



Illinois Library Association

READY SET ADVOCATE

Library Advocacy Tool Kit



Advocacy Tool Kit

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, and 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, don't understand the importance of speaking out in support of their libraries?



This toolkit was created for you, the library supporter, 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 elected officials want to know their constituents; they need to know the opinions and views of their constituents BEFORE they vote on a piece of legislation. Community members want to know how their tax dollars are being spent. You have the responsibility to tell them why libraries are vital and why spending tax dollars on libraries make for successful schools and communities. You can be that person to tell the important library story and make a difference.

This toolkit is a compilation of basic advocacy tools, and provides guidance on:

- Why be a library advocate?
- Building relationships
- Telling your library story/message
- Participating in advocacy events
- Communication tools



What Is Advocacy?

Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and social institutions. Advocacy includes activities and publications to influence public policy, laws, and budgets by using facts, relationships, the media, and messaging to educate government officials and the public. Advocacy can include many activities that a person or organization undertakes including media campaigns, public speaking, and commissioning and publishing research.

"Advocacy." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 28 November 2020, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advocacy

Advocacy IS...

- Action
- Engagement
- Supporting a cause
- Defining specific issues
- A positive message
- Leading

Advocacy is NOT....

- Selling
- Marketing
- Begging
- Whining
- Letting someone else do it

Putting the Advocacy Pieces Together

Advocacy can sometimes seem confusing, because when people talk about advocacy, they may be talking about different pieces of what in fact is an overall process. Some advocates will focus on local issues, others on statewide or federal issues. Whether it's community engagement, building an advocacy network, or getting the message out, all are part of a continuous, sustained process, or continuum, that involves four stages:

1. Laying the groundwork
2. Turning support into action
3. Advocating specific goals
4. Responding to opportunities and threats

Whether the goal is local support or federal legislation, the components are basically the same. Once you understand the pieces, and how they fit together, you will find it easier to be an effective advocate for your library at all levels. That's one of the reasons why involvement at the state level, for instance, can make you a more effective advocate at the local level.

The Advocacy Continuum

Laying the Groundwork

- Community engagement
- Building relationship
- Impact measures
- Personal stories

Turning Support into Action

- Building support networks
- Getting the message out
- Resources for advocates
- Advocacy training

Advocating for Specific Goals

- Local initiatives
- State funding
- Federal legislation
- International initiatives

