The Impact of the Economy

When an economic downturn impacts the library, library leadership must determine how to best cope.

The American Library Association Office of Advocacy prepared a series of modules, Advocacy University. Navigating a Challenging Budget Year has six sections including “Marshall Your Resources,” “Tell Your Story” and “Moving Forward.” Its “Advocating in a Tough Economy Toolkit” includes a video; tips for dealing with the media, the public and legislators; a section on how to stage a rally and many other great resources. Making Budget Presentations includes a section on “Citizen Support—Rallying Stakeholders Around the Library.”

Josh Cohen, Executive Director of the Mid-Hudson Library System presented “How to Deal with the Economic Situation” at a 2009 trustee workshop.

Karen Hyman, Executive Director of the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative, believes in rapid response and provides commonsense advice not only for bad times, but for all times: “Making the Most of Bad Times: Being There for Your Customer and Yourself in 2009.”

“Small Library Survival 101: How to Succeed and Thrive Even on Limited Funds,” presented by Herb Landau, then Library Director, Milanof-Schock Library, Mount Joy, PA at the 21 Annual Institute for Trustees and Friends, Commonwealth Libraries, PA. The outline of his talk is provided.


George Needham, Vice President, Global and Regional Councils, OCLC presented “Tough Times, Tough Choices” at the Iowa Small Libraries Online Conference, “Lemons to Lemonade: Surviving to Thriving in Tough Times,” January 21, 2010. Slide 17 asks these questions:
• “Will it show?”
• “Can it grow?”
• “Does it flow?”
• “Or is it time for it to go?”
Unfortunately the audio portion is password protected.

Needham along with Joan Frye Williams presented a podcast for Infopeople, “Thinking Out Loud about Some AMAZING Developments in Libraryland,” April 1, 2011. They discuss new creative service models; for example, Jamestown Public Library’s
project to decrease materials handling costs. Infopeople is supported by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.


The Allegheny County Library Association mounted a poster on its wiki to make a point about cuts to the library budget. This is an example of a picture being worth 1000 words.


George, Bill. 7 Lessons for Leading Crisis. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2009. Available through Access Pennsylvania Database. Table of contents available on the publisher’s website. Although this is written for the profit-making sector, many of the lessons about economic crisis are germane.

De Rosa, Cathy. “Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources: A Report to the OCLC Membership.” Dublin, Ohio: OCLC Online Computer Library Center, 2005. Although the conclusions may or may not be surprising, the process involved in gathering the information informs the study. Published in 2011, Perceptions of Libraries, 2010: Context and Community “is a follow-up to the 2005 Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources. The new report provides updated information and new insights into information consumers and their online information habits, preferences and perceptions. Particular attention was paid to how the current economic downturn has affected information-seeking behaviors and how those changes are reflected in the use and perception of libraries.”

The Nonprofit Finance Fund, “a national leader in financing nonprofits, strengthening their financial health and improving their capacity to serve their communities” has provided recommendations for dealing with economic downturns. One important section is titled: “Five Recommendations for Nonprofits in a Recession.”
This article from the *Financial Times* online edition, *FT.com*, by Clara Miller discusses the principle of doing more with less. “*More from Non-Profits Now Means Less in Future.*” December 9, 2008.

The Sergay Group Ltd. prepared a white paper, “*Managing Through Tough Times.*” Strategy, not fear, should guide your organization.


From the cover of *The State of America’s Libraries: A Report from the American Library Association*, April 2010: “Recession drives more Americans to libraries in search of employment resources; but funding lags demand.” Roberta Stevens, ALA President-Elect, hosted a webinar on the report. The news release summarized key trends.

How’s this for a title? “*Tough Times Make Tougher Libraries.*” Sarah Houghton-Jan, Digital Futures Manager at the San Diego Public Library who also blogs as the Librarian in Black, presented this at the Iowa Small Libraries Online Conference, “*Lemons to Lemonade: Surviving to Thriving in Tough Times.*” January 21, 2010. Both audio and slides are available.

Hamilton-Pennell, Christine. “*Public Libraries and Community Economic Development: Partnering for Success.*” *Rural Research Report* 18, no. 10 (Winter 2008) 1-3. We all know this, but in case you want to read it, the article “examines the role that public libraries can play in supporting local economic development efforts and, specifically, in helping to create vibrant communities and meet the information and workforce needs of local entrepreneurs.”

The College of DuPage’s “*Making the Best of a Shrinking Budget*” January 29, 2010 teleconference archive has streaming video, slides and handouts.