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## 12 Ways to Save Your Library

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A few weeks ago I wrote a piece about how to find cheap books if you need to feed your reading habit but your library is dying or dead. In the comment trail for that piece, several readers expressed disappointment that the piece wasn't about how to keep such a frugal resource alive in the first place. I heard you, and now I want to address that issue.

(See: <http://www.savingadvice.com/articles/2011/09/13/107707ways-to-get-cheap-books-when-your-library-is-dying.html>)

A couple of years ago I had to join the fight to keep our library alive at all. It was slated for closing due to budget cuts. Since it was in a rural part of the county, it was deemed "disposable," or at least more disposable than the branches in the more affluent part of the county.

I've always been a huge supporter of our library, giving money, time, and materials (for those who thought I didn't support the library you should know they're even in my will), but it's not enough when just a few people are giving. When the community got together to fight the closure, I learned a few additional ways to help fight cutbacks and closures, as well as ensure the subject never comes up in the first place. Here are some ideas. Note that the more of these you can do simultaneously, the better your chances of keeping your library alive and thriving.

**DONATE MATERIALS:** When you have a book, DVD, or CD you no longer want, give it to the library. They can either add it to the collection or sell it to raise funds. If you want to buy books to give to the library, you can find cheap books at thrift stores, used book stores, clearance racks at regular bookstores, school book fairs, and yard sales. You can take a tax deduction for the fair value of the materials you donate. The library should be able to give you a receipt. You can also donate magazine subscriptions. (Lots of local businesses do this in our library because the plastic jacket that protects the magazine sports a label that says, "Subscription Donated by Business X." The business gets a tax deduction and some advertising.)

**DONATE MONEY:** Most libraries accept monetary donations outright, and some may sell memberships in "Friends of the Library" programs. You can also name a library as a beneficiary of your will. If you're very wealthy, you can donate a large sum of money and dictate how it is to be spent (i.e., on a new library, a new wing of an existing library, or to create a specific type of collection). Giving money to a public library is usually a tax deduction, too.

**WRITE YOUR POLITICIANS:** While you definitely want to write to the local politicians who are pushing for the cutbacks, you also want to write to the federal representatives of your district. They may not even know that the local politicians are considering cutbacks. This was the case with our library. Our federal representatives had no idea and once they found out, they leaned heavily on the local politicians to give up the idea.

**ACTUALLY USE THE LIBRARY:** Too many people never use their library yet, when it gets closed or threatened with service cutbacks, they scream about it. When politicians start looking at which branches to close, they look at circulation figures to determine which branches are being used and which are not. If you want to keep your library alive you need to actually use it. Make sure you actually check out books and materials, too. If you're going there every day but only using the computers to check email, you're not helping the circulation figures.

**PATRONIZE BOOK SALES AND OTHER MONEY-RAISING EVENTS:** Many libraries have book sales where they sell off old materials or excess donations. Books are usually cheap and the money goes to buy new materials or to help with other expenses. Libraries or their supporting organizations will also host other fundraising events such as auctions, holiday parties, or "dinner with an author"-type events. If you can afford to attend, do so. The money you pay for admission or to bid on items will benefit the library.

**VOLUNTEER:** If you can't give money or materials, give your time. Volunteering to shelve or check out books can help if staff is cut. If you feel that there isn't enough programming, it may be because the library doesn't have the staff to deal with it. Volunteer to put together and host a special program or two. If you're tech savvy, teach a class on how to use an e-reader with the library system, or teach computer job search techniques. If you're a writer or know one, offer to schedule a reading. Ask what needs to be done and where the staff is spread too thin and volunteer to help out.

**PROTEST (AND LET THE MEDIA KNOW YOU'RE DOING SO)** If your library is facing closure or severe cutbacks, hit the streets to protest. A well organized protest or sit-in can go a long way toward generating awareness. Call the media beforehand to let them know so they can cover it. (Just make sure you get any necessary permits and that things remain safe and reasonable. Don't get arrested.)

**DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE AND THE NEED:** It's all well and good to protest and write letters to the head honchos, but you need to do more than complain. You have to demonstrate the need for, and the value of, the library. Point out that this is where low income people can use computers to hunt for jobs and support that with statistics from your area. Note how many kids come in for tutoring every day. Note how many clubs or groups rely on the library for meeting space. Show how many home schools in the area need a library nearby. Tell the officials how many more necessary resources the public library offers above and beyond what the local school libraries offer. It requires research on your part, but the more statistics, numbers, and real life scenarios you can show the decision makers, the better chance you have of winning the fight.

**GET EVERYONE INVOLVED:** It helps if a diverse community of users fights together. If the only ones complaining are affluent soccer moms, it's easy for officials to dismiss the complaints because they know those people can find books elsewhere. Rally the senior citizens, kids, minorities, teachers, PTA groups, book clubs, and anyone else who uses the library regularly so that the politicians see exactly how many groups will be hurt by a closure or cutback.

**VOTE:** If library funding comes up on the ballot in your local elections, get to the polls. Even if you hate all the candidates running for other offices, at least get in there and check the box that gives your support to the library.

**GET THE BIG NAMES ON YOUR SIDE:** Celebrities and high-level politicians can often sway decision makers more than a group of well-organized protesters (sad, but true). Find well-known writers to back your cause. If your area doesn't have any, enlist a well-known columnist, radio, or TV personality. If you can get a federal politician to weigh in against the local politicians, that's great, too.

**GO VIRAL:** Social media is your friend. Use Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to get the word out and to organize protests and meetings. People who never read the newspaper or watch the news might be on social media, enabling you to alert more members of your community to the problem.

**LOOK FOR PRIVATE BACKING:** It may be possible to get a corporation or a group of local businesses to chip in money to help the library. In some states the laws don't permit this, but do some research to find out if private backing is allowed. If it is, knock on some doors. If you own a business, consider donating.

**PROVIDE CONSTRUCTIVE IDEAS AND ALTERNATIVES:** Sometimes the politicians vote for cutbacks or closures without thinking things through (shocking, I know, but true). In our case, they skipped right over looking at things like reducing hours, charging nominal fees for library cards, reducing electricity usage (and the associated bills), cutting down on waste, and other simple cost-cutting measures. While not ideal, it was successfully argued that the community would much prefer reduced hours and small fees over complete closure. Give the decision makers reasonable alternatives and ideas to consider.

None of these actions will cost you a great deal of money (unless you donate enough money for a new library wing) but they can all make a big difference in the health and longevity of your library. You may have to put in some time and research to help save your library, but it will be worth it to ensure that such a valuable community resource remains available.