



# Staying **CONNECTED**



A **Toolkit** to Build **Support**  
in the **Community** for Your  
**Technology Programs**

BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation*

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***Staying Connected: A Toolkit to Build Support  
in the Community for Technology Programs***

Published by  
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation  
P.O. Box 23350  
Seattle, WA 98102  
USA

Part number: BMG-420-0091-00

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June 2002



# Table of Contents

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## **Chapter 1: HOW TO USE “STAYING CONNECTED” 1**

- A ROAD MAP FOR “STAYING CONNECTED” 3
- WELCOME TO “STAYING CONNECTED” 4
- GOALS, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS WORKSHEET 6

## **Chapter 2: BEFORE YOU BEGIN 7**

- DEVELOP COMPUTER USE POLICIES 8
- DEVELOP A SECURITY POLICY 9
- INVENTORY YOUR HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE 10
- MAP YOUR NETWORK 14
- ASSESS STAFF AND VOLUNTEER TECHNOLOGY SKILLS 16
- PROVIDE TECHNOLOGY TRAINING 21

## **Chapter 3: COLLECT DATA 23**

- GATHER STATISTICS AND STORIES 24
- SAMPLE SURVEY 26

## **Chapter 4: DEVELOP A KEY CONTACT LIST 27**

- DEVELOP A KEY CONTACT LIST 28
- SAMPLE KEY CONTACT LIST 30

## **Chapter 5: BUILD A VOLUNTEER NETWORK 31**

- RECRUITING AND KEEPING VOLUNTEERS 32
- SAMPLE LETTER FOR VOLUNTEER SUPPORT 36
- SAMPLE VOLUNTEER TRACKING FORM 37
- SAMPLE VOLUNTEER APPLICATION 38

## **Chapter 6: PLAN EVENTS 39**

- ORGANIZE AN OPEN HOUSE 40
- HOLD PUBLIC EVENTS IN YOUR LIBRARY 48
- HOST A “TECHNOLOGY TUESDAY” 51

## **Chapter 7: CONDUCT MEDIA RELATIONS 55**

- BUILD A MEDIA CONTACT LIST 56
- SEND PRESS RELEASES OR PITCH LETTERS 58
- TIPS FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA 63
- SUBMIT PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS 65
- SUBMIT A COLUMN TO YOUR NEWSPAPER 68

## **Chapter 8: UPDATE THE COMMUNITY 69**

- CREATE A NEWSLETTER 70
- SEND PERSONAL UPDATE LETTERS TO KEY CONTACTS 75
- INCREASE YOUR VISIBILITY IN THE COMMUNITY 77

## **Chapter 9: RAISE FUNDS 79**

- IDENTIFY FUNDRAISING OPPORTUNITIES 80
- APPROACH POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES 83
- CONDUCT FUNDRAISING EVENTS 87
- RESOURCES FOR FUNDRAISING AND GRANTMAKING 89

## **Chapter 10: DEVELOP EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS 91**

- IDENTIFY POTENTIAL PARTNERS 92
- APPROACH POTENTIAL PARTNERS 96
- CULTIVATE YOUR PARTNERSHIPS 98

## **Chapter 11: REACH NON-TRADITIONAL LIBRARY USERS 99**

- CONNECT TO NEW COMMUNITIES 100
- EMPHASIZE MULTICULTURAL RESOURCES 103
- ENSURE YOUR COMPUTERS ARE ACCESSIBLE 105
- WEB-BASED RESOURCES 106
- MULTICULTURAL LIBRARIANS ASSOCIATIONS 107

## **Chapter 12: ADVOCATE FOR YOUR LIBRARY 109**

- RESEARCH YOUR OFFICIALS' PRIORITIES 110
- SHAPE YOUR MESSAGE 114
- VISIT YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS 116
- WRITE YOUR PUBLIC OFFICIALS 121
- INVITE PUBLIC OFFICIALS TO YOUR LIBRARY 125
- ADVOCACY RESOURCES 127

## **Chapter 13: ESTABLISH A SPEAKERS BUREAU 129**

- SETTING UP A SPEAKERS BUREAU 130
- SAMPLE FLIER 133
- SAMPLE PRESENTATION 135

## **Chapter 14: MEET YOUR TECHNOLOGY NEEDS 145**

- CHOOSE BETWEEN VOLUNTEER AND PAID ASSISTANCE 146
- USE VOLUNTEERS FOR SPECIFIC TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS 148
- CONSIDER HIRING A TECHNOLOGY STAFF MEMBER 152
- CONSIDER HIRING A TECHNOLOGY CONSULTANT 154
- TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS 157
- CONDUCT REGULAR MAINTENANCE 161

## **Chapter 15: RESOURCE LIST 163**

## **Chapter 16: MY LIBRARY RESOURCES 167**



# Chapter

# 1

## HOW TO USE "STAYING CONNECTED"

**PURPOSE** *Develop a plan to build and sustain your public access computer program.*

### In this Chapter

A ROAD MAP FOR "STAYING CONNECTED"

WELCOME TO "STAYING CONNECTED"

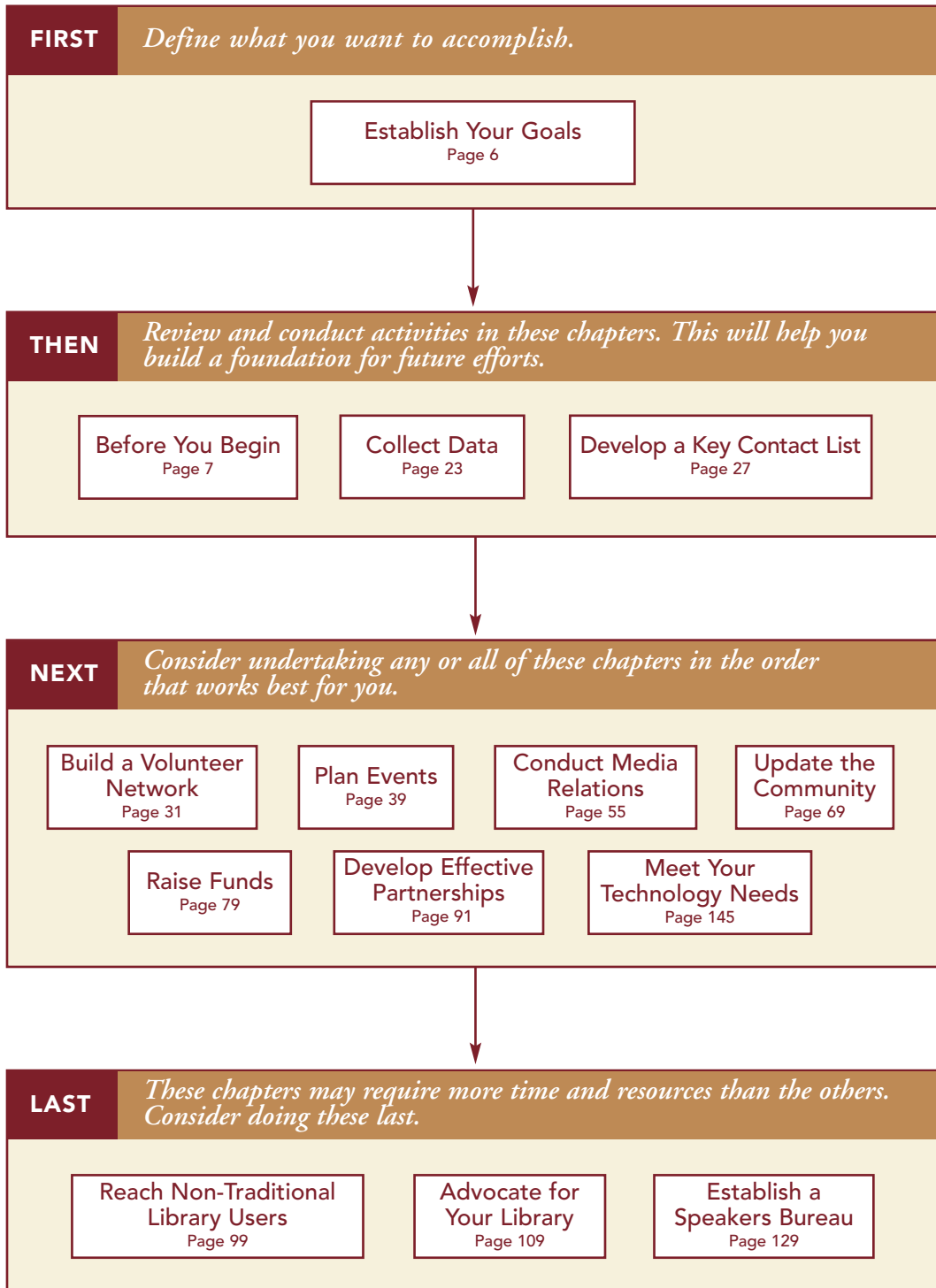
GOALS, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS WORKSHEET





# A ROAD MAP FOR "STAYING CONNECTED"

Use this map to help you navigate the toolkit.



## WELCOME TO “STAYING CONNECTED”

---

“Staying Connected” is a resource tool to help you find support for your public access computing efforts. This toolkit outlines a wide variety of activities, and we encourage you to tailor the steps and templates to fit your outreach needs.

You won't be able to do all the activities in the toolkit, but take some time to review what's proposed. Which activities will best help you reach your goals? Do any of these activities fit into what you are already doing? Are there any areas to which you could dedicate more time?

Before starting any of these activities, it is crucial that you first define what you want to accomplish and then identify potential challenges and solutions.

