

Library Connect Podcast: Jason Kramer

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MS. AMBER TOLAND: This is a Library Connect podcast. This is Amber Toland, Library Connect marketing intern for Elsevier, and I'm talking with Jason Kramer, the executive director of the New York State Higher Education Initiative. Jason, starting out, could you just kind of briefly explain what the New York State Higher Education Initiative is?

MR. JASON KRAMER: Sure, and then thank you for having me participate in this podcast. The New York State Higher Education Initiative, NYSHEI, as the acronym goes, is really a library advocacy association. We represent the public and private academic and research libraries of the state, and really, what we are about is, lobbying for those academic and research libraries. Now, New York, as many people know, has the largest public state university system. We've got the largest public urban-based university system, and we've got the largest collection of private colleges and universities in the country, as well as being home to 11 ARIA libraries.

So, we've got a very large, very broad, very diverse coalition that we've brought together under the NYSHEI umbrella, and getting the whole group to act as one, and raise issues that are important, not just to the academic and research library community, but to the population at large and getting folks outside the library to understand why these libraries are valuable and important. That's our goal, and that's our drive here at NYSHEI.

MS. TOLAND: Okay, thank you. I'm glad you told me it's NYSHEI. I was wondering how to get around that acronym.

MR. KRAMER: Yeah, it's an ugly one.

MS. TOLAND: So, what specifically do you think has made NYSHEI's lobbying so successful?

MR. KRAMER: The first step is, you know, just getting involved in the conversation, and that's something that the academic and research library community had not done here in New York in any coordinated fashion. But you know, specific to your question, we've had some growth and some success, and it's really been because we don't talk about libraries per se, we

talk about what I call "libraries applied." By that, I mean that we talk about libraries as a means to an end, not an end in and of itself.

You know, I like to tell people that, you know, if the folks that sell hammers don't talk about how important hammers are, and why you need a hammer, it's an important role in the development of civilization and all these things. You know, what they do is they get you to buy a hammer because you needed to solve some other problem, and we approach libraries in the same way. We don't ask for library support, and bring libraries into public policy conversations because libraries are a good and wonderful thing.

Certainly they are, but that is hardly enough to get state policy makers to open up the purse strings, particularly in these difficult times. So, we talk about libraries as a way of improving higher education, as a way of speeding research, tech transfer, faculty recruitment and retention, and certainly where we've had the most success is connecting libraries to the economy at large.

We, here, spend a lot of time talking about academic and research libraries as information infrastructure that's important for the digital age. You know, the snapshot argument we make is that if you want an information-age economy, you need the raw materials of that economy, and that, you know, quite simply is information, which is what we do at the libraries.

MS. TOLAND: Okay, and so, since you've been successful lobbying for New York state's academic libraries, if you were to give, maybe, one piece of advice to academic libraries in other states, what do you think is the most important thing that academic libraries could do in order to be successful in their lobbying.

MR. KRAMER: Well, you know, aside from having a reason for the lobbying and not, you know, just a reason for why you want money, but a reason why folks should support you, the really critical thing is persistence. I don't know if you've seen the movie, "Shawshank Redemption."

MS. TOLAND: Mm-hmm.

MR. KRAMER: That was pretty popular. A lot of folks are familiar with it. But in this movie, one of the prisoners decides they want some books for the library prison, and over the

course of, I don't even know, 20 some-odd years, this individual sends letter after letter to the state legislature, one a week, to the point of two a week. Eventually, the guy's successful. But you know, the point of that is that you have to drum home your message continually. This is something that it seems many in the library community are a little uneasy about, or unsure about.

You know, they'll make their case to provosts or presidents, or even elected officials, but usually leave it at that and walk away. You know, from my own experience in the world of politics, if somebody asks you for something once, and they're very easy to ignore.

MS. TOLAND: Mm-hmm.

MR. KRAMER: You know, you'll deal with them next year when they show up and they make the same request again. But it is the persistence that equals success. You know, something I told a number of my libraries, you know, is that when they go home and they watch TV, they do not see, it's not once a year that they're going to see an ad for Budweiser, or Coca Cola, or Wal-Mart, or whatever. They're being asked constantly to support these businesses, and be a consumer of these businesses, and libraries really need to do the same thing.

So, persistence really is the critical message that we too often overlook in the library world.

MS. TOLAND: That's a really great point, Jason. Well, thank you for talking with me.

MR. KRAMER: Happy to do it.

MS. TOLAND: All of Jason Kramer's tips, and his article, are in the Library Connect pamphlet, which you can read online, on Elsevier's Library Connect publications page, at www.elsevier.com/libraryconnect. Thank you, Jason, and thanks for listening to this Library Connect podcast.