funding for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy grant program to at least \$30 million. This increase would provide competitive awards to school libraries as well as not-for-profit organizations for all states including South Carolina. See FY20 Senate Letter on IAL (April 15, 2019)
Telecommunications	
Net Neutrality	SCLA supports the Save the Internet Act (S. 862) and the restoration of net neutrality and broadband competition protections for all Americans. See June 2019: Coalition Letter in Support of the Save the Internet Act

2019 Issues

Funding/Appropriations	
<p>Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funding</p>	<p>SCLA overwhelmingly supports funding LSTA at the reauthorized amount of \$232 million. This will allow for more than 120,000 public, school, academic, government and other libraries to advance employment, entrepreneurship, education, empowerment, and engagement in communities across America. This funding is the only federal funding program for libraries and is imperative to the growth of South Carolina's communities, education and libraries and should be funded.</p>
<p>Support funding to the Partnership of Among South Carolina Academic Libraries (PASCAL)</p>	<p>PASCAL is utilizing \$3.4 million in lottery funding to support the one- time migration costs for a Shared Library Services Platform for 55 member libraries. This investment ensures that all institutions, regardless of size, can participate. The shared platform will enhance the learning and research experience for students and faculty, allow libraries to more efficiently manage electronic and print collections, and reduce overall systems costs. Participating libraries will migrate to the Ex Libris Alma library services platform and Primo discovery solution in 2020. SCLA supports all funding allocated to PASCAL and hopes for continued support in 2019/2020 from federal funding.</p>

Telecommunications	
Net Neutrality	SCLA believes in Net Neutrality. It is important to libraries because “Libraries and librarians of every kind are dedicated to providing maximum and equitable access to information of all kinds” (ALA, 2017). We must “preserve the core principles of network neutrality articulated in the FCC’s Open Internet Order, which protects free speech online, education research, and innovation” (ALA, 2017).
Access	
Supporting the Affordable College Textbook Act	SCLA supports the passage of the Affordable College Textbook Act , and is in support of expanding the support of open access materials and textbooks in a higher education environment to achieve savings for students as introduced in the 115th Congress (S.1864) for the fourth time and reintroduced in 2019 Congress.

2020-2025 Goals

Connect

- South Carolina Library Legislative Day (Annually)
- National Library Legislative Day (Annually)
- Continued contact with representatives and staff annually
- SCASL Read-in (Annually, April 2nd, 2020)

Engage

- Email (Engage)
- Telephone (Engage)
- Postcards (Grassroots)
- Social Media (Engage/other)

Grow

- Autoenrollment in CQ Engage, a legislative action website provided by the American Library Association, for new SCLA members.

Creating a flexible agenda is key when planning advocacy and legislative work.

Additional planning, forethought and consideration must be had as legislators are often incoming and outgoing. Although many times funding needs follow trendlines, some state specific material can be included in future agendas. The committee was unable to achieve autoenrollment for incoming members and this could be a continued goal for the next co-chairs.

In keeping with the advocacy committee's mission, special effort was made to generate key connections across the state. This practice was in effort to create a cohesive message and reduce duplication of advocacy work. The committee sought to repeat the same advocacy message to legislators whether promoting school librarians, archivists, or the like. During this review period, a strong connection was made with the South Carolina School Library Association (SCASL). SCASL sent a school librarian to most every local legislator visit held throughout 2017 until present and heavily participated in every grassroots campaign held. Both the SC State Library and the Association of Public Library Administrators held volunteer

positions on the committee serving as liaisons to each group and providing input on advocacy plans.

2016-2021 Advocacy and Campaign efforts

2016-2017

After the 2016 Presidential election, an overwhelming amount of library advocates sought to engage with local legislators on the impact of libraries on their communities, library funding and library advocacy. When the 2017 federal budget was presented, deep funding cuts were proposed for many government agencies including libraries. In response, the advocacy committee worked on its first grassroots postcard campaign in partnership with [EveryLibrary](#), a national political action committee for libraries, entitled *“Save South Carolina Libraries.”*

This campaign sought to remind Senator Lindsey Graham to “Save South Carolina Libraries” by providing direct feedback to the Senator from South Carolina library users. Virginia Cononie created the graphic for the front of the postcard and the advocacy committee crafted the message. The postcards were printed with funds provided by EveryLibrary. Participation was solicited through an open Google form. Interested advocates submitted requests for blank postcards. Cononie packaged and sent out bundles to each requestor. Requestors were asked to prominently display the postcards in their library space for the community participation. On the back of the postcard, library advocates were asked to finish the sentence “South Carolina libraries and the people they serve need these funds because...” Some sentences included:

- “It’s the highlight of our week. Storytime makes a difference when you are a stay-at-home mom.”

- “Libraries are the life-blood of our community.”
- “The library serves the community through programs and activities to suit diverse needs.”