- **Define your goals.** What would you like your public access computing program to look like beyond the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant cycle? Who will provide the main support for the technology and the staff? Who will be the main users of the technology? What benefit do you want the community to gain from the service?
- **Identify potential challenges.** There are many things to consider here: expansion plans, necessary upgrades, the need for securing technical support, ongoing staff training, bandwidth issues and possible budget cuts.
- **Develop possible solutions to these challenges and plans to reach your goals.** What resources can you find or leverage to help you sustain your public access computers? Think about possible partnerships and marketing efforts. How can you bring more traditionally underserved individuals to the library? Consider posting fliers in nearby supermarkets and community centers.

The worksheet at the end of this section can help with this planning process.



### HELPFUL HINT

**The Public Library Association's “Planning for Results: A Library Transformation Process”** is an excellent resource for your planning process. Go to [www.pla.org/conference/planning/planning.html](http://www.pla.org/conference/planning/planning.html) for more information.

### *Step 1 — Decide how much time you can invest.*

To help you to decide which activities will work within your schedule, we have estimated the time required for each activity.

These times are estimates only and are based on one person performing an activity

steadily. In each activity, the work may be spread across several days and may involve more than one person. Of course, the amount of time ultimately required will depend on your previous experience in conducting these types of activities and to what extent you can dedicate yourself to them.

***Step 2 — Use the road map provided to navigate the toolkit.***

The chart on page 3 provides a suggested way to use the toolkit. Of course, what you decide to do first will depend on activities that you may already be doing or areas to which you need to devote the most attention. Only you can decide that.

***Step 3 — Throughout the process, look for support from others.***

There are thousands of other libraries across the United States that are trying to sustain technology programs. Reach out to your state library system, consortium or network for additional ideas. You can also go online to the Public Library Association, [www.pla.org](http://www.pla.org), or to the American Library Association, [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org), to find more ideas on gaining support for your computing services.

This toolkit also includes contact information for other grantees who have developed good ideas. They are willing to share their experiences with you — just give them a call.

***Step 4 — Take time to celebrate success and commend your team.***

Libraries are constantly changing to meet their communities' needs. Take pride in the fact that you are helping connect people to lifelong learning. After each success, take time to celebrate your achievements.



**Goals, Challenges and Solutions: Make Plans to Sustain Your Technology Programs**

Before you start to undertake activities in this toolkit, take time to first define what you want to accomplish and then identify potential challenges and solutions. To get started, review your mission statement and brainstorm ideas. Invite every team member to participate.

Establishing goals is just the first step. You'll then need to develop action plans to achieve your goals. Revisit your goals often as your needs change.

**SAMPLE GOAL**

*Create a network of volunteer trainers to assist patrons on the computers and to conduct computer maintenance.*

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Solution</b>	<b>Proposed Budget</b>
<i>There is no steady and reliable source of skilled volunteers.</i>	<i>Approach local technical or community college about creating an internship program with information technology (IT) students.</i>	<i>\$1,000 for materials and insurance.</i>

**GOAL**

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Solution</b>	<b>Proposed Budget</b>

**GOAL**

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>Solution</b>	<b>Proposed Budget</b>

# Chapter

# 2

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

**PURPOSE** *To prepare staff, volunteers and patrons for the arrival of your technology.*

Note: Portions of this section were graciously supplied by NPower. The NPower National Network can be accessed online at [www.npower.org](http://www.npower.org).

### In this Chapter

DEVELOP COMPUTER USE POLICIES

DEVELOP A SECURITY POLICY

INVENTORY YOUR HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE

MAP YOUR NETWORK

ASSESS STAFF AND VOLUNTEER TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

PROVIDE TECHNOLOGY TRAINING

## DEVELOP COMPUTER USE POLICIES

8–16 hrs.

TIME INVOLVED:

**PURPOSE** *To develop policies for the use of your computers, printers and the Internet.*

**Step 1** — *Brainstorm the list of factors that may help you manage the use of your computers, including:*

- **Sign-up sheets for users** — Will you have a need for these? Are you restricting e-mail use and/or visiting chat rooms?
- **Time limits for computer use** — Do people hang out on the computer all day? How will you monitor time limits?
- **Headphone use** — Will you keep them at the computer or will patrons check them out? Will someone clean them regularly and mark them so they do not get stolen?
- **Permission to use CDs and floppy disks** — Will you let people bring in disks from home? Will you sell disks? Will you offer to hold disks for library patrons?
- **Printer management** — Will you charge for printing? Is the printer in an area where it can be easily seen by staff?
- **Staffing needs** — Will you need someone in your computer lab at all times? Can a volunteer fulfill your computer staffing needs?
- **Internet use policies** — Will you restrict sites patrons can visit? Will it be in writing? Will it be clearly visible to all patrons who use your computers?

**Step 2** — *Visit the American Library Association's Web site for ideas on developing Internet use policies for your library as well as sample policies from other libraries:*

[www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/internetusepolicies.html](http://www.ala.org/alaorg/oif/internetusepolicies.html).

**Step 3** — *Draft your library's policies and post for patrons to see.*

**PURPOSE** *To create security policies for your technology.*

Internet access is generally the most visible or well-known portion of a security policy, but overall a security policy can and should include more than that. For example, consider including policies on theft, damage, viruses and access by minors.

There are many resources, including free samples and actual security policies, available on the Web. In addition, many books related to technology security have chapters on developing and implementing a security policy. Most of the resources listed below focus on policies for large organizations (called enterprise policies), but the same principles could be applied to the security policies at your library.

You can view sample policies and white papers describing security policies at:  
[http://rr.sans.org/policy/policy\\_list.php](http://rr.sans.org/policy/policy_list.php).

The following are links to two examples of actual usage policies. The first is for an educational institution and the second applies to corporations:  
[www.oit.gatech.edu/security/policy/usage/contents.html](http://www.oit.gatech.edu/security/policy/usage/contents.html),  
[www.dmtnet.com/Internetpolicy/policy.pdf](http://www.dmtnet.com/Internetpolicy/policy.pdf).



### TOOLS & RESOURCES

#### **Books with information about security policies:**

*Defending Your Digital Assets Against Hackers, Crackers, Spies & Thieves.* Randall K. Nichols, Daniel J. Ryan and Julie J.C.H. Ryan; Computing McGraw-Hill 2000; Chapter 4, Information Security Policy.

*Active Defense: A Comprehensive Guide to Network Security.* Chris Brenton and Cameron Hunt; Sybex 2001; Chapter 2, How Much Security Do You Need?

*Information Security Risk Analysis.* Thomas R. Peltier; Auerbach Publications 2001; Appendix A, Security Policy.



**PURPOSE** *To develop a notebook that contains a valuable inventory of your technology.*

This notebook can contain information about hardware and software, as well as warranties, manufacturer information, Internet connections (including details of your connections, e-mail accounts and Web site host), backup procedures, support phone numbers and helpful Web sites. This notebook should also contain a copy of the operating system on CD or floppy disk.

### **Step 1 — Inventory hardware.**

There are some software programs available to help you inventory your software and hardware and to help you sufficiently understand your training needs. Unfortunately, most of these programs are expensive, so consider researching free options on the Web.

Tech Surveyor is a free Web-based tool that makes it easy to gather detailed information about your computers, servers, networks, printers, other peripherals and key software. It can also help you profile the technology skills of your organization's staff.

Visit [www.npower.org/techsurveyor](http://www.npower.org/techsurveyor) and try it. With Tech Surveyor you can:

- Assemble the baseline information that is critical to solid technology planning.
- Zero in on equipment that may be in need of an upgrade.
- Identify who on your staff has particular technology skills and where there are needs for further technology training.
- Make a fact-based case to funding sources for new technology resources.
- Maintain secure off-site records of what your library owns, protecting you in case your in-house records are lost or damaged.

Tech Surveyor will take you step by step through a series of simple forms that collect data about technology and tech skill sets. You can create as basic or as detailed a portrait of your tech assets as you wish. You can come back and revise that portrait any time you want. Your data will be stored in a password-protected area of the Tech Surveyor database and will be accessible to you anytime and anywhere that you have Web access.

Tech Surveyor can generate a wide range of valuable reports, including:

- Detailed profiles of individual computers.
- Inventory lists of all your organization's computers.
- Lists of which computers can handle upgraded software.

If Tech Surveyor doesn't work for you, try Belarc Manager, which you can download at [www.belarc.com/BelManage.html](http://www.belarc.com/BelManage.html). This program automatically takes an assessment of your computers and develops a report. It is also free.

## Step 2 — Inventory software.

Depending on the number of computers and the complexity of the systems within your organization, there are several ways to keep track of everything.

- **Do it yourself.** If you don't have many computers, it might be simplest to create your own software inventory database, spreadsheet or paper inventory form. This system is free and without all of the complications some inventory software programs present.
- **Use asset-management software.** Larger organizations or networked libraries may need some type of software to track inventory. Many times, this software can be configured to run over a network and keep track of your computers and software automatically. These three programs may be helpful:

**Isogon** ([www.isogon.com/index.shtml](http://www.isogon.com/index.shtml)) — develops several software asset management tools for large organizations.

**GLOBEtrotter** ([www.globetrotter.com/products.shtml](http://www.globetrotter.com/products.shtml)) — tracks current software and plans for future purchases.

**LAN Auditor** ([www.lanauditor.com](http://www.lanauditor.com)) — supports automatic collection of hardware and software inventories across multiple network platforms.

- **Maintain a “software cabinet.”** A common problem in many organizations is the loss of disks and documentation for software. Establishing a central repository or a software cabinet for all disks, manuals and documentation is a very simple solution to help you avoid losing this important information.



### GOOD IDEAS

**The staff at the Washington County Public Library in Virginia uses an Access database to keep** an accurate inventory of the computers, printers and other items. Using this data, the staff members have developed a purchasing schedule for new equipment and product updates as well as a system to rotate high-traffic machines so their computers will not need to be replaced at the same time. This makes it easier to anticipate how much money will be needed annually to sustain the library's computing programs. The library also has started to charge patrons nominal fees for printing, which helps to defray costs of buying new network printers and other equipment. For more details, contact the Washington County Public Library, Abingdon, Virginia, 276-676-6383.

