

Postprint: Analysis and Implications of the American Library Association's Dana Library Public Relations Award

Authors: Xuanyi Fang, Tan Dajun

Date: 2023-08-26T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] This study introduces and analyzes the “John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations Award” established by the American Library Association, aiming to provide references for the development of library marketing and public relations activities in China. [Method/Process] Through web survey, literature analysis, and email survey methods, the award is examined from aspects including its title, application procedures, award content, and reward mechanisms, with particular focus on its evaluation criteria. [Results/Conclusion] The evaluation criteria comprise three components: needs assessment and planning, implementation and innovation, and evaluation. It is concluded that these criteria constitute a public relations project system encompassing strategic planning, environmental analysis, target users, project budgeting, brand building, communication strategies, and evaluation. Implications for public relations activities of libraries in China include: formulating strategic planning, building professional teams, segmenting target users, establishing brand awareness, and focusing on building social relationships.

Full Text

Analysis and Enlightenment of the American Library Association's “Dana Library Public Relations Award”

Fang Xuanyi, Tan Dajun

School of Economics & Management, South China Normal University, Guangzhou 510006, China

Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] This paper introduces and analyzes the Dana Library Public Relations Award established by the American Library Association, aiming to provide reference for the development of library marketing and

public relations activities in China. **[Method/Process]** Using network investigation, literature analysis, and email survey methods, this study examines the award from the perspectives of its name, application process, award content, and reward methods, with a focus on the evaluation criteria. **[Result/Conclusion]** The award's evaluation criteria consist of three components: needs assessment and planning, implementation and innovation, and evaluation. It is concluded that the evaluation criteria form a public relations project system comprising strategic planning, environmental analysis, target users, project budget, brand building, communication strategies, and evaluation. The implications for public relations activities of libraries in China include: formulating strategic planning, building specialized teams, segmenting target users, establishing brand awareness, and emphasizing the construction of social relationships.

Keywords: strategic planning; library public relations; Dana Library Public Relations Award

Classification Number: G252

Introduction

Library public relations refers to the activities through which libraries, via purposeful and planned actions, promote understanding and cooperation with the public, strengthen internal unity, expand external influence, establish a positive image, and secure social support and assistance to create favorable conditions for their survival and development[1]. Therefore, library public relations activities create a favorable social environment for library development and enable them to better realize their social value. To promote library development and improve service quality, numerous organizations and institutions worldwide have established awards related to library public relations. Among these, the John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations Award (JCD Award) established by the American Library Association (ALA) is renowned for its long history, rigorous application procedures and evaluation criteria, and broad influence. Its award-winning cases, activity concepts, and strategies are worth studying. A foreign scholar published a monograph in 2007[3] that summarized the first 60 years of the JCD Award in 10-year segments, emphasizing the award's importance and envisioning that library marketing would become mainstream and that practice-oriented, results-focused library public relations would drive the vigorous development of the library profession. In the past decade, foreign literature has primarily focused on news reports about the award, while research findings have concentrated on case analyses of one or multiple award-winning projects. This study primarily employs network investigation, literature analysis, and email surveys of typical cases to discuss the JCD Award from the perspectives of application process, award content, evaluation criteria, and reward methods, aiming to derive beneficial insights for public relations activities of libraries in China.

1 Overview of the JCD Award

1.1 Award Name

In 1946, to commemorate John Cotton Dana's outstanding contributions to the field of library public relations, ALA collaborated with the H.W. Wilson Company to establish the Dana Library Public Relations Award to honor libraries that have achieved effectiveness in public relations.

1.2 Organizing Institution

In 1946, ALA's Library Administration and Management Association, Public Relations and Marketing Section, and the Wilson Company jointly established the JCD Award. In 1957, ALA established the Library Leadership and Management Association (LLAMA), which primarily provides members with innovative service models and learning opportunities to achieve excellent leadership and management. Since 1957, LLAMA has been responsible for managing the JCD Award, annually recognizing various libraries and related organizations that have made outstanding contributions in public relations, which essentially also serves to summarize and study library public relations and marketing work.

