

## BRIDGING THE GAP

*Rita Berman Frischer*

**Description:** This final session of the Freshman Seminar will guide attendees toward setting effective library administration goals and present strategies for achieving them. We will share techniques for obtaining, maintaining and building institutional support, assuring an adequate and growing budget, and promoting enthusiastic backing for various fundraising projects. We will discuss such public services as reference work, lively programming, community outreach and bibliographic instruction. If there's time, we'll talk about library space planning and use within the organization. Then, after we solve the problems of supervising or recruiting personnel and/or volunteers and discuss how to get your backlog of books processed without enough staffing, we'll conclude by convincing you that applying for and getting AJL accreditation is your best not-so-secret weapon for accomplishing your goals. Come with questions.

**Rita Frischer**, a former president of SSC and of AJL of So. California, has been active in Jewish libraries and learning centers since 1973. In 1980, she was hired as Director of Library Services at Sinai Temple in West L.A., a position she left in July 2000 after 20 years of administering and expanding Sinai's Blumenthal Library. Along with Rachel Glasser, she worked with the Elazars on the last revision of their scheme, in 1986 she had founded the Centralized Cataloging Service for Libraries of Judaica, the only Elazar/Weine-based cataloging resource for small libraries. Currently, she writes reviews and articles and consults and speaks on librarianship and literature.

Much of Library Administration depends on being able to envision goals and objectives and convincingly communicate these to professional and lay leaders. Successfully implementing your programs and projects depends on educating and recruiting these crucial members of your community. Thus the title of this segment, "Bridging the Gap," can apply to the many ways in which the Library and Librarian can make connections within any organization, bringing a Library component into many areas not immediately obvious but very beneficial to your long-range goals.

One of the largest gaps I needed to bridge was that between the skills needed at the beginning of my career and those needed on my last job. At the beginning, administration meant starting a library from scratch with little money and strictly volunteers to help. It meant doing everything but windows. It included setting up training and work parties for PTA mothers and a system for independent scheduling, while teaching 8 or more classes a week. It was very hands-on task oriented.

When I became full-time library director at Sinai Temple, a position I held for 20 years, administration became more political and less chore-laden. To bring an established library to its full potential meant writing policies, working with a large committee toward setting goals and then increasing awareness and budget to make those goals possible. I found early on that stretching the rule against committee meetings in the library to allow one meeting a year--the Budget Committee meeting on the night it considered the Library's requested budget increases--was a good idea. Showing the library at its best allows those on the committee to see what you do; for most of them, it could be their first visit. And reminding them of their investment in the facility to date often increases their willingness to assign funds to protect and build on that

investment. Evaluation, weeding and focusing the collection, broadening outreach, increasing PR and programming, high visibility participation in organizational events, all serve to bridge the gap between your goals and the level of funding made available.

### **1. Bridging the Gap between Short Range Goals and Long Range Goals**

It is advisable to give serious thought to three, five and ten year objectives for the Library, whether in terms of growth, technology or service. It is advisable to break down these objectives for yourselves into short range components and then use those as guidelines for more immediate action. It is not necessarily advisable to broadcast your long-range, pie in the sky, objectives to lay leadership or boards. You don't want to alarm them about the scope of your dreams and the possible costs involved. Far better to successfully implement small steps toward your ultimate goal, gaining visibility and trust piece by piece. Circumstances may alter your five- or ten-year projection somewhat along the way, but you'll have a strong track record of achievement to draw on as you move forward. Be sure you document your immediate achievements and broadcast them as widely as possible.

### **2. Bridging the Gap between Staff and Volunteers**

At Sinai, we moved toward professional staffing by tallying up the total dollar value of the Library as organization investment. I included not only the cost of the book and non-print collections but the furnishings and the approximate number of person hours represented by the cataloging already completed, bringing the numbers within reach of \$1,000,000. When the businessmen on the Budget Committee were asked if they would consider running their own million dollar business with only occasional, untrained volunteers, the point hit home and we began to be budgeted for clerical and other support staffing.

Meanwhile, volunteers can remain a valuable part of your crew, covering off hours, serving as liaisons with other institutional arms (Sisterhood, PTA, etc.), fundraising, etc. Its important that they get to do things they enjoy, that those who want company be scheduled for tasks that involve team work, that they be well trained and convinced of the importance of accuracy in presenting the Library's best face to the organization, and that they be shown regular appreciation via some special event.

### **3. Bridging the Gap to the Community**

In Los Angeles, the Jewish libraries joined forces to organize a city-wide Jewish Book Month celebration which included major exhibits in the downtown library, bookstore window displays, special programs, etc. AJLSC also gives a large collection of new Judaica to the Los Angeles Public Library and/or the County Library at our final special event each May or June, requesting that a representative come as our guest to accept the gift. Bookplates in each volume show that AJLSC is the source and the receiving system distributes the books to branches as they see fit.