After you have placed the software in a central storage unit, establish a system for checking in and checking out software. That way, you will always know who has a piece of software at any given time.

Following is a sample “Software Check-out Sheet” that can easily be created using Microsoft Word or Excel.

You may also consider using your card catalog system to manage your software. Create a catalog record for each program, checking the software in and out just like the rest of your resources.



**Sample Software Check-out Sheet**

NAME	APPLICATION	DATE OUT	DATE IN

**NOTES**

Blank area for notes.

## MAP YOUR NETWORK

8-16 hrs.

TIME INVOLVED:

**PURPOSE** *To create a map of your network that can be kept in a secure location. This map will facilitate pinpointing any technology problems that may occur and help you plan for future technology needs.*

**Step 1 — Draw a map of your network.**

Include all your computers, servers, printers, switches/hubs, routers/Internet connection devices, cables and ports. (See sample “Network Map” on the following page.)

**Step 2 — Record all information requested in the sample map.**

Keep an up-to-date record of all relevant information about your network to save you time and money if a technological problem occurs or if you decide to expand your network in the future. Consider tracking this information in a spreadsheet so you can update it easily as your technology changes.

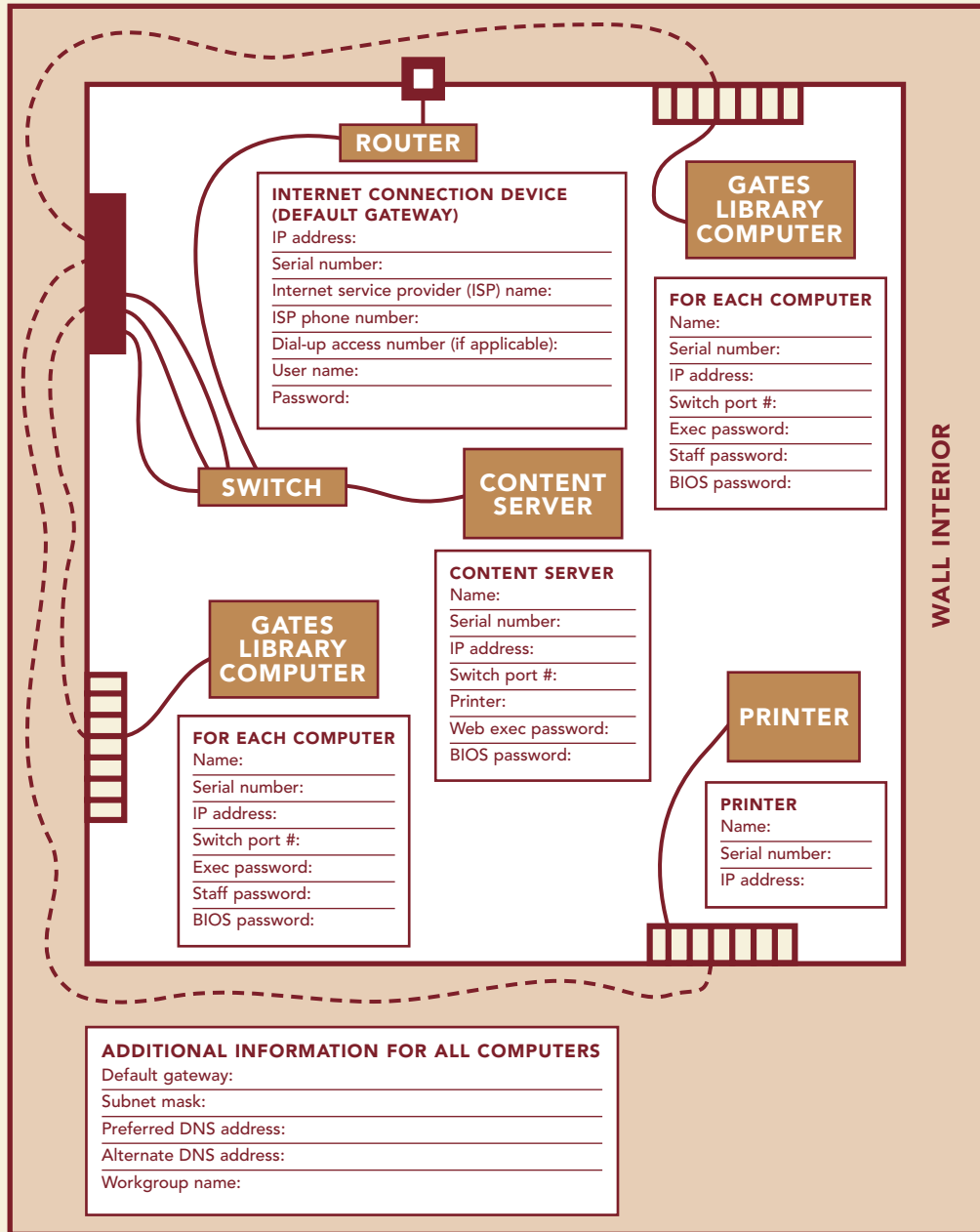
**Step 3 — Store this map in a secure location.**

Because this map contains passwords, it is crucial that it be stored in a secure location.



## TOOLS & RESOURCES

This sample network map is provided as an example to help you create a network map of your own computer network. Fill in the information as noted below.



Network Drop



Permanent Wall Cabling



Patch Plate



Patch Cables



Internet Connection

**PURPOSE** *To gain a clear understanding of the level of technology skills of your library staff and volunteers so you can plan for future technology needs.*

### **Step 1 — Administer a staff skill survey.**

Before you bring in a trainer or send staff to a class, get a sense of your staff's current skills and a clear sense of your library's needs for staff skills. The following sample "Staff Skills Survey" is one way to help with your assessment. (Note: Self-rating isn't always accurate.)

An online survey can be found at [www.npower.org/techsurveyor](http://www.npower.org/techsurveyor). If you register or sign in as a guest, you can track and send the information online.

Everyone at your library should take this survey. You never know who knows how to use technology until you ask.

### **Step 2 — Plan for technology training.**

Technology training should be a part of your general plan for staff training and should be a line item in your budget. Include the cost of staff time in the training costs. Make sure you plan time for training into your employees' work schedules.



#### **HELPFUL HINT**

**The accepted rule of thumb** is that 30 percent of technology spending should go to hardware and software and 70 percent should go to training and support.



### Sample Staff Skills Survey

Library Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Primary tasks and responsibilities: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

#### KEY

**No Knowledge** — You are unfamiliar with the skill or task.

**Beginner** — You are familiar with the skill or task but unable to perform it without close supervision or instruction.

**Intermediate** — You are competent in the skill or task. Refer to peers and manuals for extra help. Training would help to refine skills.

**Advanced** — You are very competent in the skill or task. Capable of teaching peers and patrons the task or skill. Rarely stumped or confused.

#### Skill Area: Basic Computer Operation

	NO KNOWLEDGE	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Manipulate printer options				
Install printer hardware and software				
Install applications				
Troubleshoot operating systems				

#### Skill Area: Word Processing

	NO KNOWLEDGE	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Format margins, adjust page setup				
Create and format tables and graphs				
Use mail merges				
Link between files				





## TOOLS & RESOURCES (continued)

### Sample Staff Skills Survey, page 2

#### Skill Area: Database Design and Maintenance

	NO KNOWLEDGE	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Create database tables				
Enter data into database				
Create database queries				
Create database reports				

#### Skill Area: Spreadsheet

	NO KNOWLEDGE	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Use formatting options, page setup				
Create graphs and charts				
Use formulas				
Use pivot tables				

#### Skill Area: Image Editing and Multimedia

	NO KNOWLEDGE	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Create, alter and crop images				
Open and use interactive CDs				
Create and deliver interactive slide presentations				

#### Skill Area: E-mail

	NO KNOWLEDGE	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Receive and send messages				
Open and insert attachments				
Administer address book				
Use listservs				
Use filters				
Perform bulk e-mail merge				
Use newsgroups				



## TOOLS & RESOURCES (continued)

### Sample Staff Skills Survey, page 3

#### Skill Area: Internet

	NO KNOWLEDGE	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Use a Web browser				
Open Web sites				
Navigate a site				
Search with key words				
Print information				
Download files				
Use bookmarks, favorites				

#### Skill Area: HTML

	NO KNOWLEDGE	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Write HTML code				
Develop animations and multimedia				
Administer a Web site				
Publish a Web site				
Design a Web site				
Create forms and form-handling options				
Link Web pages with database				

#### Skill Area: LAN

	NO KNOWLEDGE	BEGINNER	INTERMEDIATE	ADVANCED
Use shared printers and options				
Access shared files				
Add, change and move workstations				
Troubleshoot network issues				
Perform network administrator functions				



**Sample Staff Skills Survey, page 4**

What do you consider your technological strengths? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

What do you consider your technological weaknesses? \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

What specific job-related software skills do you want to learn in the near future?

---

---

---

How do you best learn?

- In a classroom with computers
- On my own
- One-on-one training

**PURPOSE** *To teach your staff and volunteers the technology skills that your library needs.*

There are many different ways to provide technology training for your staff and volunteers. Here are a few:

- **Training classes** — Technology classes for library staff can range from a two-hour session to a regular college course. Your system, regional, district or state library might offer technology classes. These classes are often the most relevant training for libraries. Remember that one staff member can attend the training and then teach others the material.

Local colleges and universities may have extension classes that teach core technology skills. Community technology centers often offer introductory classes to the general public, and library staff can take advantage of these. Distance learning is becoming a more popular way for people in remote areas to take classes via satellite or the Internet. For independent learners, more and more Web sites offer a full listing of online courses. Many organizations offering technology assistance to libraries sponsor classes as part of their services. Some nationwide corporate training centers also offer substantial discounts to libraries.