1.3 Award Application

1.3.1 Application Scope The JCD Award is open to libraries, information service companies, and reference consulting companies of all types and sizes worldwide. However, units meeting any of the following three conditions are not eligible: those that have won the award in the previous year; organizational units of ALA, EBSCO, and the Wilson Foundation; and institutions affiliated with JCD Award committee members.

1.3.2 Application Process The JCD Award requires submitting three types of documents: an online application form; a brief description of the public relations activity (within 100 words); and a strategic communication plan presented electronically (PDF, PPT, Word, etc.). The strategic communication plan includes three components: needs assessment and planning, implementation and innovation, and evaluation, requiring a clear presentation of the case overview within a maximum of three pages. In addition to these materials, applicants may submit supporting materials such as photographs, media reports, recommendation letters and user comments, promotional videos (broadcast advertisements, interviews, etc.), website screenshots, and social media promotions (such as YouTube videos)[4].

1.3.3 Application Requirements The JCD Award requires that applicants must obtain permission before using trademarked or copyrighted materials, including project documents. If applicants use unauthorized materials in their activities or project documents, they will be disqualified. Applicants must agree to transfer copyright of submitted project documents to ALA, EBSCO Information

Services, and the Wilson Company, including the right to publish, reproduce, and illustrate documents and video clips.

1.3.4 Application Timeline Since 2012, the JCD Award application period has been February-March each year, with award announcements in April (though there have been exceptions, such as in 2016 when the application deadline was extended to April 1 and winners were announced in May). Awards are officially presented and experiences shared at the ALA Annual Conference in June.

1.3.5 Reward Method Since 2012, each JCD Award recipient has received a \$10,000 prize provided by EBSCO Information Services and the Wilson Foundation, with formal award presentation and experience sharing at the ALA Annual Conference.

1.4 Award Winners

This study retrieved information about award-winning projects from 2007-2017 on the LLAMA website. In terms of quantity, 77 awards were presented between 2007-2017. Among them, 29 awards were given from 2007-2011, averaging 5-7 per year; 48 awards were given from 2012-2017, averaging 8 per year.

Regarding the types of winning libraries, the survey found that 63 public libraries, 13 university libraries, and 1 special library received the award. In terms of national distribution, six libraries outside the United States won this honor, with the remaining winners all from the U.S. These six were: Saskatoon Public Library and Vancouver Public Library in Canada; Durham County Library and Birmingham Public Library in the UK; and Edmonton Public Library and Hamilton Public Library in Canada.

In terms of award content, JCD Award winners fall into four main categories: (1) **Library Resources and Services:** This category refers to libraries marketing their resources and services through various means to improve resource utilization and service levels. Twenty-five award-winning projects belong to this category, accounting for approximately 32.4% of the total. (2) **Reading Promotion Special Projects:** Twenty-five award-winning projects belong to this category, also accounting for about 32.4%. (3) **Community Outreach Services:** This category primarily refers to providing public welfare services to specific target users in the community, mainly in the form of literacy education, post-disaster fundraising, and employment guidance. Seventeen projects belong to this category, accounting for approximately 22.1%. (4) **Brand Revitalization:** This category refers to revitalizing libraries and increasing user attention through slogans, trademarks, etc. Ten projects belong to this category, accounting for about 13.1%.

The 2017 award-winning projects are shown in Table 1.

2 Analysis of JCD Award Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation criteria are the standards used by judges during review, which serve as an important reference for award applicants. The JCD Award’s evaluation criteria consist of: needs assessment and planning (25%), implementation and innovation (50%), and evaluation (25%)[5]. The following sections analyze these three components using case studies.