Naturally, you'll consider other resources in the community as you determine your objectives and make every effort to work with them. Many of our L.A. Jewish libraries are part of the Metropolitan Library Network, a directory of special resource collections which allow public and other libraries to refer clients to lesser known collections well suited to their needs. Our

Jewish libraries band together to take tables at community festivals and events, a visibility which could, in smaller communities be carried out by several Jewish groups, library and non-, or by cooperating with members of the Church and Synagogue Library Association to showcase ecumenically the local religious collections. We have reached out to the community by participating in city-wide literacy programs, by passing books and other materials on to Headstart and other public school programs, and by publicizing Tolerance and other far-reaching programs.

Currently, the L.A. Jewish libraries are exploring becoming part of the California State Library Services and Technology Act, encouraged by Kevin Starr, State Librarian. Other states surely have similar programs for which Jewish libraries would qualify.

#### **4. Bridging the Gap between Space Needed and Space Available**

Point one is that the Library needs to be a dedicated space, not a lunchroom or regular meeting space (except for the Budget Committee on Library Budget night). Point two is that accomplishing this may take years of repetitive noodging and determination. In planning a library's space, both for patrons and for storage, compromises become necessary and creative thinking surely helps. When I was asked to design a new Library space for Sinai Temple, the day school library had not yet been incorporated politically into the synagogue library so the challenge was not only to plan a space that could handle classes while leaving the adult and reference collections accessible during class hours, but also to work within an administrative structure not necessarily amenable to compromising day school wants with synagogue needs. This problem, ongoing in many organizations, is one for which each of you will need to find solutions. Hopefully some of what you have heard here today will inspire you toward a workable setup with minimal stress. Obviously I have no easy answer to offer.

#### **5. Bridging the Gap between the Library and the Board**

Point one here is to communicate but with common sense. To have a Library Committee is almost crucial. Having the Library represented on the Board by your Library Chair or by the V.P. with your portfolio is important. Just remember it is your responsibility to give that champion of your cause ammunition with which to work. Be sure to prepare regular progress reports, get pictures and publicity in the newsletter whenever possible (better yet, write a regular column--I did for 20 years and it opened lots of doors), prepare a year-end report for the final open membership meeting, involve yourself with children of board members...whatever works. Just don't alarm people by daydreaming out loud unless you really know and trust the ear you're sharing your big goals with and feel sure that person will help you achieve them.

#### **6. Bridging the Gap between Real and Apparent Statistics**

A number of years ago, a member of our Budget Committee, the Finance V.P. in fact, decided to find out for himself how useful the library was in the organization's scheme of things. He had himself let into the Library, went to the shelves and, at random, pulled some 50 or 60 books off, looking to see how recently they had been checked out. Then he wrote me a letter, extrapolating that since many of these books had not been checked out in three years, the rest of the 20,000 books in the collection were doubtless similarly underused and how could I justify our existence.

I don't remember what I answered after I stopped laughing (and maybe crying a little) at his scientific approach to statistics. Nevertheless, be aware that laypeople tend to judge your library in this simplistic way and arm yourself accordingly.

One way is to track everything you supply to teachers in the school...each video, each book, touches not just the one teacher but the 20 students in the class. Similarly, if the rabbi turns to you for resources for a sermon, your impact exceeds a single user...maybe you wouldn't compute 500 listeners in the congregation into your numbers but you can expand a bit and still be honorable. Keep numbers on in-house usage, on telephone inquiries, on magazine article requests and faxed copies, on every and any way in which you serve your organization.

It's tedious, I agree, but well worth it when you come before the Budget Committee and somebody asks you to give them circulation figures as your only evidence of usefulness. And don't forget your classes given, your tutoring of B'nai Mitzvah, your participation in Sisterhood and Rabbinic programs. This is no time for hiding your light beneath a bushel basket...let it shine forth for everyone.

However, I would remind you that the light you shine should be primarily that of the Library and its place in the organization. Try not to make the mistake of taking ownership, allowing the Library to become "Shirley's Library" or "Miriam's Library" in the eyes of your institution. Always remember and remind them that it's their baby! Otherwise, when the person seen as entirely responsible for nurturing the library disappears from the scene, for whatever reason, the budget is often cut, as well as space and any other staff. Experience has made it clear that even the best collections, lovingly tended over many years, need the entire board to understand and accept ongoing responsibility. Otherwise, they are apt to go to rack and ruin or even into boxes in storage.

In closing, I would like to share this quote from the Ethics of the Fathers 3:17 which gives weight to our mission of service and education:

"Where there is no understanding, there will be no knowledge. Where there is no knowledge, there will be no understanding."

Good luck.