- **Customized training** — If you need to train your entire staff, consider bringing in a professional to provide customized training. A trainer can adapt a session to fit your library's needs and teach the specific technology tasks you need to learn. If you have a system administrator or other IT staff, he or she may be able to lead a training session in-house.
- **Do-it-yourself training** — Independent learners can take advantage of the wealth of Web-based tutorials as well as instructional books, CDs and videos available in your own library.
- **Listservs and message boards** — Do you want to know what the best scheduling software is, or how libraries are faring with the latest free Internet service provider? Do you have a more technical question about making your database accessible through your Web site? Library technology listservs and message boards can be great sites for informal information gathering. Visit [www.techsoup.org](http://www.techsoup.org) for listservs and message boards on a variety of topics.



## GOOD IDEAS

**Carol Walters, director of the Sandhill Regional Library System in North Carolina**, sets up time each week to train librarians from the 15 libraries in her system on computer software and Internet applications so they will be better equipped to help patrons. Every Friday during times when the libraries are less busy, Walters directs tutorials for librarians from the five-county area. Each library is responsible for sending two staff members each week to this training session. Some of the topics covered in the first four months of the training included using MS Office applications, working in Publisher, navigating the Internet, using online databases and using the Internet to plan trips and access maps. (This is particularly helpful because there is only one travel agent in all of the five counties in the Sandhill Library System.)

After four months of the training sessions, library administrators surveyed the participants to find out what else they would like to or need to learn in the future. In addition to gathering feedback for future tutorials, these sessions have been very helpful in training librarians to respond to the technology needs of the community. For more details, contact the Sandhill Regional Library System, Rockingham, North Carolina, 910-997-3388.

# Chapter

# 3

## COLLECT DATA

**PURPOSE** *To gather anecdotes and statistics that illustrate the success of your public access computing services. Knowing how many people use the computers and why will strengthen your outreach efforts immensely.*

### In this Chapter

GATHER STATISTICS AND STORIES

SAMPLE SURVEY

**PURPOSE** *To gather examples that point to the importance of your services.*

**Step 1** — *Develop a system to determine the number of individuals using your computers, the profiles of these users and their reasons for using the computers.*

Here are a few ideas for doing this:

- Include a section on your sign-in sheet for people to note their purpose for using the computers. You can also ask users to indicate their stage in life: students, senior citizens, adults, children, etc.
- Prepare a short survey that can be printed on large index cards or 8.5" x 11" paper. Have a stack of surveys and pens next to the computers. Use a sign to draw attention to the survey. Have a box near the computers where people can drop off completed surveys. (See the suggested survey on page 26.)
- Talk to your patrons. Ask them what they use the computers for. Probe for success stories. For example, do you know a student whose grades have improved after he or she started using the computers or an adult who secured a job by responding to an advertisement on a Web site? Keep these examples in a notebook.
- Record the number of attendees each time you host a computer class or event. Note the approximate age of each attendee and his or her interests based on the questions asked. Ask the attendees to complete an evaluation form after the class.

**Step 2** — *Use this data in your outreach efforts.*

For example, include the average number of computer users per month in a letter to a public official or include an anecdote in your newsletter.



## GOOD IDEAS

**The Washington County Public Library in Virginia** used FrontPage and Excel to set up an online survey that tracks patrons' Internet preferences, demographics and the services most frequently used. Library director Charlotte Parsons says the survey serves many purposes. Primarily, it is used as a learning tool in the technology lab. Users learn basic computer and Internet skills as they complete the survey. The librarians also used this data to show increased traffic in the library, as well as increased participation in Internet and computing courses offered in the lab, to justify the renewal of an important grant. Library staff have also used the data collected in this survey to build a list of contacts with e-mail addresses and other information. They plan to create an electronic newsletter to distribute to this contact list, giving an update on current library happenings and special services. For more details, contact the Washington County Public Library, Abingdon, Virginia, at 276-676-6383.





**Sample survey for collecting data about computer use in your library**

**PLEASE FILL OUT THIS SURVEY TO HELP US BETTER SERVE YOU!**

Are you a regular patron of [INSERT NAME OF LIBRARY]?  No  Yes

Is this the first time you have used our computers?  No  Yes

What is the main reason you use the computers? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about the computers? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

We may offer classes on computer and Internet use. What class(es) would interest you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The following information is optional:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Can we put you on our mailing list to receive updates from [INSERT NAME OF LIBRARY]?  No  Yes

# Chapter

# 4

## DEVELOP A KEY CONTACT LIST

**PURPOSE** *To develop a comprehensive list of individuals who can play a key role in supporting and promoting library programs.*

### In this Chapter

DEVELOP A KEY CONTACT LIST

SAMPLE KEY CONTACT LIST

## DEVELOP A KEY CONTACT LIST

8 hrs.

TIME INVOLVED:

**PURPOSE** *Create a list of names, telephone and fax numbers, addresses and e-mail addresses of key people.*

### **Step 1 — Brainstorm a list of influential members in your community.**

These leaders may have access to funding sources, make decisions that affect your programs and talk to other influential community members on a regular basis.

When developing this list, think of which individuals you would most like to be informed about your library. When these key contacts know about your services and your successes, they will be more likely to support you and share information about your library with other members of the community.

Some ideas for key contacts include:

- Library board members
- Individual donors and/or foundations that currently support your library
- Local elected officials (e.g., mayor, city council members, county commissioners, legislators, U.S. Senators and Representatives)
- Directors of local social service organizations (e.g., your local Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization, the department of senior services, the county employment office)
- Community groups (e.g., Rotary, Kiwanis, Chambers of Commerce and small business organizations)
- School officials (superintendents and principals)
- Members of the media (see “Conduct Media Relations” section, page 55, for specific details)
- Heads of appropriate departments at your local college (e.g., library sciences, information technology and public affairs)

### **Step 2 — Find contact information for these individuals and organizations by looking them up either on the Internet or in the phone book.**

Call each one to confirm the contact information and let him or her know that you might be sending library updates or invitations to a community event. This call will help you start a relationship.

**Step 3 — Create a “Key Contact List” on your computer for easy access and updating.**

The following sample could be developed using Microsoft Excel or Word.



**HELPFUL HINT**

**Creating this list may seem like busy work now**, but it will save you time later. For example, the list will be readily available when you want to invite community leaders to an open house, approach service clubs for donations or seek volunteers.



Sample Key Contact List

ORGANIZATION	CONTACT	ADDRESS	PHONE	FAX	E-MAIL

To download this template so you can use it at your library

[CLICK HERE](#)

# Chapter

# 5

## BUILD A VOLUNTEER NETWORK

**PURPOSE** *To develop a network of individuals who volunteer at your library.*

### In this Chapter

RECRUITING AND KEEPING VOLUNTEERS

SAMPLE LETTER FOR VOLUNTEER SUPPORT

SAMPLE VOLUNTEER TRACKING FORM

SAMPLE VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

**PURPOSE** *Develop volunteer positions and policies that keep volunteers engaged.*

### **Step 1 — Define why you need volunteers.**

Identify specific reasons why volunteers would benefit your library. Do you have too many activities and not enough staff? Would you like to start new projects? Establishing desired outcomes at the beginning of a project will help to define your volunteer needs.

### **Step 2 — Design volunteer activities and position descriptions.**

It is important that you provide specific responsibilities, expected outcomes and goals for volunteers. Challenging and motivational activities provide an atmosphere in which your volunteers can succeed.

Volunteer job descriptions should specifically outline the responsibilities of each volunteer. They should also describe the requirements and skills that you need in a volunteer. As a result, a job description can be very useful in your recruitment process.

Below are suggested components for volunteer job descriptions:

- **Position title** — Be specific and descriptive.
- **Work location** — Is this a job that must be done at the library or could the volunteer work from home?
- **Responsibilities** — List what will be expected of the volunteer. Be specific about administrative as well as programmatic tasks associated with this position.
- **Qualifications** — List all qualifications expected or preferred for the position. Include work/other volunteer experience, education and other skills required, such as writing ability.
- **Commitment required** — If the position requires a time commitment, include the minimum length of service, hours per week and any specific days on which you need the volunteer to be available.



#### HELPFUL HINT

**See the “Meet Your Technology Needs” chapter**, page 145, for details about recruiting and managing volunteers for your technology needs.

### **Step 3 — Recruit volunteers.**

After you have identified your volunteer needs, carefully recruit individuals who are appropriate for the job. Be honest about the work required and the time involved for the project.

Below are examples of where to recruit volunteers:

- AmeriCorps ([www.americorps.org](http://www.americorps.org))
- RSVP, a local Senior Corps program that connects older Americans with volunteer opportunities ([www.nationalservice.org](http://www.nationalservice.org))
- Employment assistance programs
- High schools (service-learning programs)
- Colleges
- Job training programs
- Parent groups (local PTA)
- Real estate agents (new-resident welcome packets often include volunteer opportunities)
- Retired executive organizations (e.g., SCORE, [www.score.org](http://www.score.org))
- Religious groups
- Senior centers
- Service organizations (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary, Junior League)
- Sororities and fraternities
- United Way ([www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org))

Don't forget to look within your own network. Ask friends, family, staff and other individuals with whom you are acquainted if they have time or if they know individuals who might want to volunteer.

See the sample letter on page 36 for ideas on how to ask organizations for volunteer support.



#### **HELPFUL HINT**

**View sample volunteer descriptions online at [www.co.arlington.va.us/lib/index.htm](http://www.co.arlington.va.us/lib/index.htm).** Click on "Support your library" on the left side of the page, and then select "Volunteering."



#### **Step 4 — Keep your volunteers interested.**

Volunteer retention requires a great deal of attention. Below are a few tips to keep the volunteers you recruit.