2.1 Needs Assessment and Planning

Needs assessment and planning primarily refers to conducting macro and micro analysis of the environment in which the library (or organization) operates, understanding the overview, demographic structure, and political, economic, and cultural development level of the environment (community, school, etc.), and using this to determine the activity’s target users and objectives, predict what effects the public relations activity can achieve, and clarify the project budget. Specific components mainly include: strategic planning, environmental analysis, target users, and project budget.

2.1.1 Strategic Planning The JCD Award requires each applicant to develop a corresponding plan that clarifies the activity’s purpose and describes how it will be achieved, ensuring targeted action. Beyond developing an action plan, it is more important to elevate public relations activities to the level of library strategic planning to ensure long-term implementation. For example, the 2017 University of Tennessee Libraries’ “Information is Our Game” campaign aimed to strengthen communication between users and librarians and improve library resource and service utilization. The University of Tennessee Libraries’ Marketing and Communications Office developed a detailed project plan—“University of Tennessee Libraries Marketing Campaign (2013-2016)” —after field research, with all project activities carried out around this plan. Successful public relations activities require not only detailed planning guidance but also attention from library management to implement them as long-term strategic plans. The thoroughness and feasibility of strategic planning are important factors affecting public relations activities and thus constitute key evaluation criteria.

2.1.2 Environmental Analysis The JCD Award requires applicants to analyze the socioeconomic profile, total population, age structure, educational composition, and learning priorities of their communities, identify local environmental strengths and weaknesses, determine activity motivations, and provide reference for identifying target user groups and marketing objectives. King County Library launched an outreach service program in response to 89,000 unemployed workers in its region, guiding workers to use free library resources, extending opening hours, and holding multiple seminars and database usage lectures. The project not only increased usage of databases and other resources but also alleviated employment pressure to some extent, receiving extensive media coverage. San Jose Public Library conducted the “TeenHQ” activity based

on its city's large youth population (people under 24 accounting for 34% of the total population), large income gaps making it difficult for some families to pay related fees, and lack of dedicated learning spaces, providing teenagers with free learning spaces where they could use advanced equipment and technology to meet research needs. Environmental analysis is the first step in conducting public relations activities, and the analysis results can identify activity priorities and lay the foundation for clarifying target users.

2.1.3 Target Users The JCD Award requires each project proposal to establish clear target user groups and list communication objectives to conduct targeted public relations activities. For example, the 2015 University of Maryland Libraries' award-winning project segmented target users into students (undergraduates, graduates) and faculty (professors, part-time instructors, and teaching assistants), further dividing students into graduating and non-graduating users, providing employment information and training for graduating users and research methods and guidance for non-graduating users. These successful cases all use clearly defined target users as their service objects, proposing appropriate solutions for specific user groups to improve activity quality and level and ultimately achieve activity objectives.

2.1.4 Project Budget The JCD Award emphasizes the economic efficiency of activities, requiring applicants to include the library's annual operating budget and project funds in their application forms, budget and expenditure details in project documents, and compare actual expenditures with budgets after activities. Beyond financial budgets, time and human resource investments must also be reflected. The purpose is to evaluate fund utilization efficiency and determine whether activities can be conducted long-term. Since 2012, the JCD Award has divided applicants into four categories based on annual operating budgets: \$1-5 million; \$5.01-15 million; \$15.01-30 million; and over \$30 million, with separate reviews for each category.

2.2 Implementation and Innovation

The review focuses on examining the execution of project plans and whether activities have achieved their initially established objectives, as well as what communication platforms applicants used to interact with users and user feedback. Review experts emphasize activity innovation—both communication content and platforms/strategies should be innovative, requiring applicants to launch marketing brands, establish brand awareness, enhance connections with community departments, emphasize social relationship building, and use news media to increase influence. Specific components mainly include: brand building, communication channels, and social relationship construction.

