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Philanthropy and Libraries

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New and Noteworthy: Philanthropy and Libraries

Jennifer A. Bartlett

It would require volumes to describe in detail just exactly how and where the ironmaster bestowed and still bestows his munificence. The world knows about the many libraries at Braddock, Homestead, Johnstown, Edinburgh, Dunferline, besides the great Carnegie Library and Music Hall at Pittsburg, which have so stimulated the intellectual pulse of a city tempted to devote itself too absolutely to material pursuits...he will give of his millions, but he exacts of the community what he would exact of the individual – that once in possession of its library it must carry the work forward.

– “Andrew Carnegie’s Principles of Philanthropy.” *New York Times*, Apr 15, 1900: 27.¹

Business and industrialist Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919) is one of the best-known philanthropists in the history of libraries. In his later years, he donated the greater part of his fortune, some \$350 million, to numerous foundations, universities, and charities. The Carnegie Corporation of New York, established in 1911, built approximately 2,500 libraries in the United States and worldwide. However, public libraries were already firmly established in the United States long before Carnegie arrived from Scotland. The first free public library supported by taxation dates back to 1833, in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and the Boston Public Library has been loaning books to Massachusetts residents since 1854. Support from philanthropists including Carnegie, Samuel Tilden, Henry Tate, and John Passmore Edwards further promoted the growth and development of these important community institutions.²

The terms “philanthropy” and “fundraising” are sometimes used interchangeably. However, the difference is one of degree. Fundraising refers to seeking financial support for a specific organization or cause through seeking and gathering contributions of money from individuals, businesses, foundations, and other organizations. Methods can include face-to-face fundraising, phone-a-thons, online donations, and crowdsourcing, among others. Philanthropy focuses instead on a more comprehensive commitment to the common welfare, and implies a desire to promote good work through the donation of resources to causes furthering that work. Viewed through this lens, fundraising is only one part of an overall philanthropic strategy. Philanthropists are actively interested in problem-solving and in the past, present, and future organizational culture as a whole.

Regardless of definition, fundraising and philanthropy have been of primary concern to library leadership from the beginning. Writing in *Serials Librarian*, Rose Kernochan offers an interesting account of the history of fundraising in American public libraries, focusing on the New York Public Library.³ Fund-raising has not traditionally been a skill emphasized in library schools, but it is a necessity for effective leadership. Speaking of librarians’ sometimes reluctant role in fundraising, Kernochan says, “It seems that when they do undertake

advocacy—and take development seriously—these ‘accidental entrepreneurs’ can often achieve the results they need” (p. 134). The Fairfax County (Va.) Public Library, the Parnly Billings (Mont.) Library, and the Los Angeles Public Library are included as case studies of libraries in very different communities which employed innovative techniques to improve their financial situation and involve their respective communities. Fund-raising is not an optional leadership skill, writes Kernochan, rather, it is a vital component of library operations. Modern library directors must develop their own advocacy and fundraising abilities in order to help their institutions thrive, or hire professionals who can take on that responsibility.

Carla Hayden, the current Librarian of Congress, emphasizes the importance of community building and the importance of philanthropy in a 2016 interview for *Library Journal* by Executive Editor Meredith Schwartz.⁴ Hayden sees a need for an increase in private donations to the Library, or as she calls it, “patriotic philanthropy.” Dr. James H. Billington, Hayden’s immediate predecessor, founded the James Madison Council, an advisory group comprised of leaders from the public and private sectors. Hayden cites projects ranging from digitization of collections to the establishment of the Packard Campus of the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center (funded by the David and Lucille Packard Foundation) as examples of areas of interest for potential donors. Key to the success of the Libraries’ efforts is “friend-raising,” a term emphasizing the personal relationships that are key to successful and long-lasting philanthropic efforts. Writes Schwartz, “Hayden is fully prepared to use her honeymoon period and the interest generated by her historic appointment to start outreach to the public immediately, even as she sets LC’s house in order behind the scenes” (p. 22).

Fundraising and philanthropy is the focus of the April 2016 special issue of *Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances*. Jesse Whitchurch and Alberta Comer write about the University of Utah J. Willard Marriott Library’s re-evaluation of its fundraising strategy when its External Relations Director retired in 2014.⁵ The resulting new position of Development Director has enabled the library to change the organizational mindset about development at the library. After presenting a useful literature review, the authors describe the development of a “culture of philanthropy” at Marriott Library, which actively involves library staff throughout the organization, rather than only those in the development office. This process began with a SWOT analysis involving the dean, development team, and departments and small groups across the library. This assessment phase also yielded ideas for dozens of potential new projects, all of which were documented as potentially fundable; the administrative team then compared the ideas with the library’s strategic goals to develop priorities. Key to the success of the culture of philanthropy was also the integration of small but consistent outreach efforts across the organization, including offering researchers and visitors the opportunity to join mailing lists, reaching out to donors who are conducting scholarly research, and providing regular staff updates. Although the authors are optimistic about these changes, they also write about challenges including the assessment of library fundraising on library faculty and staff, as well as concerns from library personnel about devoting limited resources and time to the development process.

