



Illinois Library Association

# advocacy toolkit

## **The Importance and Purpose of Library Advocacy**

Advocacy simply means to actively support a cause. Libraries are our cause. Many people in the community recognize libraries are an important asset; but there are people who feel that technology has made library services obsolete and the current economic situation sometimes makes their argument compelling. Library supporters must remind their neighbors, community leaders, and elected officials of the fact that libraries provide great learning opportunities, excellent public service, and serve as invaluable contributors in their communities.

Advocacy is such an easy word, yet so complicated in the minds of many in the library community. Why is it that most library supporters, who themselves are strong community members, have no idea of the importance of speaking out in support of their libraries?

This toolkit was created for you, the library supporter and Illinois citizen, so that you can learn to be a true library advocate. Your voice will make a difference, especially if it is heard at the right time and in the right place and by the right person. All legislators want to know their constituents; they need to know the opinions and views of their constituents **BEFORE** they vote on a piece of legislation. You can make the difference. This toolkit is a compilation of the basic advocacy tools, and provides guidance on:

- Why be a library advocate?
- Building relationships
- Participating in advocacy events
- Communication tools

*“Be the change you want to see in the world.”*

— Mahatma Gandhi

# why be a library advocate?

## **Library Advocates speak out for libraries because:**

- 1.) They value the mission of publicly funded libraries to serve everyone who lives, visits or works in their community
- 2.) If those who benefit from library services don't actively support such services who will? Communities, who hire, elect and support library workers and buildings, do so because they value libraries in their community. Those supporters expect that the people they hire will be their voice in fighting for the best library service for their community.
- 3.) Studies show that if a community has a library it is a successful community. We also know that this could change with decreased funding and increased technology. It is the job of a library advocate to keep the importance of libraries at the forefront of all interested parties.
- 4.) We are the safeguard to intellectual freedom. We know that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and this right includes the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media.
- 5.) The message that libraries are unique and valuable must be communicated loud and clear. We know that libraries today are more than just books. We are social places for meetings, we are human services for those who have needs for survival, we are the first door to learning for young children, and we are the place for internet use and training for lifelong learning. We are so much and we need to shout it out loud in our communities.
- 6.) Many people, even some elected officials, have a stereotyped image of libraries based on interactions which took place generations ago. We must update the image of libraries, librarians, and all library staff for the citizenry of the 21st Century. We have the responsibility to promote our professionalism and worth to everyone.
- 7.) Legislators routinely deal with issues like funding cuts, filters, censorship, legislation mandates and so much more that impact library services. We need to provide a quick response to emerging issues so that their votes can be informed by professional advice.
- 8.) We know that in today's world there is intense competition for dollars and we must continue to fight for all library dollars.

# who should be a library advocate?

## **A Library Advocate:**

- Believes in the value of the library.
- Supports equitable access to information in a democratic society.
- Works with others to get the message out on the importance of libraries.
- Does not have to work in a library or be a library board member.
  - Loves the library for the many services it provides.

## **Library Advocates Are:**

Community Organizations  
Friends of the Library  
Library Board Members and Trustees  
Library Users  
Library Volunteers  
Library Staff  
Business Leaders and Workers  
Elected Officials  
Community Leaders  
Educators, Administrators, School Board Members

# developing relationships with state and federal legislators

Your legislators have an important job to do. Every day they make decisions that impact everyone in Illinois. Your job is to develop a positive working relationship with them and be an effective advocate for your library.

## **What is the first step to getting to know them?**

When your legislator gets elected into office, send a letter of congratulations and invite them to your library for a tour. Include your legislators on your mail and e-mail lists, friend them on Facebook, and follow them on Twitter.

## **How do I connect with them?**

- Make an appointment to meet with them in your office or their office.
- If you cannot get an appointment with your legislator, ask to meet with a staff person. Building a relationship with your legislator's staff is just as important as building a relationship with your legislator, as they rely heavily on their staff when they are making decisions.

## **When I meet with them, what do I say, what do I bring?**

- Your first meeting will usually be a short one. You will be introducing yourself and your library, and talking briefly about issues that are of importance to your library and its users.
- Bring your business cards. Give one to the administrative assistant and one to the legislator.
- Bring things to the meeting that will showcase your library:
  - ~ Statistics about usage of your library. This would be a good use of your Snapshot Day statistics.
  - ~ Newspaper or online media that details a recent library program or service.
  - ~ A testimonial from a satisfied patron.
  - ~ Your newsletter featuring upcoming events.
  - ~ The most recent Palm Card (available on [www.ila.org](http://www.ila.org))
  - ~ An item with your library logo.

