

A Statewide Public Library Conversation

Goals

Since January 2012, the Delaware Division of Libraries (DDL) has supported public libraries in Delaware to create local awareness about libraries, generate engagement with the community and encourage positive action associated with supporting libraries. The Geek the Library community awareness campaign provided the framework for a statewide initiative organized and supported by DDL, and implemented locally by all Delaware public libraries. More than a year into the effort, it has created a buzz across the state, united all of the libraries in many positive ways and helped motivate library staff to make personal connections with the community.

“Delawareans connect Geek the Library—the coolness factor—with their librarians,” noted Delaware State Librarian Annie Norman. “It has given Delaware libraries a stronger brand identity. It brought the libraries together and closer to their communities—all in a good way.”

The campaign acted as a launching pad for activating library teams at the local level, said Deputy Director Beth-Ann Ryan. “We were pleased by how enthusiastically the libraries took it and ran with it. Geek the Library gave all of us the confidence to get out there. We learned that it’s great to use something like this as a springboard to starting conversations.”



AT A GLANCE

- Service area: State of Delaware
- Service area population: 897,934
- Staff: 182 full-time and 317 part-time

Campaign

With the help of tremendous planning and support activities from DDL, including state-specific advertising, events and promotional guidance, libraries have come together under the

campaign identity and used it as a catalyst to actively engage their communities. While all Delaware libraries received support from OCLC, including free printed materials and templates, it’s the additional support and superb top-level coordination from DDL that made each local

campaign even more impactful. Delaware libraries received guidance and motivation through every stage of the local campaigns—the state librarian even participated in a local parade with the Delaware Library book cart drill team—and DDL plans to continue this beyond the scheduled one-year period.

“Delawareans connect Geek the Library—the coolness factor—with their librarians. It has given Delaware libraries a stronger brand identity. It brought the libraries together and closer to their communities—all in a good way.”

— Annie Norman, Delaware State Librarian

A Statewide Public Library Conversation *Continued*

What's notable about the Delaware experience is that DDL utilized the campaign as it was intended, but also realized additional value. DDL used the extra communication with libraries as a learning experience to gain knowledge about where gaps in professional development exist and as an opportunity to help library staff shift their own thinking about the value of the library in the community. One objective was to help library leaders embrace and communicate the idea of libraries being transformational and a place for lifelong learning. Additionally, Norman and her team hoped to guide librarians in thinking broadly about the necessity to transform their organizations to meet local needs—including how programs and resources are organized for users.

Some of the campaign strategy was based on helping the libraries start to organize data (e.g., what people in the community geek) according to major Dewey Decimal Classification® categories. This focus, said Norman, is a positive step to categorizing all resources consistently to ensure consumers understand what's available and that the library's resources and services scope goes well beyond books. It can also help libraries isolate where there's a specific local need, she added. "All the services that libraries provide should sit on this framework of Dewey, so we make sure we're covering all of the bases."



“Resources are a result of delivering value to the customer. The more we engage the public with their passions and interests and develop stronger library services to support that, then libraries will be better funded as a result.”

— Annie Norman, Delaware State Librarian

Outcome

A critical piece to this, according to Norman, is actively initiating conversations with the community. The DDL team helped Delaware libraries to reinforce the engagement already started at each library. In the fall of 2012, DDL sponsored six community conversations in a phase of the state initiative called “We geek the Delaware Dream.” These discussions, facilitated by Dr. Bill McGowan and documented by visual artist John Donato, brought the local conversation to a new level, and allowed the library and the community to unite in their visions of the Delaware Dream and how the library plays an important role.

The conversations allowed the libraries to initiate a community dialogue that helps position the library as a key player to address local concerns. Through community activities and this meaningful discourse throughout the campaign and via the Delaware Dream conversations, the public made deeper connections to the library. What's more, library leaders and staff got to know the community better—uncovering information that can help mold what resources and programs are offered, and how the library transforms in the future.

“Resources are a result of delivering value to the customer. The more we engage the public with their passions and interests and develop stronger library services to support that,” noted Norman, “then libraries will be better funded as a result.”

For more information about Geek the Library, visit

geekthelibrary.org