

**Lobbying for Libraries and the Public's Access to Government Information: An Insider's View** by Bernadine E. Abbott-Hoduski. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003. 289 pp. ISBN 0-810-84585-7

Ready to play Beltway ball? Whether we're taking on the Hill—Capitol Hill, that is—on behalf of access to government information or whether we're marching down to town hall to secure our acquisition budget, *Lobbying for Libraries* is the librarian primer for influencing politicians and advancing our causes.

In this “Insider’s View,” Bernadine E. Abbott-Hoduski—the founder of the American Library Association’s Government Documents Roundtable—details effective tools for librarians to: finagle funding and resources, design a legislative bill, communicate with policymakers, and influence public policy at the local, state, or federal level.

Abbott-Hoduski appears to have done all this and more with style and effectiveness throughout her twenty-plus year career lobbying for access to government documents in Washington D.C., mostly in her role as a staff member for the U.S. Congress Joint Committee on Printing. For many of us librarians, however, the intersection of library and government is a controversial or even disparaged space; nevertheless, we can no longer afford to avoid it. Our resistance to politicking may emanate from some personal “culturally-induced bias against the whole messy business of politics” (Beckerman, 1996, p. 24). More significantly, our reluctance may emerge from our best efforts to uphold the essential library mission of confidentially and impartially providing information about a range of topics from a variety of perspectives—a tenet that could yield dramatic benefits during eras of political witch-hunts.<sup>1</sup> Institutional relations between libraries and political bodies seem to jeopardize—if not contradict—our core principle of impartiality.

The true contradiction of working inside the political Machine comes not from any compromise of our ethic, but from our belief that libraries are inherently apolitical and that impartiality is always viable. Libraries are founded first upon a political infrastructure that casts these institutions as democratic spaces:

The public library is a means of democratic progress precisely because of its relationship to books and reading. It provides free access, without regard to personal or social characteristics of library users, to sources of value and knowledge as a means of enhancing individual progress toward “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” In addition, it serves as a source of knowledge for the informed citizenry on whom the fate of responsible democracy rests (Raber, 1997, p. 67).

Furthermore, politics literally build our physical facilities: in the case of public and state-affiliated academic libraries, government bodies appoint our boards, approve our budgets and grant us bonds (Beckerman, 1996). In the case of many special libraries, politics regulate the industries we serve (pharmaceutical or petroleum/energy libraries, for example) or create the body of literature we research (law or military libraries). Regardless of such ties, library lobbyists—like good reporters—are encouraged to keep a discreet distance from politicians while cultivating amicable working relationships with them (Beckerman, 1996). Yet how do we do this? Few library school curricula teach us the politics of politicking.

*Lobbying for Libraries and the Public's Access to Government Information: An Insider's View* is our first informed guide into the fray. With its lobbying-as-quilting metaphor and simple chapter headings (“How to Lobby,” “Who are the Lobbyists?” and “Who Is to Be Lobbied?”), Abbott-Hoduski crafts an instructive and quick read for us novice lobbyists who face the convoluted tendrils of political and economic systems with little professional preparation.

Navigate the book like you would the Machine: take what you need and leave the rest. An essential “how to” of lobbying can be cherry-picked from its chapters through identifying valuable tips like, “Be [at hearings or meetings] often enough that [public officials] recognize you when you walk into the room or hear your name. That kind of recognition takes time and persistence,” (p.15), or “Get to know the lobbyists on the other side. Stay friendly. You may have some positions or goals in common” (p.17).

Aside from such directives, Abbott-Hoduski includes references to resources for Capitol Hill insider information, as well as anecdotes that span her considerable career. While her personal accounts present an intimate view of government procedure and behind-the-scenes networking, they also serve to frame her work more as a memoir. Still, the anecdotes illuminate invaluable lessons that Abbott-Hoduski learned through time and effort, and from which we can benefit at the onset of our own lobbying or fundraising efforts.

This book should appeal to a broad readership, given the applicability of its lessons to any lobbying or development endeavor—whether at the local, state, or national level. It is recommended for library schools, government document repositories, and library leaders who are struggling to campaign for financial security or develop their institutions through coalition-building efforts.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> One such era was created by McCarthyism in the 1950s. For a consideration of the library’s mission of impartiality during this period, see Daniel Taradash’s

*Storm Center* (1956), which portrays a small-town librarian (Bette Davis) who refuses to withdraw a Communist book from her library's shelves. More recently, the Patriot Act has forced librarians to resist or submit to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's review of the library book borrowing and/or Internet use of patrons under suspicion. See the American Library Association's resolution on the USA Patriot Act available from:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/ifissues/usapatriotact.htm>; the Special Libraries Association's USA Patriot Act Portal at:

<http://www.sla.org/content/SLA/advocacy/PATRIOTAct/index.cfm>; and the Association of Research Libraries' Federal Relations and Information Policy web at: <http://www.arl.org/info>.

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### Reviewer

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