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Creating Government Document Displays

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It is good to see so many in the audience today. That tells me that you value print resources, as well as electronic formats!

Government documents contain a wealth of information. We need to encourage their usage! Our library users should be informed as to what is available in the "document world," and one of the best ways to do this is through the creation of document displays. There are other reasons for promoting your collection through the use of displays. After a few months of displaying, I think you will find that library users will be checking out your display area to discover the latest topic being highlighted, and you may actually be bringing people INTO the library for this same reason. Also, I think displaying your materials encourages library users to check out items that they normally would not.

There are several things to consider when one is thinking of embarking on display creation. First of all, it is important to evaluate the amount and type of space available. An effective display can be designed for either a small or large area, although, of course, there will be some limitations in a smaller area. The types of space may vary. Tables, walls, or display cases may be available – or possibly all three! Display cases are wonderful for displaying archival materials or visual items that may "walk away" if not under a lock and key. However, tables do have their advantages. I like the fact that documents can be displayed openly and therefore library users can pick them up, page through them, study them, and check them out if desired.

Your budget may effect the extent of your display. It will probably determine whether you will have simple or elaborate displays. For instance, whether you can invest in a display case. It may also be a part of your decision as to the frequency of your displays, whether they are bimonthly, monthly, or a long-term exhibit.

Another point to consider will be the amount of time you have to devote to creating displays. It does take time, but there are shortcuts you can take. One of those is to enlist the help of student workers or volunteers whenever possible. Also, be sure to save ideas, signs, bibliographies, etc., from all displays for possible use at a later date when you feel swamped with other things.

Now it is time to get it all together! Some of the supplies you will need may include: tabletop book stands, poster-size floor stands, 3 or 4-panel hinged display boards, fabric or tablecloths for draping (color is important), boxes to drape cloth over for a three-dimensional look, posterboard, foamcore, construction paper, markers, etc.

Once you have some supplies to work with, you can go on to choosing a topic. Some places to get great ideas for displays are newspaper articles, student assignments, campus events, and Chase's Calendar of Events. After you have an idea, decide on a title to define your display. Then pull related documents from your collection. You may find that you need to adjust the title as you progress. Sometimes you may find too many documents and will need to narrow the scope, or you may find too few and will need to broaden it or even change your idea completely.

After you have decided on your subject, you are ready to gather information. You may want to incorporate resources besides government documents, such as books from other collections, or pamphlets from non-profit organizations. Check the Internet for facts, statistics, or graphs related to your topic. Include Web site addresses related to your topic in your display.

Next, you will want to start making or gathering visual materials. These will probably include: a large title sign, smaller signs with captions or descriptions of individual materials or groups of materials, photos or copies of photos, graphs, maps or newspaper clippings, posters from the collection or requested from government agencies or non-profits, and any objects related to your topic.

There are also a couple of things you will want to think about when assembling your display. If you are using any valuable items or documents from archives, for instance, be sure to place them in a locked display case. Some visual items do tend to walk off. Check on the library's insurance coverage. Also, if borrowing items from a private party, have the lender sign a loan agreement.

You will also want to consider the preservation of the items you are displaying. All light damages materials; diffused or deflected light is best. You may want to invest in special preservation lighting for your display cases. Turn off lighting in your display cases whenever possible.

Temperature and humidity can be a problem in tightly closed display cases. A cool, relatively dry atmosphere is best to avoid fading, curling, buckling, and mold problems (45-55% relative humidity, 65-75 degrees F.) Small squares of silicone may be used to maintain ideal conditions in a case. You may want to use the technique of encapsulation to enclose any archival document sheets or maps.

Finally, you may want to develop a library display policy, if you don't already have one.

Now, you are ready to begin. Initially, displaying Government Documents can seem challenging. However, knowing a few tips and tricks can make it easier. Also, having a Web site to refer to when you have exhausted your brain is a big bonus. So...get your creative juices going... and have fun!

Resources:

Franklin, Linda C., *Library Display Ideas*. McFarland, 1980

Heath, Alan, *Off the Wall: the Art of Book Display*. Libraries Unlimited, 1987

Tedeschi, Anne C., *Book Display: a Library Exhibits Handbook*. Highsmith Press, 1997