2.2.1 Brand Building Building a library marketing brand facilitates long-term marketing activities and enhances project recognition and influence. In

2014, Wills County Public Library launched the “Your Go-To Spot” brand re-organization campaign with limited budget funds, which increased 2013 circulation by 40% compared to 2012 and database usage by 153%. In 2015, Flathead County Library reshaped its brand to reflect the new generation of libraries, conducting a multifaceted branding campaign that reshaped everything from the library’s name to its service content, with all reshaped library resources and services provided free to the public. Therefore, these award-winning projects demonstrate that building activity brands helps enhance user understanding and recognition of library services, breaks through traditional concepts, and relates to whether public relations activities can be conducted continuously, playing an important role in library survival and long-term development.

2.2.2 Communication Channels The communication channels libraries adopt affect final activity outcomes, and channel selection influences information transmission efficiency, user understanding of information, and user feedback. Therefore, review experts carefully examine communication channels and platform selection, requiring channels, platforms, or communication carriers and forms to be innovative. The University of Tennessee Libraries’ award-winning project is representative in communication channel selection, focusing on using audio-visual media, social media, and tangible displays to attract users, primarily employing four promotion methods: (1) Video media: The library produced four videos (1-2 minutes each) about library resources and services, posted on YouTube and campus communities, and played as “pre-roll ads” on campus free movie channels, covering digital resource usage, copyright issues, data management, reference services, and information literacy education. (2) Image media: The library photographed 30 librarians dressed as athletes, created cards (similar to baseball cards) with photos and personal information including name, photo, position, subject expertise, and contact information, placing these “baseball cards” throughout the school to promote librarian image and market subject librarians. (3) Social media: Primarily Facebook and Twitter, where librarian photos were posted to cater to young people’s psychology, achieving high click rates and widespread response. (4) Tangible displays: “Baseball cards” were played on LED screens inside the library and made into billboards placed throughout campus. The University of Tennessee Libraries used multiple communication platforms to promote library services and publicize librarian image, achieving “meaningful” services through “interesting” communication strategies, improving service levels, enhancing librarian-user interaction, broadening user information access channels, promoting user research and learning, and achieving a win-win for both libraries and users.

2.2.3 Social Relationship Construction The JCD Award examines whether applicants value building social relationships and advocates cooperation with external organizations and individuals. The University of California, Santa Barbara’s “Disaster Memoirs” project collaborated with Santa Barbara

Public Library, Patagonia Company, and middle schools, covering community members beyond universities, from high school students to Patagonia employees, from blind people to users with reading disabilities. This demonstrates that award-winning projects generally emphasize social relationship building, seeking multi-party cooperation to expand public relations activity influence. Similarly, Columbus Metropolitan Library (CML) conducted the “Great Libraries Build Campaign” to revitalize its 7 urban branches and 2 suburban branches, aiming to raise \$21.5 million through private charitable institutions to achieve its 2020 vision plan. By spring 2016, \$18.8 million had been raised through companies and foundations. Beyond support from charitable institutions and foundations, CML also sought community help and expanded influence through mail, web pages, paid media, free media, and social media campaigns.

2.3 Evaluation

Evaluation essentially compares activity plans with actual results. The JCD Award attaches great importance to evaluating public relations activities, using assessment results to judge entire cases. The evaluation criteria have six requirements: identify factors affecting public relations activity success; measure activity effects and impacts on target users, library public relations, resources, and services; assess fund utilization efficiency; list difficulties encountered during activities and explain solutions; describe lessons learned and how they will be implemented in the next phase; and explain which objectives have been achieved, which have not, and which are difficult to measure. Among these six requirements, evaluating public relations activity effects is the key consideration, with judges determining whether activities achieved expected goals based on factors such as resource utilization rates before and after activities, user attitudes, and library website traffic.

3 Implications for Public Relations Activities of Libraries in China

Based on analysis of the JCD Award’s establishment, evaluation criteria, and award-winning cases, this study identifies several aspects worth referencing for China’s library community in developing public relations activities: strategic planning, target user setting, brand building, and social relationship construction.