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## **What do I do after the meeting is over?**

- Always end your appointment by thanking your elected officials for their support. Thank the administrative assistant for any help he/she gave you for setting up the appointment.
- Send a thank you letter and enclose answers to unanswered questions you might have had during your meeting.

## **What else can I do to strengthen my relationship with my legislators?**

- If your legislator recently passed a piece of legislation you can support, take the time to congratulate him/her. The official will appreciate your support.
- Make sure your legislators know how they can get a library card.
- Invite your elected officials to come for a tour of your library. Take their picture. Post it in your library newsletter (print and online), library social media website, and e-mail a copy to your official.
- Select a program that the official could be involved in (ie: poetry reading, handing out awards to summer reading participants, etc.). Take his/her picture. Invite the press to cover the event. If the press cannot make it, send them a picture.
- If you have anyone on your staff skilled in Photoshop and the ALA READ poster software, create READ posters featuring your elected officials and their favorite books. Hang them in the library, post online, and send your elected official a framed copy.
- Make space for your elected officials to conduct town halls and open meetings for their constituents in your library. You're not only supporting civic engagement for your community, you are also reinforcing your relationship with your officials.
- If you hear that your elected officials are appearing at a community forum, take time to stop by. Chances are most of the topics won't impact your library, but this is an opportunity for you to see your representative and let the official know you appreciate his/her support.
- If possible, attend fundraisers for your elected officials. This can be difficult as tickets often start at \$100 or more. There usually are events that are not as expensive. Your officials will appreciate your being there. Again, take a moment to thank them for their support of library issues.
- You'll think of other ways to engage your legislators as you get to know them. Once they get to know you, they will start to think of you as their expert on library issues and will contact you from time to time to get your take on a specific issue.

# developing relationships with local officials

While your local and state legislators are very important people in the legislative process, your local officials will help you build the foundation you need to cement your library's mission and importance in your community. You will be a library advocate when you follow some of these important steps:

- Include the mayor and all elected officials of your community on your mailing and e-mail lists.
- Keep them informed by sending them periodic library newsletters and other communication pieces.
- Follow your mayor on Facebook and/or Twitter.
- Invite your elected officials to the library for a tour. Take a picture and send them each a copy.
- When forming focus groups or writing your library's strategic plan, include your local elected and appointed officials.
- If your elected officials do not have a library card, contact them and invite them to your library to get one. Make a press event out of it.
- Select a program that could involve your official (ie: poetry reading, handing out awards to summer reading participants, etc.). Take photos and invite the press to cover the event. If they cannot attend, send them a photo.
- If you have anyone on your staff skilled in Photoshop and the ALA READ poster software, create READ posters featuring your elected officials and their favorite books. Hang them in the library, post online, and send your elected official a framed copy.
- Create space in your library for your elected officials to conduct town halls and open meetings for their constituents. This supports civic engagement for your community, and reinforces your relationship with your officials.
- If you hear that your elected officials are appearing at a community forum, take time to stop by. Chances are most of the topics won't impact your library, but this is an opportunity for you to see your representative and let the official know you appreciate his or her support.
- Attend fundraisers for your elected officials and take a moment to thank them for their support of library issues. Your officials will appreciate you being there.
- Speak to local groups, organizations and agencies about library services and programming.
- Get involved and encourage your staff to become involved in other aspects of your community as well. Join business networking groups (Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, etc.).
- Develop partnerships with the park district, social service agencies, and other governmental and nonprofit entities that are offering programming and solving problems in your community.
- Be a problem solver in your community and bring together other community leaders to discuss local issues, concerns, and initiatives.

# letter writing phone calling and e-mailing legislative messages

## Letter Writing

Letters are a simple and powerful way to let a legislator know how you feel. Legislators will pay attention to a letter because letters represent votes and each letter is deemed to represent several like-minded citizens. Letter writing is important if you are communicating with your local, state and federal officials. With the new security measures, your letter may take up to 2 to 3 weeks to get delivered. As a result, in time of urgency it is okay to e-mail or fax your letters. Go to [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov), [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov), or [www.ila.org](http://www.ila.org) for contact information.