Another article in the *Bottom Line* special issue also focuses on the role of library staff in philanthropy from Michael A. Crumpton of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.⁶ In this article, Crumpton discusses the need for an organizational philanthropic strategy that will enable “library staff to embrace development goals and work with the development officer or office to achieve mutual goals for the benefit of the organization. This puts fundraising and donor development at the forefront of strategic planning to have ownership by everyone in the organization” (p. 98). Crumpton begins his article with a comprehensive and well-organized literature review. He then moves into the UNC-Greensboro case study, which involved

informational presentations to library staff, focus groups, the creation of a development advisory committee, the hiring process for a new development director, and the strategic planning process.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania Dean of Libraries Luis J. Gonzalez, writing in the 2013 Chandos title *Private Philanthropic Trends in Academic Libraries*, emphasizes the need for financial acumen among academic library managers, especially in the field of philanthropy.⁷ Communication with upper-level administrators is particularly important; convincing university leaders that open resources available through a search engine are no substitute for library databases can be challenging. Library leadership cannot depend on the larger institution to understand its libraries' unique issues and challenges, because those administrators are not as well equipped to communicate those issues and challenges to donors. Further, it can be challenging to prove the libraries' value: "In the existing financial environment higher education institutions are being asked to implement deep budget cuts. These cuts are not impacting on their libraries, which generally have been perceived by senior financial officers as "black holes" in their budgets, into which they pour substantial economics, and there is no clear way to determine their return on investment (ROI)" (2). Thus, the library director's ability to demonstrate a library's overall value to students, faculty, and administrators is key to fundraising and development success. Gonzalez offers an excellent primer for the director or dean who may be new to fundraising with chapters on the basics of philanthropy in academe, the impact of technology on fundraising, types of grants, friends groups, and management of development teams.

Another Chandos title, *Successful Fundraising for the Academic Library: Philanthropy in Higher Education*, likewise observes that library development can be challenging in an environment that often relies on the support alumni who have graduated from a specific department or college.⁸ With no alumni to approach, libraries can be seen as low-performing in a development context. Authors Kathryn Dilworth and Laura Sloop Henzl make the case for academic library fundraising as an integral part of the institution's overall fundraising mission, talk about the importance of collaborative relationships with other units in the university, and suggest strategies.

Although much of the current library literature on philanthropy focuses on academic libraries, according to the Foundation Center a significant portion of annual gifts are allocated to the public library sector. The Foundation Center's "Visualizing Funding for Libraries' Data Tool" (developed with support from the Knight Foundation) has been developed to help public, academic, school, corporate, and other types of libraries find funding opportunities and track funding patterns.⁹

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¹ Since 1900, many volumes have indeed been written about Andrew Carnegie and the work of the Carnegie Corporation. See, for example, Patricia L. Rosenfield's *A World of Giving: Carnegie Corporation of New York: A Century of International Philanthropy* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2014) and Ellen Condliffe Lagemann's *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1989).

² For a brief illustrated history of public libraries in the United States, see the exhibition from Hillary Brady and Franky Abbott, *A History of US Public Libraries* (Digital Public Library of America. September 2015), at <https://dp.la/exhibitions/history-us-public-libraries>. See also Michael Kevane and William A. Sundstrom. "The Development of Public Libraries in the United States, 1870–1930: A Quantitative Assessment." *Information & Culture: A Journal of History* 49, no. 2 (2014), 117–144.

³ Rose Kernochan, "Fundraising in American Public Libraries: An Overview." *Serials Librarian* 71, no. 2 (August 2016): 132-137.

⁴ Schwartz, Meredith. "Librarian of the People." *Library Journal* 141, no. 17 (October 15, 2016): 20-22. More information about the James Madison Council may be found at the Library Support website at <https://www.loc.gov/philanthropy/index.php>, and the Packard Campus at <https://www.loc.gov/avconservation/>.

⁵ Jesse Whitchurch and Alberta Comer. "Creating a Culture of Philanthropy." *Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances* 29, no. 2 (2016): 114-122.

⁶ Crumpton, Michael A. "Cultivating an Organizational Effort for Development." *Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances* 29, no. 2 (April 2016): 97-113.

⁷ Luis J. Gonzalez, *Private Philanthropic Trends in Academic Libraries* (Philadelphia: Chandos Publishing, 2013).

⁸ Kathryn Dilworth and Laura Sloop Henzl. *Successful Fundraising for the Academic Library: Philanthropy in Higher Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Chandos Publishing, 2017).

⁹ The Foundation Center was established in 1956 and offers a comprehensive database on U.S. and international grants. The Visualizing Funding for Libraries Data Tool can be found at <http://libraries.foundationcenter.org/>.