- **Keep them challenged** — Help volunteers acquire new skills. Give them tasks that will help with the success of the library.
- **Make them feel comfortable** — Help them do a good job by providing the tools they need and an appropriate workplace. Introduce them to your staff and make them feel a part of the team. Ensure that they understand what is expected of them.
- **Keep good records** — Keep an updated list of all your volunteers. Keep track of the best time to reach them, activities that they enjoy and the best times for them to volunteer. Add your volunteers to your mailing list to update them on events at your library.
- **Respect their work** — Even though these individuals are not paid staff, their ideas and perspectives are important.
- **Don't overwork them** — Make sure time expectations are clearly understood at the beginning of a project. Volunteers pressured to do more work than they anticipated doing might feel resentful and cease to volunteer in the future.
- **Say thank you** — Recognizing the work of your volunteers goes a long way toward keeping them.



#### **HELPFUL HINT**

**It may seem easier to get a job done by yourself**, but training volunteers will save time in the long run.



## GOOD IDEAS

**In a town of just 600 residents, Aguilar Public Library in Colorado** has been fortunate to have some of the most committed volunteers around. The library has five regular volunteers who dedicate more than 20 hours per week to the library.

The library uses a variety of creative tactics to recruit volunteers. When the library's board of trustees completed interviews for a new library director position, the staff decided to send out letters to all local applicants thanking them and encouraging them to become volunteers. They received a very positive response from those letters. Aguilar Public Library also retains volunteers by providing other opportunities for involvement in the library, such as encouraging long-term volunteers to apply to the library's board of trustees. Board president Carol Ryan says this allows individuals to expand their service to the library. For more details, contact the Aguilar Public Library, Aguilar, Colorado, 719-941-4426.

**The Veterans' Memorial Library in Patten, Maine,** recruited AmeriCorps members who provide free training for its computer lab. These individuals are part of a national service program and serve a certain amount of hours per year in exchange for living expenses and money for college. The AmeriCorps members at the Veterans' Memorial Library teach classes on basic computer and Internet skills in the library's computer lab. Library director Susan Hess says that the assistance provided by AmeriCorps has been invaluable.

The AmeriCorps members' supervisor visits the library once a week to check up on the members, solve any problems that may come up and give directions and strategies for teaching computing skills. The advisor also helped library staff plan an open house after it received the grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. For information about AmeriCorps, go to [www.americorps.org](http://www.americorps.org). For more details, contact the Veterans' Memorial Library, Patten, Maine, 207-528-2164.

**Lancaster Community Library in Lancaster, Virginia,** is a not-for-profit organization, receiving more than half of its financial support from the private sector. The library's five full-time employees rely heavily on the support of more than 60 volunteers who handle most circulation, book repair and cataloging activities. In addition, the library has other volunteers who organize community programs.

To reward the volunteers for their dedication, the library offers perks such as copying and faxing privileges. In addition, the library staff holds an annual luncheon for all volunteers. This year, for the first time, they have put together a "goody bag" to be distributed to volunteers during National Volunteer Week. The staff at Lancaster Community Library believes that these small gestures are an excellent way to let volunteers know that the library staff cares about them and the services they provide to the library and community. For more details, contact the Lancaster Community Library, Lancaster, Virginia, 804-435-1729.



**Sample letter to recruit volunteer support**

*(Put on library letterhead.)*

[DATE]

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[ORGANIZATION]

[ADDRESS]

[CITY], [STATE] [ZIP]

Dear [NAME]:

[NAME OF LIBRARY] provides free public access to computers and the Internet. This access to digital information is enjoyed by community members of all ages and all incomes, many of whom do not have access to computers at home.

In order to provide this service to the community, we must rely on the assistance of volunteers to get the job done. I am writing to ask you to inform members of [INSERT ORGANIZATION NAME] of volunteer opportunities at our library.

Volunteers at [NAME OF LIBRARY] work on a variety of different projects. I have included a list of volunteer job descriptions to distribute, if appropriate. [DON'T FORGET TO INCLUDE THE VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTIONS.]

I will contact you to follow up on this letter. If you have any questions, I can be reached at [INSERT PHONE NUMBER] or [E-MAIL].

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[E-MAIL]

Enc.



Sample Volunteer Tracking Form

NAME	PHONE	E-MAIL	BEST TIME TO CONTACT	BEST TIME TO VOLUNTEER	CURRENT PROJECT	DEADLINE

To download this template so you can use it at your library [CLICK HERE](#)



**Sample Volunteer Application**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Check the volunteer work you are interested in doing (check all that apply):**

- Clerical     Computer     Mending books     Shelving books
- Book processing     Bringing books to homebound patrons
- I want to know more about my options

**Are you interested in working:**

- Independently at the library     At home
- On community events     With the public

**Available hours:**

- Morning     Afternoon     Evenings     Weekends     Special Events

**How often would you like to volunteer?**

- Regularly. How many hours per week? \_\_\_\_\_
- Periodically. How many hours per month? \_\_\_\_\_
- Work on a one-time or short-term project.

**Do you speak a language other than English?**

- Yes (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_     No

**Employment or volunteer history:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**References:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Chapter

# 6

## PLAN EVENTS

**PURPOSE** *To organize and host events that bring the general public and community leaders into your library to see and use your new technology.*

### In this Chapter

ORGANIZE AN OPEN HOUSE

HOLD PUBLIC EVENTS IN YOUR LIBRARY

HOST A "TECHNOLOGY TUESDAY"

## ORGANIZE AN OPEN HOUSE

32 hrs.

TIME INVOLVED:

**PURPOSE** *To invite community members, public officials and the media to your library specifically to see and use your new computers.*



### HELPFUL HINT

See the **"Raise Funds"** chapter, page 79, for information on fundraising events.

### *Step 1 — Pick a date and time.*

Check the community calendar for conflicting dates. Does the date work well with the school calendar? Does it compete with federal holidays? Local elections? Annual community fairs or events?

Pick a time that will be convenient for the majority of your community. For example, you may want to hold the open house at 5 p.m. so people can come immediately after work, or on the weekend to accommodate families.

### *Step 2 — Develop a timeline, work plan and budget.*

Ideally, planning should begin four weeks before the open house. (We've included a proposed timeline to help with your planning.)

Planning an open house may require getting help from other people. Establish a schedule that outlines specific responsibilities. Keep your team up to date on everyone's progress.

Be sure to include a budget in your plan so everyone understands the parameters for the event. Establishing your budget in the beginning will help determine the scope of your event.



### HELPFUL HINT

**Keep in mind when organizing events** that you should spend as much time and effort getting people to your event as you spend planning the event itself.

### **Step 3 — Invite the public.**

There are a number of ways you can invite the public, including sending an invitation, placing posters and fliers in the community and placing an announcement in your local media.

The first step in creating invitations is to develop an invitation list. This should include people from your “Key Contact List,” your “Media Contact List” and any other appropriate individuals and organizations.

Then create an invitation. Your invitation can range from a postcard to a letter to a flier, depending on your budget. (See sample on page 45.)

If time and budget are factors, you can photocopy the invitation. Consider using colored paper so the invitation stands out in the mailbox or on a bulletin board.

If you want to print the invitations, you could ask a local printer if he or she will donate all or a portion of the printing costs of your invitations. Offer to include their logo on the flier as a thank you.

Consider sending an e-mail invitation to everyone on your list for whom you have an e-mail address. (See sample on page 46.) The e-mail invitation should be in addition to the paper invitation and include the same elements.

You can also let the public know about the open house by creating and distributing posters and/or fliers throughout your community. Consider filling out the flier included in this toolkit and posting it on your library’s front door so your patrons will have a chance to learn about the open house when they visit your library.

You can also place fliers on community bulletin boards (look for them in your local grocery store or laundromat) or in community services agencies.

Examples of places where some libraries have posted fliers include:

- Senior centers
- Bookstores
- Social service offices
- Schools
- English-as-Second-Language program centers



#### **HELPFUL HINT**

**Use Microsoft Publisher** to create a poster, flier and invitation.



#### **Step 4 — Notify your local media.**

Local newspapers, television stations and radio stations can help get the word out about your open house and your public access computing program. Send them a press release to encourage them to write a story about your event and/or to include the date and time in their calendar listings. (See the “Conduct Media Relations” chapter, page 55.)

An open house tells a good story visually, so consider alerting the photo desk at your local paper about the event. Even if the newspaper doesn’t run a story, it might run a photograph with a caption.

After you send information to the different media outlets in your community, follow up with a brief telephone call to remind them of your event and to inquire about their attendance.

#### **Step 5 — Ask your local media to run a public service announcement (PSA).**

Write a PSA and ask your local television stations, radio stations and newspapers to broadcast and/or print the PSA free of charge. The PSA can be about your open house or about your public access to computing program. (See page 66 for samples.)



#### **GOOD IDEAS**

**The Public Library of Steubenville and Jefferson County in Ohio** used the 100th anniversary of the construction of the main library building in the county as a “hook” to attract media attention and new patrons to the library to use the computer technology lab.

Library staff extended the centennial celebration throughout the year, hosting themed events each month. They kicked off the year with a reception in the library, where the staff dressed in period costumes. They showcased their computer lab at the gala by setting each computer up to demonstrate different software or Internet applications. A staff member stood near the computers to provide directions or answer questions about the equipment. Library director Alan Hall noted that this was an extremely popular event and that the computer lab attracted many patrons.

The library staff put a great deal of effort into publicizing the event. A week before, they held a balloon launch on the grounds of the main library building. They invited three groups of children from three local schools and the media (via a press release). The balloon launch was appealing to the local media because it involved many of the children from the community and provided a good, colorful visual.

The library received excellent coverage in the local papers, including a front-page color photo. This publicity further promoted the reception the following week. For more details, contact the Public Library of Steubenville and Jefferson County, Steubenville, Ohio, 740-282-9782.

### ***Step 6 — Prepare to demonstrate the computer equipment.***

An open house is an ideal time to demonstrate the new computer equipment and to help visitors try the new technology for themselves. Arrange to have staff members available to show guests how to use the computers and to answer questions. Additionally, have step-by-step directions on hand to help patrons “test drive” the new equipment.