The advocacy committee created, organized, and held its first in-state legislator visit, South Carolina Library Legislative Day (SCLLD), to deliver the result of this campaign. Over 300 postcards were delivered in person to Senator Graham’s Greenville office. Additionally, the group was told that many more postcards were sent in via the mail prior to our visit. Before meeting with Senator Graham’s local staffer, each returned postcard was photographed and uploaded to Google Drive. They may be viewed at the following link:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1c93sfcpV4O69pk8loCKCm5LsH6qMnC47?usp=sharing>

After completing this campaign, the committee solicited feedback and learned to provide simple and direct rules to all participants. It was also decided to open all further campaigns to all state senators and federal representatives to achieve a wider reach.

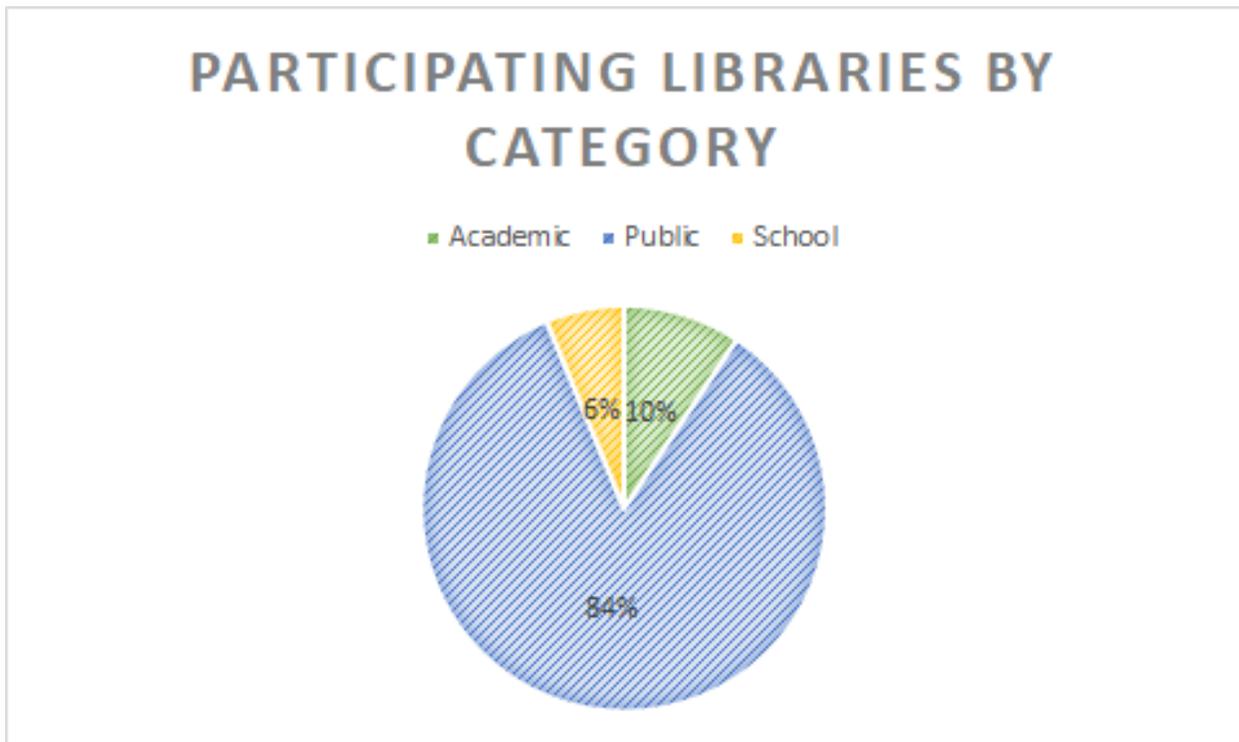
Participants also said that they wanted a larger space on the postcard to provide input.

2018-2019

In 2018-2019, the committee created and organized the “I love my library because...” funding campaign to show South Carolina federal legislators the impactful and invaluable work that South Carolina Libraries do every day in location specific districts. For this campaign, library advocates were asked to write out why they loved their library on the front of a postcard. Some advocates wrote long passages, while others just gave one sentence and additionally, a great deal of artwork was received depicting the impact of libraries. Through committee connections, the South Carolina Library Association for School Librarians (SCASL) mobilized their school

librarians provided a strong clear voice illustrating the value of school librarians through student’s postcard participation. Every postcard was scanned and placed on a digital map to indicate participating libraries across the state. View the map at this link:

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1lwe43U2RmbtiShKleXvOl7rVhwziLrNN&usp=sharing>