3.1 Strategic Planning

Kotler believes that specific technical methods for marketing service activities are not the key issue; strategic planning is what matters. “Nonprofit sectors need to reconceptualize where they are heading and what strategies they need to use to reach their destination”[6]. Clearly, Kotler believes the key to this transformation lies in establishing a comprehensive marketing framework at the

strategic level rather than in specific techniques[7]. Most JCD Award winners have developed detailed strategic plans for public relations activities and integrated them into their overall library development strategies, with submitted projects having at least one year of operation and potential for continuous development. Therefore, to enable long-term public relations activities, library public relations teams must develop strategic planning and coordinate all parties. First, they should view the entire public relations activity process strategically, covering everything from initial user research to later activity evaluation. Second, they should integrate public relations activities into the library's overall strategic planning, combining them with library goals and vision. Without detailed and rigorous strategic planning, overall conceptualization and systematic arrangement are impossible, making it difficult to achieve activity goals or evaluate their effectiveness. Strategic planning should be a system composed of environmental analysis, target users, activity objectives, fund allocation, communication strategies, effect evaluation, and timeline, with all activities conducted based on this foundation. With such process guarantees, library public relations activities can be transformed into long-term service projects, forming lasting mechanisms.

3.2 Building Specialized Teams

Public relations projects are generally planned by library public relations departments. Libraries should establish specialized departments or teams (such as the University of Tennessee Libraries' Marketing and Communications Office or Irving Public Library's Public Relations Communications Group) to implement public relations activities. Due to concepts, funding, personnel, and organizational structure, most libraries in China have not established public relations departments or dedicated positions[8], which affects the long-term development of public relations activities and results in incomplete activity systems. Therefore, libraries with conditions should establish corresponding positions or departments to build specialized public relations teams. Some libraries may face multiple limitations that make it difficult to build complete teams from the start, so they can begin by appointing public relations librarians who coordinate with other departments, gradually introducing talent to build specialized teams as influence and scale grow.

3.3 Target User Segmentation

Target users refer to the objects of products and services provided by organizations and are the front end of public relations activities. Only after identifying certain target groups in society can targeted activities be conducted. Through investigation of JCD Award-winning projects, most cases segment target users. Market segmentation involves understanding community residents' needs, which is often accompanied by a series of survey activities. Market segmentation should be implemented in daily library work, understanding user needs through daily contact (such as borrowing and returning books), but such

brief exchanges are insufficient for fully understanding users. Therefore, libraries must go deep into communities, continuously visit community users, and conduct long-term, stable, and continuous research. Beyond conducting detailed surveys, they should also build community user public relations networks, dividing users into different levels such as internal public, external public, actual public, and potential public[9].

3.4 Establishing Brand Awareness

The American Marketing Association defines brand as: a name, term, sign, design, or combination thereof used to identify the goods and services of a seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from competitors[10]. A public relations activity brand is a type of social cognition and recognition of the library formed through long-term accumulation in various public relations activities led by the library, possessing intangible value. The higher the activity's recognition and influence, the higher the benefits generated, thus forming a unique brand.

In practice, libraries can be treated as a brand, or individual library projects or services can create separate brands. Domestic libraries lack brand awareness in conducting public relations activities, and few have created distinctive brands. Therefore, first, they should determine brand names (such as “Information is Our Game” or “Your Go-To Spot”) that should be concise and to the point. Second, they should design brand logos with aesthetic appeal that are simple, elegant, and express brand connotations. Third, organizations should plan a series of activities to build brand influence, conducting extensive publicity around the brand. Libraries can select appropriate communication channels to deliver value to users, such as social media platforms (WeChat public platforms, Weibo, RSS, etc.), news media, tangible displays (banners, scrolling text, billboards, etc.), and library homepages, to publicize the brand and make it deeply ingrained.