### ***Step 7 — Consider the program for your open house.***

Your program should last no longer than 15 minutes. Identify two or three speakers to make brief remarks about the library and the public access computing program. Possible speakers include a member of the library staff, a public official or a library board member.

Decide the order in which the speakers will make their remarks. Work with each speaker in advance to determine if he or she will write his or her own comments or if he or she needs you to help write them.

Below is a suggested program outline.

- A library staff member gives a brief welcome address and outlines the program.
- A public official or other special guest speaks next and focuses on the benefits the new technology provides to the community.
- A library board member closes the program by inviting everyone back to the library for future events (mention any upcoming events) and then directs guests to the computer demonstration.

### ***Step 8 — Anticipate logistics for the day of the open house.***

Estimate how many people you expect at the event and make sure you have enough chairs, food and staff. Identify the number of staff needed to show the guests how to operate the computers. Plan for enough staff to be on hand.

Have a sign-in sheet for your guests to write their name, address, phone number and e-mail address. This will help you develop a mailing list for notices of future events.

Consider serving beverages and light snacks, if your budget allows.

Identify any policies your library has regarding Internet usage and time limits. (See the “Before You Begin” chapter, page 7.) Post those policies in several places for all guests to see.

### ***Step 9 — Follow up after the event.***

Send thank-you notes to all speakers and volunteers who helped organize your open house.



## TIPS

### **Suggested Open House Timeline**

#### ***Four weeks before your open house...***

- Choose a date and time.
- Post your announcement by putting fliers up around your library and community.
- Develop promotional materials. Start drafting press releases and PSAs.
- Develop the invitation and the invitation list.
- Contact caterers, if necessary. If you plan to use a caterer, call and book early.

#### ***Three weeks before your open house...***

- Make final revisions to the invitation. Invitations should be printed and addressed so they are ready for distribution.
- E-mail invitations to your e-mail list.
- Ask local media to run PSAs and community calendar announcements.
- Mail all invitations. Include even those individuals you plan to invite by phone.
- Post the date and time of the open house on your Web site.
- Finalize all promotional materials.

#### ***One to two weeks before your open house...***

- Send your press releases by e-mail, fax or mail.
- Conduct follow-up phone calls with reporters.
- Begin personal invitation phone calls. If you have time, make confirmation calls to others individuals on your invitation list as well.
- Post fliers throughout the community.

#### ***On the day of your open house...***

- Place a reminder call to the media outlets that received a press release.
- Place sign-in sheets and pens in a prominent location.
- Set up a table with copies of your press release along with information on other upcoming events or brochures on the library itself. Consider providing a guide on how to use the computers for guests unfamiliar with your technology.



Sample Open House Invitation

# PLEASE JOIN US FOR AN OPEN HOUSE

*The [NAME OF YOUR LIBRARY] cordially invites you and [ORGANIZATIONAL NAME] to experience all the resources your library has to offer at our Open House.*

**WHEN:** [DAY], [MONTH, DATE], at [TIME]

**WHERE:** [NAME OF YOUR LIBRARY]  
[LIBRARY ADDRESS]

- HIGHLIGHTS:**
- Test computers and other library technology.
  - Get information and view meeting rooms available for public use.
  - Enjoy light refreshments.

**DIRECTIONS:** [DIRECTIONS and PARKING INFORMATION]



Please RSVP to [NAME] at [PHONE NUMBER] or [E-MAIL] by [DATE].  
For more information, visit our Web site at [WEB ADDRESS].

**WE HOPE YOU WILL ATTEND.**



### Sample E-mail Invitation for the Open House

PLEASE JOIN US FOR AN OPEN HOUSE!

The [NAME OF YOUR LIBRARY] cordially invites you and [ORGANIZATIONAL NAME] to experience all the resources your library has to offer at our Open House.

WHEN: [DAY], [MONTH, DATE], at [TIME]

WHERE: [NAME OF YOUR LIBRARY]  
[LIBRARY ADDRESS]

- HIGHLIGHTS:
- Test computers and other library technology.
  - Get information and view meeting rooms available for public use.
  - Enjoy light refreshments.

DIRECTIONS: [DIRECTIONS and PARKING INFORMATION]

Please RSVP by responding to this e-mail by [DATE].

For more information, visit our Web site at [WEB ADDRESS].

We hope you will attend.



Sample Open House Flier

PLEASE JOIN US FOR AN  
**OPEN HOUSE**

---

**WHEN:** [DAY], [MONTH, DATE],  
at [TIME]

**WHERE:** [NAME OF YOUR LIBRARY]  
[LIBRARY ADDRESS]

- HIGHLIGHTS:**
- Test computers and other library technology.
  - Get information and view meeting rooms available for public use.
  - Enjoy light refreshments.



**DIRECTIONS:** [DIRECTIONS and PARKING INFORMATION]

For more information, visit our Web site at [WEB ADDRESS].

**PURPOSE** *To bring community members to your library who might not come on their own and to demonstrate your computers.*

### **Step 1 — Assess your facilities.**

Look around your building and consider the following factors:

- How many rooms could be made available for meetings?
- Is there a time that the whole library or an open area of the library could be available for meetings?
- What size are your meeting rooms?
- How many computers are available for a group class?
- What other facilities in the library would be useful to community organizations?
- How often are you willing to allow organizations to use your facilities?

### **Step 2 — Establish policies for public use of your facilities.**

Consider charging organizations a nominal fee (if appropriate) for use of your space and computers, and determine how long your space can be available for booking.

### **Step 3 — Check with your insurance company to assess any issues to consider.**

If necessary, create guidelines to ensure you do not violate any insurance policies.

### **Step 4 — Brainstorm a short list of organizations that could benefit from the use of the computers in your library and how.**

Your “Key Contact List” is a good place to start. An example of how others might use your library includes inviting an organization to hold a meeting at your library. While they are there, you could demonstrate the software on the new computers.



#### **HELPFUL HINT**

**Remember, the use of your facilities can help leverage resources you need.**

For example, consider inviting your local senior center to your library for a computer class. In exchange, they may provide a volunteer to help you with library duties.

**Step 5 — Write a letter inviting organizations to use a meeting space or the computers.**

The sample letter in this chapter should provide a good starting point for creating your own invitation letter. When developing your letter, be sure to highlight the specific assets available at your library.

**Step 6 — Make follow-up calls.**

Wait an appropriate amount of time for groups to receive your letters and consider the offer. Then follow up by phone with key groups, particularly those that reach individuals less likely to use your library and computers and those that might generate volunteers or funds.



**HELPFUL HINT**

**Take an opportunity to promote library services** to the organizations using your meeting rooms. Find out the group's focus and set up a display of relevant books, Web site lists and other resources available in your library.





### Sample Letter to Organizations

*(Put on library letterhead.)*

[DATE]

[NAME]

[ORGANIZATION]

[ADDRESS]

[ADDRESS]

Dear [NAME]:

Public libraries serve the community by providing access to technology, information and literature. In addition to these services, public libraries can fulfill a variety of other organizational needs such as making public meeting space and technology for computer training available.

We at the [NAME OF YOUR LIBRARY] want to invite [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] to take full advantage of the library and experience its many resources first hand. We encourage you to consider holding your next meeting or training sessions at our facility. Our resources include:

- Computers;
- Meeting rooms;
- And, of course, the library itself.

You are welcome to tour our library to view our meeting space and new computers before reserving the facilities.

If you have questions about our library or would like to schedule a training session or meeting, please contact me or [NAME] at [PHONE NUMBER] or [E-MAIL].

We look forward to your visit.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

[YOUR TITLE]

[YOUR PHONE NUMBER]

[YOUR E-MAIL]

## HOST A "TECHNOLOGY TUESDAY"

32 hrs.

TIME INVOLVED:

**PURPOSE** *To create a designated day of each month (or every other month or each quarter) to host computer training sessions or technology information sessions that bring individuals into the library who might not otherwise take advantage of its offerings.*

**Step 1** — *Brainstorm a list of possible training or information sessions you can offer.*

Some ideas include:

- Teach two or three core classes, such as “Introduction to Computers,” “Introduction to the Internet” and/or “How to Use Internet Search Engines.”
- Offer more advanced training, such as Web page design, taught by an instructor from a local high school or community college.
- Organize a lecture series on timely topics, including:
  - “Best Sites for Reserving Travel.”
  - “Online Support for Doing your Taxes.”
  - “How to Bank or Invest Online.”
  - “Using the Internet to Trace Genealogy.”
  - “Job Hunting Online.”

**Step 2** — *Establish a permanent day and time for your training sessions.*

This will be based on your hours of operation as well as your staff availability. Try to pick a time that is convenient for as many of your patrons as possible.



### HELPFUL HINT

**Remember that you do not have to create lesson plans on your own** for training. Look for resources online, such as [www.techsoup.org](http://www.techsoup.org), and in the materials you have received from the foundation to help you develop a curriculum.

### ***Step 3 — Create a name for your training series.***

We have suggested “Technology Tuesday,” thinking that the training could be offered on the first Tuesday of each month (or of every other month). If Tuesdays won’t work for you, try “CyberSundays.” Whatever you choose, be creative and make the name memorable for the general public.

### ***Step 4 — Develop a timeline and work plan.***

This series will require ongoing tasks, including finalizing the classes, securing and confirming instructors and registering participants. Establish a schedule that outlines who is responsible for what and by when.

Questions to consider:

- How will you publicize the classes?
- When will you offer these classes?
- Will the class inconvenience other library patrons?
- Do you have enough staff to assist class attendees and library patrons?
- How many people do you want to attend the class? (This will be defined by the space and number of computers available in your library.)
- Where will you hold the class? (You don’t necessarily need a formal classroom to teach your patrons. Be creative!)
- Do you need to develop a lesson plan, or can you use one from another library or organization?
- How many staff should be on hand to show guests how to operate the computers?