Participating Libraries by Name	
Allendale Hampton Jasper Regional Library	Hester Memorial Library
Anderson County Library	Inman Library
Andrews Library	Irmo Branch Library
Bamberg County Library	John’s Island Regional Library
Charleston County Public Library	Lexington County Public Library
Cherokee County Public Library	Marion County Library
Chester County Library	Mt. Pleasant Regional Library
Colleton County Memorial Library	Olanta Public Library
Cynthia Graham Hurd/St. Andrews Library	Pelion Branch Library
Cyrill-Westside Library	Richland Library- Main
Denmark Library	Robert Anderson Middle School Library
Doctor’s Bruce And Lee Foundation Library	Seneca Library - Oconee
Dorchester County Library	Simpsonville Library - Hendricks
Dorman High School Library	Spartanburg County Public Library
Francis Marion University- Rogers Library	St. Helena Library, Beaufort
Greenville Technical College Library	USC Upstate Library
Harvin Clarendon County Library	

Small Sample of Quotes from District Postcards		
District 1	Charleston County Public Library	“It has always been a safe place for me to learn about myself, others and the world. It provides me with educational opportunities that I could not have otherwise. It has enabled me to broaden my knowledge of perspectives/life experiences that are different from my own and hear from diversity of world views. In short, it has been critical in helping me live a more full and meaningful life.”
District 2	Lexington County Public Library – Pelion Branch	“There is nothing like a grandma with a library card and a mission.”
District 3	Robert Anderson Middle School Library	“The library means the most thing to me because reading books and other things feel good and make my heart happy.”
District 4	Simpsonville Public Library	“It is my home away from home. It is almost the first place I go when I move to a different community or city. I love the free events at the library, from author visits to special music performances from local orchestras or musicians. I love the space provided at the library for other special community educational programs.”

District 5	Cherokee County Library	“I love my library because of the cozy spaces to read!”
District 6	Dorchester County Library	“The children in rural areas are in awe of what they can do. The way their eyes light up when they find a book or movie is amazing! If taxpayer money is not provided, this joy may be taken away. What a disservice that would be.”
District 7	Andrews Library	“I like this library because it has a game room and tons of computers and a lot of kids come here.”

Every district had at least a couple of postcards returned, and many districts had several hundred returned. Each card was hand delivered by local constituents and library advocates during the 2019 South Carolina Library Legislative Day (SCLLD). Contrary to the 2017 SCLLD, multiple organizers across the state met with multiple federal legislator offices. Four out of the seven district offices were visited with overwhelming success and positive feedback.

In Spring of 2019, Mrs. Virginia Cononie, SCLA advocacy co-chair, was chosen as the sole South Carolina representative to attend the first ALA Capital Fly-in. This event, like National Library Legislative Day, sought participation from one representative from each state. Representatives across the nation were chosen because they lived in a particular district of their state. Cononie visited District 4’s representative and both Senator Graham’s and Scott’s office promoting libraries and asking for library funding.

2019-2020

From late 2019 until early 2020, advocacy efforts were focused on capturing stories from every single South Carolina Library. 200-word narratives and various digital photos were collected detailing what it means to work, use, and manage local libraries across our state. This campaign was entitled “Show and Tell Your Legislator. Each story was submitted via a libguides website and an open Google Form. When COVID-19 struck, this project implicitly stalled. A great deal of effort was given to this project along with passionate participation from the South Carolina Association of School Librarians. Total campaign submissions and downloadable PDF Booklet may be viewed at the following link:

<https://uscupstate.libguides.com/Share2021/districtbooks#s-lg-box-wrapper-30336683>

2021

In effort to focus on sharing relevant details about South Carolina libraries, the “Show and Tell Your Legislator” campaign was suspended, reworked, and renamed “Share Your Story.” Libraries across the state are encouraged to submit a 300-word narrative and one photo describing library services during the global pandemic. This project hopes to open the thoughts and minds of SC state representatives on the true impact of libraries during crisis. Submissions will be collected in a district specific booklet just as planned in the previous campaign. Booklets will be printed and delivered to the congress person via mail and email. Virtual visits will be requested during the week of April 19th, 2021. Participation is open until March 31, 2021. Visit the following link to upload submissions: <https://uscupstate.libguides.com/Share2021>

Distinctions Awarded

Mr. Jonathan Newton, advocacy co-chair, was awarded the SCLA Intellectual Freedom Award in 2019 and the American Library Association's Gordon Conable Award in 2020 for his outstanding work defending intellectual freedom, upholding the Library Bill of Rights, and meeting the drastically varying needs of his library community while they either participated, protested or supported a local Drag Queen Storytime. South Carolina library professionals and others across the nation nominated and secured the awards for Newton by touting his unwavering spirit, continual drive to provide equitable services, and ability to serve his community and library staff during a time of crisis. His work should be defined as an example for all who serve communities confronted with controversial topics or censorship challenges.

Succession Planning

Beginning in Spring 2021, the advocacy committee will begin succession planning with a new co-chair from the South Carolina State Library. The committee hopes that a chair chosen from the State Library will encourage participation and engagement from Public Libraries and form a direct tie to the advocacy work already in progress for the state. All those interested in being involved with this group, should reach out to Virginia Cononie at vcononie@uscupstate.edu until June 2021.