Responding to Opportunities and Threats

- Budget threats
- Legislative challenges
- Censorship challenges

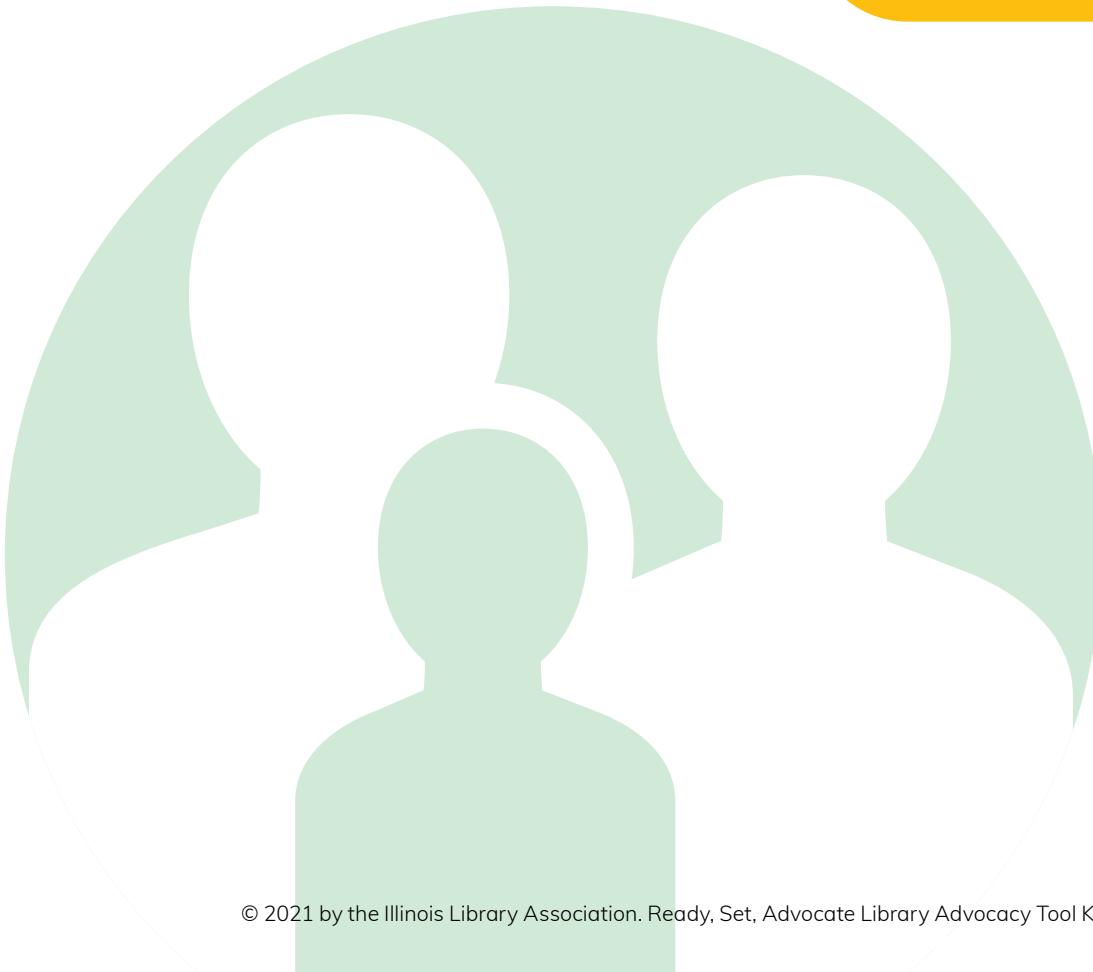


Who Should Be a Library Advocate

A library advocate is someone who believes in the value of the library. A library advocate is someone who believes in equitable access to information in a democratic society. A library advocate is someone who works with other library advocates to get the message out on the importance of libraries. A library advocate does not have to work in a library or be a library board member. A library advocate can be anyone who believes in the fundamentals of equal access to information, who has benefitted from the expertise of information professionals, or who loves the library for the many other additional publicly supported services it provides.

Library advocates can be:

- 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





Why Be a Library Advocate?

Library advocates speak out for libraries because:

- They value the mission of publicly funded libraries to serve everyone who lives, visits, or works in their communities
- If those who benefit from library services don't actively support such services who will?
- Communities that hire, elect, and support library workers, trustees, and facilities do so because they value libraries. Supporters in such communities expect that the people they hire and elect will be their voice in fighting for the best library service possible.
- 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 needs. It is the job of a library advocate to keep the importance of libraries at the forefront of all interested parties' minds.
- Libraries 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.
- 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, and do, so much and we need to shout it out loud in our communities.
- Many people, even some elected officials, have a stereotyped image of libraries based on interactions that took place generations ago. We must update the image of libraries, librarians, and all library staff for the citizenry of the twenty-first century. We have the responsibility to promote our professionalism and worth to everyone.
- Legislators routinely deal with issues like funding cuts, filters, censorship, legislative 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, informed advice.
- We know that in today's world there is intense competition for dollars and we must continue to fight for all library funding.
- Libraries are for everyone, regardless of race, color, ethnicity, ancestry, national origin, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital and/or familial status, mental and/or physical impairment and/or disability, military status, economic status, political affiliation, and other human distinguishing characteristics.



Getting Started : Know Your Library. Know Your Community.

All advocacy begins with the community you serve, whether it is a city or town or other district, a college community, a school community, or a non-for-profit community. This means that the first important step is to understand that community, its composition, aspirations, challenges, and goals.

You also need to know your library:

- Does your library have a mission statement?
- Are your library's strategic goals up to date? Do you know what they are?
- Are you subscribed to local, state and national library system, state, and association e-lists? (ALA, ILA, RAILS, IHLS, ISL)
- Do you know when your library board meets? Are there board packets you can read to learn what the library is doing?
- Do you know where to get the basic data that explains who is using your library?
- Do you know what services your library offers?