### Letter Writing Key Points:

- Individually written letters – rather than mass form letters – make a greater impression on a legislator.
- Type your name, address and phone number at the top of your letter.
- Always be specific. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify its full name and number, e.g. House Bill: HB\_\_\_\_, Senate Bill: SB\_\_\_\_. Send your letter while the issue is still alive.
- State your position. Explain why you support or oppose this particular issue. Keep in mind that local examples concerning the impact of this legislation are very powerful. Be courteous and to the point, keeping your letter focused on one issue.
- Ask for a response. Indicate to your legislator that you would appreciate a reply containing his/her position on the issue. “Sincerely yours” is a proper way to conclude your letter.
- Follow up. If you agree with your legislator’s vote, take the time to let him/her know that. Similarly, if you disagree with his/her vote, inform your legislator.
- It is recommended that all written correspondence to your federal legislators be sent to their Illinois district office. This is due to the fact that written communication sent to Washington DC must go through a large amount of security checks and by the time it gets to the legislator it is damaged and the content obsolete. You can find your federal legislator’s address by checking their website.
- Check the Illinois General Assembly website at [www.ilga.gov](http://www.ilga.gov) to find out when the Illinois legislature is in session. When the legislature is out of session it is more effective to send your letter to your legislature’s district office.

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### **Addressing Your Correspondence to the State Senate**

The Honorable (Full Name)  
State House (Room Number)  
Illinois Senate  
Springfield, IL 62706

### **Addressing Your Correspondence to the State House of Representative**

The Honorable (Full Name)  
State House (Room Number)  
Illinois House of Representatives  
Springfield, IL 62706

### **Addressing Your Correspondence to a United States Senator or Representative**

The Honorable (full name)  
United States Senate  
Washington D.C. 20510

Dear Senator (last name)

OR

The Honorable (full name)  
United States Representatives  
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Representative (last name)

## **Telephone Calls**

A personal phone call to a legislator or his staff is an effective form of communication. If you already have a relationship with your legislator it is most likely your phone call will take top priority. Remember; do not get discouraged if your call does not get past the legislator's receptionist. The receptionist will make note of your call and log it as "for" or "against" an issue and relay the message to the legislator or his/her aide.

### **Key Points When Making a Phone Call:**

- Begin your call with giving your name and address.
- If calling about a bill, give the bill name, sponsor and number.
- Be brief in explaining your position and give examples if possible.
- Add concrete information to support or not support a bill or issue.
- Ask if the legislator has made a decision on the bill or issue you are calling about.
- If possible, ask if the legislator will co-sponsor the bill you are supporting.
- Always be pleasant and thank the person you are speaking with.
- Always get the person's name that you are speaking with and follow up with a thank you note.

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**E-mail**

While e-mail can be very effective with some legislators, please remember that most legislators get hundreds of e-mails and a phone call or a letter is really the most effective. However, when time is of essence an e-mail should be used. Having a personal relationship with your legislator will make your e-mail more effective. You should follow the same general rules as when writing mailed correspondence.

**E-mail Key points:**

- Put your name and address at the top of your message so it is clear that you are a constituent
- Be very brief and personal. If you are working from a form message, personalize it.
- Make your view known in the subject line (e.g., "Support the library") and do not expect a response. Staff may check only the subject lines to gauge public opinion on a particular issue.
- Avoid attachments, because they are rarely read.
- Use e-mail sparingly to avoid being considered "spam".
- Proof carefully, especially when writing in haste. Mistakes may cost you credibility.
- Make sure you include your full name and your complete mailing address, and telephone number so that the legislator knows how to contact you if he/she finds it necessary.
- Illinois Legislators have a drop down box for e-mail on their legislator websites and you can use this when you want to e-mail a legislator.

# on-line advocacy resources

There are many excellent tools on the World Wide Web for the library community to use when they are getting ready to advocate their message. These tools are free to use and some are downloadable. It would be a good practice for all librarians and library advocates to bookmark some of the following websites and check them daily in order to stay current and fresh with library issues.

*"In a time of turbulence and change, it is truer than ever that knowledge is power."*  
~ John Fitzgerald Kennedy

**Illinois General Assembly provides the following links at [www.ilga.gov](http://www.ilga.gov)**

**Legislation and Laws:** All Illinois Bills and Resolutions are listed on this link. The Illinois Compiled Statutes Text is on this site as is the full text of the Illinois Constitution.

**Senate:** Here is a full list of the senators with short biographies, the bills they sponsor, their district and their party affiliation. Senator Committees are listed as is transcripts and FOIA information.

**House:** Here is a full list of the House Representative members with short biographies, the bills they sponsor, their district and their party affiliation. House Representative Committees are listed as is transcripts and FOIA information.

**Live Audio/Video:** A link is provided to each house so that you can listen to or watch the members in session from your computer.

