TIP SHEET

How to develop and use key messages

K ey messages are short statements about your library that you want your patrons and community to hear and remember. They provide straightforward, clearly worded information that enhances relationships and gets people interested in what your library has to offer.

A Good Key Message is:

- Concise – easy to understand
- Simple to say aloud — sounds conversational
- Focused on one broad idea
- Jargon free
- Easy for people to remember
- Persuasive

Why Key Messages are Important

Key messages provide the building blocks for your communications. They can be used in materials to promote your programs, services, and activities. They help to foster positive interactions with the public, the media, and with key stakeholders including donors and council members.

Key messages can help you:

- Stay organized when speaking with the public, the media, or with stakeholders
- Ensure consistent, accurate information is being presented about your library
- Improve the public's understanding of your library

What important messages do you want to communicate about your library?

How to Develop Key Messages

You can choose to develop several sets of key messages. Some might provide basic information about your library. Others might be tailored to specific programs or events. Still others might respond to issues, questions, or objectives that relate to your strategic plan or community. Here are the steps:

❶ Decide what you need to communicate
- Answer the basic questions? Why does your library matter? Who benefits? How are your programs and services unique?
- Step into your audience's shoes. Think about their questions and concerns.
- Prioritize the most important things to say.

❷ Write down the top 3 or 4 important points
- Use short, simple sentences to summarize your main points.

❸ Create supporting points for each key message
- Write statements that include facts, statistics, examples and simple explanations that reinforce your key messages.

❹ Tailor your supporting points to different groups
- Teenagers and seniors differ greatly in their interests, language and communication styles. Town council is interested in specific policy and bottom-line decision making. The public wants to see the big picture and what the library can offer them.
- Tailor your supporting points to best suit the needs of your intended audience. Use examples and analogies that each group is familiar with.

SAMPLE KEY MESSAGES

The key messages below are posted on the Montana State Library's Website. Notice how the supporting points provide simple explanations of the main points. And they're persuasive too!

Montana libraries are community centers and centers of the community.
We are where people meet – whether it's for a book discussion group or to share a cup of coffee or to hear a speaker or to register to vote. Montana's libraries are where Montanans come together.

Montana libraries foster learning at every stage of life.
From pre-school story hour to estate planning, Montana's libraries have the resources to help you learn where ever you are in life.

Montana libraries are high-tech and high-touch.
Computer databases, Internet access, even computer classes, Montana's libraries have it all. And, we have the librarian to help you sort through it.

Senior Citizen Campaign

Montana libraries are a fountain of youth.
Research indicates that keeping your mind active is one of the best ways to live a long and healthy life. At your Montana library, you can exercise your mind and meet with friends to discuss the latest news, check out the most popular bestseller, learn how to surf the Net, or even volunteer your time.

Baby Boomer Campaign

Montana libraries will help you rediscover yourself.
Whether you want to spend time with your grandkids or climbing Mt. Everest, now you can. And your Montana library can help.

Found at http://msl.mt.gov/WhatsYourStory/Campaigns/Main/ct_cp_keymessages.asp

Incorporate Key Messages into your communications, including:

- Staff, Board and Friends meetings
- Conversations with patrons and key stakeholders
- Website pages
- Newsletters, posters, Q&A Sheets, brochures, and bookmarks
- Presentations
- Media interactions (interviews, press releases, articles)
- Annual reports
- Grant applications

Tip Sheets focus on skill building for Parkland Regional Board, member library staff, boards and Friends groups.

Parkland Regional Library
Cooperation ▪ Innovation ▪ Service