### ***Step 5 — Solicit outside trainers.***

Invite a community member or businessperson to conduct technology lectures at your library. For example, a local accountant could present a lecture called “Online Support for Doing your Taxes” or a representative from the county employment office could present a lecture on “Job Hunting Online.” Instructors from the local high school or community college could be invited to teach advanced classes.



#### **HELPFUL HINT**

**Don’t forget to mention your computer classes** on your library’s answering machine. And be sure that anyone who works at the circulation desk or answers the telephone knows about the program and can help people register.

### ***Step 6 — Invite the public.***

You may have to take a number of steps to promote your training sessions.

Some ideas include:

- Post a flier in your library.
- Post fliers throughout the community, including in schools, community centers and senior centers.
- Post information about the training on your Web site.
- Announce the training at community meetings.
- Ask newspapers to publish information in their calendars about the training.

Ask your patrons to spread the word to their own communities. For example, ask your Spanish-speaking library patrons to announce the training within the Spanish community.

### ***Step 7 — Contact the media.***

Your local newspapers, television stations and radio stations can help you get the word out by publishing or broadcasting your event in their community calendar. Send a press release to each outlet. (See “Conduct Media Relations” chapter, page 55.)

### ***Step 8 — Send thank-you notes to sponsors and other helpers.***



#### **GOOD IDEAS**

**Eleanor Foley, director of La Veta Public Library in Colorado**, believes that the more people you get into the library to see what’s there, the better your chances of getting help in the future. When La Veta Public Library received its grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the staff held an open house strictly for educators to promote use of the computers by students and teachers. This created future partnerships to help replace hardware and software down the line.

La Veta Public Library staff also promoted its computer training in the local newspaper, emphasizing that the programs were directed to people with no computer experience, including senior citizens. Foley reported that the biggest obstacles were overcoming people’s perceptions that the class would have a cost associated with it and that computers are only used by young people. This outreach worked: More than 50 people joined the classes in the first month. For more details, contact the La Veta Public Library, La Veta, Colorado, 719-742-3572.



# Chapter

# 7

## CONDUCT MEDIA RELATIONS

**PURPOSE** *To provide ideas for securing positive stories on local television and radio stations and in local newspapers and magazines.*

### In this Chapter

- BUILD A MEDIA CONTACT LIST
- SEND PRESS RELEASES OR PITCH LETTERS
- TIPS FOR WORKING WITH THE MEDIA
- SUBMIT PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS
- SUBMIT A COLUMN TO YOUR NEWSPAPER

## BUILD A MEDIA CONTACT LIST

8-16 hrs.

TIME INVOLVED:

**PURPOSE** *To develop a comprehensive, up-to-date list of producers and reporters at local television stations, producers and announcers at local radio stations and editors and reporters at newspapers and magazines.*

### **Step 1 — Create a list of all the media in your area.**

Include television stations, radio stations that cover events in your community, daily newspapers, community weekly newspapers and local magazines.

### **Step 2 — Call each outlet to introduce yourself.**

Ask to whom you should address your press releases and story ideas. Get this person's full name, title, direct phone number, fax number, mailing address and e-mail address.

### **Step 3 — Identify deadline requirements and technical needs.**

Television stations, radio stations, daily newspapers and weekly or monthly publications will all have different deadline requirements. You will increase your chances of getting coverage if you know and can accommodate each of their deadlines.

These media outlets also have different technical needs. For example, television stations need good visuals and require a spokesperson who can speak in short, simple sentences.

Radio stations also need to record a spokesperson who can speak in "sound bites." Radio requires interesting background noise. For example, they may want to record the sounds of people talking while using the computers.

The print media — newspapers and magazines — typically require interviews with one or two spokespeople who can speak knowledgeably about your library and the public access computing program. Newspapers may also want a good photograph to help illustrate the story. (Daily newspapers usually send their own photographer; weekly or monthly publications may use a photo that you provide.)

### **Step 4 — Create a "Media Contact List." (See the following sample.)**

Use Microsoft Excel to enter all the information you collected in this grid.

### **Step 5 — Update your media list every six months.**

People in the media tend to change jobs frequently, so it will be important to update your media list on a regular basis.

**Sample Media Contact List**

ORGANIZATION	CONTACT	TITLE	ADDRESS	PHONE	FAX	E-MAIL	DEADLINE
Daily Herald	Mary Smith	City Editor	1111 Elm St., Anywhere, USA 11111	123-456-7890	123-456-7890	Msmith @herald.com	Needs press releases by noon on Mondays.

To download this template so you can use it at your library [CLICK HERE](#)



## SEND PRESS RELEASES OR PITCH LETTERS

8-16 hrs.

TIME INVOLVED:

PURPOSE *To alert the media to stories about your library.*



### HELPFUL HINT

**Remember to publicize only what you can handle.** Make sure your staff and volunteers are prepared for any results of your media efforts.

### Step 1 — Develop a story idea.

The fact that your library offers free access to computers and the Internet is a bright, “good news” story. Most importantly, access to technology has the power to change people’s lives. Because of this, media in your community may be interested in coming to your library to get a firsthand look at the computers and interview you and the people who are using them.

You may be more successful in getting coverage if you first develop a “hook,” or an angle that will interest your local reporters.

Some possible story ideas include:

- Arrival of new computers.
- An open house to demonstrate new computers.
- Introduction of new computer classes or programs.
- Tie-in to the launch of other programs, such as your summer reading program or Black History Month celebration.
- Interesting stories about people who have used the computers successfully (e.g., maybe you know of someone who found a job using your computers).

### Step 2 — Write a press release or a pitch letter.

There are two basic tools you can use to tell the media your story idea: a press release and a pitch letter.



### HELPFUL HINT

**For guidance on media relations activities** as they relate to your technology programs, please e-mail [media@gatesfoundation.org](mailto:media@gatesfoundation.org).

A press release is a short story that tells the who, what, when, where and why about an event or your program. Use a press release when your story is time sensitive. Your press release should be no more than two pages long, and words and sentences should be kept short. Paragraphs should also be short, no more than six lines.

Give your press release a headline that is as compelling as possible. The headline will be the first thing that editors read and can help pre-sell them on the story. Use journalistic shorthand on your press release; write “more” at the bottom of a page when the release continues to another page and “###” to denote the end of the release.

A pitch letter is a letter or memo written to create an interest in your issue. Use a pitch letter only if there is no urgency to your issue, because it may take several weeks for the media to decide if they will write about it.

Your pitch letter should be addressed to a specific person in the media, such as the city editor at your local newspaper. (If you have a good relationship with this person, it would be better to call the person rather than write a formal letter.) The pitch letter can be effective because it is more personal than a press release, and it shows that you actually care enough about your story to take the time to write a personal letter.

In both the press release and pitch letter, your grammar and spelling should be perfect, and your facts and numbers must be accurate.

### **Step 3 — Send your press release and pitch letter.**

If you are using a press release to promote an event, plan ahead! Send your press release



#### **GOOD IDEAS**

**The Washington County Public Library in Abingdon, Virginia**, consistently generates interest from local and regional print and television media by reaching out early and supplying the media with photographs to complement stories. For example, at a regional workshop hosted by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and attended by library professionals at the beginning of the grant cycle, library staff took photographs of various county library officials with foundation personnel. Then, Washington County Public Library staff compiled lists of local media representatives and sent them a press release about the event and photographs. This early outreach earned the library a front-page story in at least one local newspaper. The newspaper story resulted in further interest from local television stations, and the stations brought cameras into the library to promote an open house event.

Library staff also worked with the local newspaper to secure a monthly column written by a library staff member. Library staff use the column to update the community on the new activities and services they will be offering. For more details, contact the Washington County Public Library, Abingdon, Virginia, 276-676-6383.

at least two weeks before the event or the date you would like the story printed or broadcast. You can send your press release via e-mail, fax or mail (allow time for delivery).

Be sensitive to editorial deadlines. Newspapers, magazines and broadcast stations work under constant deadline pressure. Because stale news is no news, a release arriving even a little late may just as well never have been sent.

#### **Step 4 — Make a follow-up call.**

Make a quick follow-up call to the producers, editors or reporters to make sure they received the release. Give a short plug for the story and find out if they have any questions.

Try not to call when an editor or reporter is on deadline unless you are answering a specific request or question from him or her.



#### **GOOD IDEAS**

**Claude Caddell, director of the Frankfort Community Public Library** in Indiana, emphasizes cooperation with the small community newspaper. He says he often brings homemade cinnamon bread or other such snacks to the newsroom of the local paper. Although it seems trivial, this ensures that editors are receptive when the library seeks publicity.

Caddell emphasizes the importance of doing background research and adequate preparation when trying to interest the media in a story. It has been his experience that reporters are more likely to run a story when it is “ready-made” with photos. The paper has been very accommodating to story ideas with a strong human interest side. Stories about interesting people, Caddell notes, are easy to find in the library. For more details, contact the Frankfort Community Public Library, Frankfort, Indiana, 765-654-8746.

*Note: These tips may be more effective with smaller weekly newspapers. Larger daily newspapers usually write their own stories and send their own photographer. Weekly or monthly publications may use materials you provide.*

**Polk County Public Library Public Relations Coordinator** Nancy Hiley and Library Director Mark Pumphrey always look for opportunities to publicize the North Carolina library system. When a television station came to the library to cover a state task force meeting being held at the library, Hiley seized the opportunity. She asked the reporter to interview her about the library’s kick-off activities for the “Very Best Places to Start” campaign, a campaign focusing on ways librarians help young people doing research. The interview was broadcast on the weekend news. For more details, contact the Polk County Public Library, Columbus, North Carolina, 828-894-8721.