**Legislative Glossary:** A complete glossary of legislative terms is available here.

Additional links that are helpful are here as well:

- Previous General Assemblies
- Legislative Support Services
- Legislative Ethics Training
- Legislator Lookup
- Capitol Complex Telephone Numbers
- House Employment Opportunities

**ALA provides the following links at [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)**

**Advocacy Clearinghouse:** Tools and resources to assist you in advocating for your library.

**Advocacy Events:** Posts dates and event details for national library advocacy events such as Snapshot Day, National Library Legislative Day, ALA Conference and more.

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**Advocacy University:** Resources, courses and tools to help library advocates make their case at the local level.

**Federal Legislation:** Important legislation concerning the library community.

**Frontline Fundraising:** The Frontline Fundraising Toolkit covers the basics of advocacy.

**Legislative Action Center (Capwiz):** Has updates on library-related legislation and allows for library advocates to make direct contact with their legislative representatives via e-mail alerts.

**Online Courses:** Grassroots advocacy webinars are archived here for library advocates to view.

**Our Authors, Our Advocates:** Using favorite authors to advocate for libraries can be a very powerful tool. ALA has video clips and messages that library advocates can use when they are putting their advocacy event in place.

**Public Awareness:** The Campaign for America's Libraries is the ALA public awareness campaign about the value of libraries and librarians. This website link has a wealth of tools for library advocates to use to build their own campaign. National Library Week, Library Card Sign Up Month, ACRL, AASL and YALSA campaigns are highlighted here as are author video clips and other library advocacy messages.

**State & Local Resources:** Best practices on advocacy activities happening at the state and local level around the country.

**National Library Legislative Day:** An annual event to put library issues at the federal legislative forefront.

#### **ILA provides the following Advocacy links at [www.ila.org](http://www.ila.org)**

**Advocacy Publications:** Lists all ILA publications available for sale or downloading.

**Banned Books:** Lists the current year and past years list of banned books

**Contact Your Illinois General Assembly Official:** Here is directory information on each of the Illinois Representatives and Senators. Also this is the place to visit to find out who your legislators are for your district.

**Contact Your U.S. Congressional Official:** This is the place you need to go to find out who your federal legislators are and how to contact them. There is also an Alert link to current federal legislation and action steps that all library advocates should take.

**Economic Benefits of Libraries:** Here is a national list of reports and articles from other libraries on the economic value of libraries.

**Election Guide:** Here is a tool that can be used to see what elections are occurring in your district area.

**Illinois Information Advantage:** Here is the full report on The Illinois Information Advantage, a proposal for state funding to provide equitable access to electronic information and training for all Illinois citizens.

**Issues and Legislation:** Lists all current legislation and action alerts for the Illinois library community.

**Legislative Directory:** Find out who your state and federal legislators are here.

#### **A Look at the New FOIA Guidelines**

**NetSafe:** Posted here is a short report on how to use the internet safely.

**Public Policy Initiatives:** An ILA report on the annual ILA Public Policy Initiatives and ILA Action Agenda.

**Tax Cap Information 2011**

**ILA Legislative Palm Card FY2011**

**2012 Illinois State Library Budget**

# Join the legislative action network today!

## Working Together to Advocate for Illinois Libraries

The Illinois Library Association is excited to announce the launch of the Legislative Action Network (LAN) designed to raise awareness of the importance of Illinois libraries.

### What it is:

ILA's advocacy goal is to improve the effectiveness of member contacts with government officials at the local, state, and national levels; proactively develop legislative proposals to strengthen the position of libraries; and assist libraries in positively shaping the perceptions of libraries held by the communities we serve. In order to achieve this goal, LAN needs you to join as a member and start building relationships with your legislators today.

### How it works:

You will be asked to contact your state legislators at key times during the legislative process. ILA will make it easy by providing you sample e-mails and letters to help with the communication process. You will have the opportunity to discuss the legislative action item with both the ILA Director and the ILA Lobbyist so that you will be prepared to speak with your legislator with confidence.

### How to join:

You can join today! Visit [ila.org/action](http://ila.org/action) and sign up as an official member of the ILA Legislative Action Network. You can find your congressional district numbers for where you work at the ALA Legislative Action Center's Web site at [www.capwiz.com/ala/home](http://www.capwiz.com/ala/home).

Libraries have a great story to tell, and in these difficult budgetary times you can't expect your elected leaders to support your needs unless you let them know what matters most!

**Join at [ila.org/action](http://ila.org/action) today!**



Illinois Library Association  
[www.ila.org](http://www.ila.org)