3.5 Emphasizing Social Relationship Construction

Award-winning projects demonstrate that libraries conducting public relations activities should emphasize building external social relationships and utilize various communication platforms to disseminate activity concepts. External relationship construction involves strengthening cooperation with external organizations such as community employment guidance departments, museums, government agencies, science and technology museums, enterprises, and universities. Cooperation with stakeholders at different levels and in different fields helps enhance external understanding of libraries, significantly improves library visibility and value, saves time and funds, and absorbs excellent experience[11].

To develop outstanding library public relations promotion projects, Chinese libraries need to develop strategic planning, establish brand concepts, and build public relations activity systems. Simultaneously, to encourage Chinese libraries to develop public relations activities, specialized awards should be established within the profession to provide incentives and opportunities for libraries to

share excellent experiences. This study takes the “Dana Library Public Relations Award” established by the American Library Association as its research object, introducing its name, organizing institution, application channels, and reward methods, focusing on analyzing evaluation criteria in combination with award-winning cases, and dissecting its advocated concepts. Based on this analysis, it concludes that the evaluation criteria form a service promotion system composed of environmental analysis, target users, brand building, communication channels, social relationship construction, and evaluation, aiming to provide reference for public relations activities of libraries in China.

References

- [1] 黄宗忠. 图书馆管理学 [M]. 武汉: 武汉大学出版社, 1992: 378.
- [2] 刘红霞. 美国图书馆协会达纳图书馆公共关系奖研究 [J]. 图书馆建设, 2013(3): 80-83.
- [3] SHAW A, DEEKLE P. Outstanding library public relations: 60 years of the John Cotton Dana Award[M]. Chicago: American Library Association Press, 2007: 20-158.
- [4] 2017 JCD Applications[EB/OL]. [2017-09-20]. https://openwater-public.s3.amazonaws.com/sonar-uploads%2FoCzcKbAiSVmaHuAAtSbT_{Application}%20Info%20John%20Cotton%20Dana%20Award%20Applications%202017-09-20.pdf
- [5] EVALUATION CRITERIA[EB/OL]. [2017-09-20]. https://openwater-public.s3.amazonaws.com/sonar-uploads%2FkH7ftENKTO6mdqc6g3Zb_{EVALUATIONCRITERIA}.pdf.
- [6] MCMENEMY D. A broken relationship: pushing direct marketing to the public library user[J]. Library review, 2008, 57(6): 413-421.
- [7] 肖鹏. 重新认识图书馆营销: 概念拓宽与战略升级 [J]. 高校图书馆工作, 2014, 34(6): 3-7.
- [8] SUNY P. An exploration of university library marketing[J]. Cross cultural communication, 2014, 10(5): 169-172.
- [9] 罗式胜. 图书馆公共关系概论 [M]. 合肥: 安徽人民出版社, 1992: 57.
- [10] Branding[EB/OL]. [2018-01-08]. <https://www.ama.org/topics/branding/Pages/default.aspx>.
- [11] Academic library impact: improving practices and essential areas to research[EB/OL]. [2018-01-05]. <http://www.acrl.ala.org/value/?p=1288>.

Author Contributions

房宣伊: Research and data collection, paper writing;

谈大军: Determined article structure and research methods, revised paper.

Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] This paper introduces and analyzes the Dana Library Public Relations Award established by the American Library Association in order to provide reference for library marketing and public relations activities in China. [Method/Process] Using the method of network investigation, literature analysis and mail survey, the award is introduced from the name of award, the application of award, the content of award, and the way of reward. [Result/Conclusion] The evaluation criteria of the award are composed of needs assessment and planning, implementation and innovation, and evaluation. It is concluded that the evaluation criteria of the award are strategic planning, environmental analysis, target users, project budget, and brand

building. The enlightenment to the public relations activities of libraries in China includes: making strategic planning, building specialized teams, subdividing target users, establishing brand consciousness, and paying attention to constructing social relations.

Keywords: strategic planning; library public relations; Dana Library Public Relations Award

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.