**Sample press release to publicize an open house**

*(Put on library letterhead and send two weeks before the event.)*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

[LOCAL CONTACT PERSON]

[TELEPHONE NUMBER]

[E-MAIL ADDRESS]

**[YOUR LIBRARY NAME] Holds Open House  
To Unveil New Computer Equipment**

[YOUR TOWN, STATE] – [DATE] — The [YOUR LIBRARY NAME] will host an open house on [DATE] to introduce the library’s new computers and software from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The computers are available for the public to use free of charge.

“Our library plays a key role in offering all community members free access to a world of learning through computers and the Internet,” said [INSERT NAME AND TITLE]. “These computers are available for everyone to use, whether you are searching the Internet for information, sending an e-mail or using a word processing program to create a résumé.”

The [YOUR LIBRARY NAME] has [LIST EQUIPMENT IN THE LIBRARY, SUCH AS “TWO NEW GATEWAY COMPUTERS”] for all to use.

The open house is scheduled for [TIME]. Refreshments will be served, and staff members will be available to answer questions and demonstrate how to use the computers.

The library is located at [ADDRESS] and serves more than [NUMBER] people each year.

###

**Note to Editor:**

Interview Opportunities: [NAME, TITLE] will be available for interviews during the open house. Please contact [NAME] at [TELEPHONE NUMBER] or [E-MAIL] to arrange.

Photo Opportunities: There will be excellent photo opportunities of children and adult library patrons using the computers.

**Sample pitch letter**

*(Put on library letterhead.)*

[DATE]

[NAME]

[TITLE]

[NAME OF MEDIA OUTLET]

[ADDRESS]

[ADDRESS]

Dear [NAME]:

A young student uses the Internet to conduct research for her school newspaper. A senior citizen e-mails her granddaughter in college. A job seeker uses word processing software to create a résumé that will help him get a job.

These are just a few examples of how computers at [NAME OF LIBRARY] are connecting our community members with information and breaking down barriers to knowledge.

Unfortunately, many people in our area do not have easy access to computers and the Internet. Here at [NAME OF LIBRARY], we can help solve this problem by offering free public access to computers and the Internet for everyone. Last year alone, more than [INSERT NUMBER] people used the computers in our library.

I hope you will consider writing an article about the opportunities that the computers and access to knowledge are giving our community. I would be more than happy to arrange interviews with the people and community groups who have benefited from this service.

Enclosed is more information about our library. I will give you a call in a few days to see if I can answer any questions or arrange any interviews, but please don't hesitate to call or e-mail me first with any questions.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]

[TITLE]

[PHONE NUMBER]

[E-MAIL]

## *Tips for working with the media*

Whether the media is knocking on your door for an interview or you are knocking on their door for a story, it is always best to be prepared. These tips can help you prepare for and conduct a successful interview.

### **Interview preparation**

- **Develop three to five messages or “talking points.”** These are the main ideas you want to emphasize during your interview (i.e., new computers and the Internet are now available at the library). Repeat your main points often to ensure the reporter includes them in the story. Anticipate what questions may be asked and be prepared with answers that include these messages.

Your messages should highlight the wonderful opportunity that computers represent, as well as the need for support to maintain and upgrade them.

- **Learn more about the interview.** Ask the reporter about the goal of his or her story. Will it be live or on tape? If it is a radio interview, will listeners be calling in? If it is a TV talk show interview, will there be other guests?
- **Understand the reporter’s deadline.** Find out when the reporter must complete his or her story and plan your interview to give the reporter ample time to do so. If you are responsive to the reporter’s deadline, he or she won’t feel rushed, and your interview will go more smoothly.
- **Give yourself some time to prepare.** Once you know what a reporter wants to cover and his or her deadline, take some time to prepare before being interviewed. If the reporter has contacted you, ask if you can call back within 15 or 30 minutes, depending on his or her deadline. Use that time to collect your thoughts, review your talking points and take a couple of deep breaths before responding.
- **Relax and focus.** Get to your location or in your chair at work 10 to 15 minutes before your interview. Spend time practicing your core message points. Breathing exercises may feel silly, but they will help you feel calm.

### **During the interview**

- **Keep your answers succinct.** Don’t feel compelled to keep talking. When you have covered your message point, stop talking.
- **Do not look straight at the camera.** Stay focused on the interviewer or the task at hand. If you are showing a patron how to use the computer for a newspaper photographer or television camera, keep your focus on the patron and the computer.
- **Do not guess.** If you do not know the answer to a question, it’s all right to say you are not sure. Be sure to find the answer and get back to the reporter as promptly as possible.

- **Personalize the story.** Your own experience is important to the story. Offer simple examples or anecdotes about your observations of people using the computers. Talk about your belief that free, public access to digital information is important.
- **Avoid jargon, technical language and acronyms.** Avoid words that may be unfamiliar to the general public. Try to simplify your explanations and use analogies to explain concepts.
- **Be enthusiastic.** You have a positive story to tell the reporter's readers, viewers and listeners. Smile when it is appropriate and let your enthusiasm come through in your voice.
- **Don't worry about repeated questions.** If the reporter's questions are the same, the content of your answers should remain the same. Reporters sometimes ask the same question in order to get new information for the story, but it may also be to encourage you to give a tighter answer, making for a better sound bite.
- **Remember anything you say may appear in the story.** Nothing is "off the record." Assume from the moment you pick up the phone or walk into an interview, everything you say may be quoted.
- **Never say "No comment."** If you can't comment on a point, emphasize what you can say and return to your points.

#### After the interview

- **Ask the reporter when the story might air or be printed.** You may want to tape or clip the interview.
- **Follow up with the reporter with any unanswered questions.** Try to do so in the same day.
- **Consider sending a thank-you note to the reporter.** This helps you build a good relationship with the media.

**PURPOSE** *To inform community members about the computers in your library with an announcement on your local television and radio stations or in your local newspaper.*

### **Step 1 — Write a public service announcement (PSA).**

A PSA is a free commercial that radio and television stations and newspapers use in the public interest to help nonprofits. PSAs for television and radio stations should be short and tell all the facts in a few sentences. It should be written exactly the way you would like the announcer to read it on air. Use a stopwatch to time how long your message takes; keep it to 15 or 30 seconds.

For newspapers, first contact the advertising directors to determine if they will publish your PSA. If they agree to do so, ask what format they need, or whether their advertising department can produce it for you. Your text for the ad should be minimal, as most newspaper PSAs are small.

### **Step 2 — Send your PSA to local television and radio stations and newspapers.**

Find out if your local television and radio stations have public service directors. They are the ones who should receive your PSA. If a station does not have a public service director, send your PSA to the producer on your media contact sheet.

Send the PSA a few weeks before you would like it to be broadcast or printed. Consider sending other information about your event or program with the PSA. For example, if your PSA promotes an open house, include a flier about the event and a fact sheet on the public access computing program.

### **Step 3 — Make a follow-up call.**

Make a quick follow-up call to make sure the stations and newspapers received the PSA and find out if they have any questions.

### **Step 4 — Write a thank-you note.**

Be sure to thank your contacts if they use the PSA.





**Sample public service announcement for an open house**

*(Put on library letterhead and send three weeks before the event.)*

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Date: [DATE]

Contact: [YOUR NAME, TITLE]  
[ADDRESS]  
[ADDRESS]  
[TELEPHONE NUMBER]  
[E-MAIL]

Begin use: Immediately  
Don't use after [DATE OF OPEN HOUSE].

Time: 30 seconds

**New Computers in [NAME OF LIBRARY]**

Would you like to use a computer, but you're not sure how, or you don't have access to one?

The [NAME OF LIBRARY] cordially invites you to an open house on [DAY, DATE], from [TIME] to experience the power of computers and the Internet by using the library's new computers and software. Staff members will be on hand to answer your questions and demonstrate how to use the new computers. For more information, please call [TELEPHONE NUMBER].

###



**Sample public service announcement to invite the public to use the computers**

*(Put on library letterhead and send three weeks before you would like it to air.)*

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Date: [DATE]

Contact [YOUR NAME, TITLE]  
[ADDRESS]  
[ADDRESS]  
[TELEPHONE NUMBER]  
[E-MAIL]

Begin use: Immediately  
No End Date

Time: 30 seconds

**New Computers in [NAME OF LIBRARY]**

Would you like to use a computer, but you're not sure how, or you don't have access to one?

Visitors to the [NAME OF LIBRARY] can access the Internet and use computers and printers for free. Staff members are always on hand to answer your questions and demonstrate how to use the computers. The library is open [HOURS AND DAYS OF OPERATION]. For more information, please call [TELEPHONE NUMBER].

###

**PURPOSE** *To seek public support for your computer program by reaching influential community members through an opinion column.*

An opinion column is an article that discusses an issue of concern in the community, offers possible solutions and asks for support. These columns are usually no more than 750 words and should not be used to discuss organizational programs.

**Step 1 — Conduct a brainstorming session on your column's subject.**

As the title indicates, these columns are “opinions.” They should state your point of view and, ideally, have a “call to action” that asks readers to take a specific step. For example, your column might encourage readers to support an increased library budget. You may have a better chance of having your column published if it relates to a current event or is in response to a recent article in the newspaper.

**Step 2 — Call the person at the newspaper responsible for publishing opinion columns.**

Explain why you want to write a column and generally what it will say. Find out the newspaper's guidelines for these pieces (specifically, how long the column should be).

**Step 3 — Write the column.**

Read the columns in your local newspaper to make sure your style is a good fit.

**Step 4 — Consider asking a local opinion leader to co-author the column.**

Adding a community member with clout to your column will increase the chances that the column will be printed. Look at your “Key Contact List” for potential co-authors.

**Step 5 — Send the column to your newspaper contact and then telephone that person to confirm that he or she received it.**

It often takes several days for the newspaper editor to confirm that the paper will or will not publish your column. The editor may also ask you to make changes to the column.

**Step 6 — Clip your published column and send copies of it to influential contacts.**

Help keep your partners and influential community members informed about your library by sending them a copy of the column with a note that says, “In case you missed it.”