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## 51, 36, 127, Hike: Justifying a Law Library Renovation and Expansion Project (Part I)

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# Trends

IN LAW LIBRARY MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

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*Edited by Philip C. Berwick ♦ For academic, firm, corporate, and government law librarians*

## 51, 36, 127, Hike: Justifying a Law Library Renovation and Expansion Project (Part I)

By JAMES S. HELLER, College of William and Mary, Marshall-Wythe School of Law

Efforts to renovate and expand the law library facility at William & Mary began in the mid-1990s. This two-part article traces how this project was justified within the law school, the university, the State Council of Higher Education, the General Assembly, and, ultimately, the voters of the Commonwealth, who approved a state-wide higher education capital bond initiative in November 2002.

This article summarizes how we sold the project to different constituencies. Part II, in the next issue of *Trends*, sets out a "model" document that was used to persuade these groups of the project's viability.

### Internal Constituencies

The first step in any building project involves marketing it internally—in our case, within the law school. The various constituencies include: library staff, students, faculty, administrators, and any law school advisory boards.

Much of what is discussed below will not happen until you get the dean's support for the project. This is not necessarily an easy task; it could take years, so be patient. You must be prepared to give the dean

detailed information supporting the project, both orally and in writing, over a sustained period of time.

You will have no problem convincing the library staff of the need for renovated and additional space (at least if they don't fully appreciate the inevitable disruption). The students also will be eager supporters, even though no current student is likely to benefit from the project. Most of your school's students visited other law schools when they were considering which to attend. Some of those libraries probably are bigger, look nicer, and have a better technological infrastructure than your library.

Students also will have complaints about your facility: the lousy heating and cooling system, noisy computer labs, leaky faucets, and on and on. Many of these same complaints can be heard even in brand new libraries, but that doesn't make them any less real. Students also know a lot about rank. Because many students spend the better part of the day and night in the library, they understand that a new and improved facility could be a great attraction to others who are considering coming to your school.

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When you get to the point of putting together a building committee, you will want two or three students to serve on it. Because its activities will span several years, do not put only third-year students on the committee. In fact, first- and second-year students probably will be most helpful—they will be more enthusiastic about the project and less satisfied with the status quo. Not only will the student committee members provide critical information from their perspectives, they also will help sell the project to the dean and to the faculty.

The two groups that you need to convince for the project to have any chance at all are the law school faculty and the administration. You need to get the faculty involved. This will be done through the library committee or a special building committee appointed by the dean. Ideally, you want three or four faculty members to serve on the building committee. As for the size of the committee, it probably should be limited to no more than eight members, which is still a manageable number. You want faculty who use and support the library to serve on the committee. Although the committee chair should be a tenured faculty member who strongly supports the library and the building project, you do not need—nor do you necessarily want—to load the committee only with cheerleaders. Find one or two faculty members who support the library in principle, but may have some doubts about the need for a multi-million-dollar library project. When you convince them of the merits of the project, they will become your strongest advocates.

Selling the project within the law school also means gaining the support of the law school's governing board. When the dean thinks the time is right, you will give the board whatever information determined necessary to gain its support. Also, anticipate making one or more face-to-face presentations to it. The board usually consists of financially successful alumni who have busy lives and who want to read, and hear, a simple, straightforward presentation. You also should be prepared to answer such questions as, "Our law firm library got rid of most of our books five years ago. Why can't you do the same, and then you won't need more space?"

### External Constituencies

Selling the project within the university may be even more difficult. Doubtless, there will be numerous other worthy capital projects, each of which has its lobbyists. Your best-positioned advocate is, of course, your dean, who has direct access to the president, provost, vice presidents, and other deans. The dean

will count on the you to supply a lot of data and other information that justifies the project. You should not wait for the dean to ask you for specific information—you have been keeping (and updating) this information for years. You have regularly informed the dean and the faculty of developments that directly or indirectly support the building project.

Your most powerful source of data is the annual ABA statistical compilation, which ranks law school libraries in numerous categories. You will compare your library to all of the 190 or so law school libraries. More importantly, you will compare your library to facilities in other law schools. These schools include: those with whom your school competes for students; those which your university considers peer institutions; those in the same general rank according to the *U.S. News* annual survey; and those in the rank to which your school aspires.

Much relevant supportive information can be gleaned from law school self-studies, and the sab-batical ABA and AALS site inspections. If the ABA and AALS reports were critical of the library facility, you will want to share that information with important constituencies within the university.

Do not expect the university to jump on board instantaneously. Unless you already have identified a donor who wants to drop several million dollars in your lap to get naming rights to your library, it will take some time to get the university on board. If you are a state-funded law school, there probably is a higher education governing body to convince, the state legislature, and perhaps the governor's office. Here, high-level university administrators, perhaps the dean and possibly other influential people such as members of the law school's governing board or an important government insider who has an interest in the project, will be helpful.

Remember that it is still the law librarian who provides the information that justifies the project. This information always should be current. When you have new data from, for example, the ABA annual surveys, update your documents by noting that you fell four places in library facility size since the last survey.

Do not be surprised if you have to make a presentation to representatives of the state council on higher education or to the local delegates to your state legislature. Indeed, you *want* to see these folks in person. You will give them an information packet that has the appropriate bulleted highlights (or low-lights), but you should relish the opportunity to show them your narrow aisles that do not comply with the ADA; your microform room that houses more than 40% of your collection; the compact shelves you already installed in the basement; the stacks on the

top floors that stand where tables used to be; the student carrels that are full of books; the computer lab that has such bad air circulation that it can double as a sauna. The library walk-through probably is the most important thing you can do. This picture will be worth a thousand words and is what your visitors will remember.

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