When looking at your community, here are some of the critical questions you need to ask:

- Who are the community leaders/movers and shakers?
- Subscribe to e-lists that your community has available: city, school, park district, chamber, etc.
- Does the community have service organizations?
- What are the key businesses?
- Do you know the school curriculum?
- Can you describe your community?

And as important as understanding your community, you need to be actively engaged there. Some questions you need to consider:

- Are you a community leader?
- Are you engaged in your community outside of your library?
- Are you serving in leadership roles in your community?
- Are you attending meetings, events, coffees in your community?
- Do you invite other organizations and businesses to come into your library to promote themselves?
- Are you at the community "table?"
- Is your library serving as a "vehicle" for your community?

It has been said that "All politics is local," and this is particularly true where library advocacy is concerned. A good knowledge and understanding of your library and community and engagement with that community are the foundations of successful advocacy.

With the knowledge and understanding you have gained, you are ready to become an important advocate. This is because:

- **YOU** are the person who knows what your community needs.
- **YOU** know what your library can do **right now**.
- Both **YOU** and your library exist within a larger community or organization such as your city, faith community, school, or business community
- **YOU** know how your library can fit within that larger community or organization, right now.

Now that you've laid the groundwork, you're ready for the next steps...



Your Library Message

Whether communicating with the public, with media, with library users, with community leaders, or with elected officials, it is important to communicate a clear, consistent, and concise message. If you work at a library or serve on a library board, what is your library all about? How are you making a difference in your community and in people's lives? If you're a library user or supporter, what makes the library important to you?

The “Big Picture”

This message needs to focus on the big picture, but also on the specifics within your community. Some “big picture” messages are shared by all libraries and are the focus of national and statewide public awareness campaigns. Some of them are:

- Libraries transform lives
- Libraries transform communities
- Libraries are essential to lifelong learning
- Libraries are a smart investment—and an incredible value for your tax dollar

A number of other “big picture” messages relate to the current economic and pandemic situation:

- Libraries are first responders for those needing information and assistance
- Libraries are vital to a robust recovery
- Libraries are “bigger than a building”

ILA has developed a series of “Bigger than a Building” talking points that can be used to illustrate how the value of libraries extends far beyond in-building use. These have been particularly valuable messages during the pandemic, with many libraries able to provide only limited in-building access. These messages may be found at www.ila.org/advocacy/bigger-than-a-building.

A number of resources exist for those working on messages that are specific to various types of libraries: public, school, academic and special. A good Illinois example is the “My Library Is...” project, featuring messages developed by RAILS and IHLS members. These may be found at www.mylibraryis.org.

Your Local Library Message

Within these broad messages, you need to think about your local library message:

- What is unique and special about your library?
- What are your local library's issues?
- How is the library making a difference in your community?
- How has the library served the community during the pandemic, with many traditional services disrupted?
- How will your library help drive the recovery?

Your message is also important if you are looking to achieve specific goals of service improvement:

- What are your goals and plans?
- Are you looking to add services, hours?
- Are you looking to expand or renovate?
- How will these plans make a difference in the community and in people's lives? If you are a library user, how will these plans make a difference to YOU?

All of these messages need to be carefully crafted, concise, and widely shared so that community members and community leaders understand your library's value—and goals.



Telling Your Library Stories

As all great communicators understand, it is the specific story—backed by data—that drives home the point. It is the specific stories that dramatically illustrate what statistics only suggest.

Remember...

The best advocates for change are those people who can tell a story that moves people to action... and you are the one who knows those stories best.

But capturing these stories is not always easy. For the most part, library staff may not be aware of the true impact of the services they provide. Whether they are children, students, parents, businesspeople, or the elderly, libraries have a profound impact on the lives of community members.

What are the components of a compelling library story?

- A problem
- A library intervention
- A happy ending
- One fact
- A real person
- A “phrase that pays”

The good news is that there are hundreds and hundreds of these real stories out there. The trick is to get library users to share those stories with you.

How can you get users to share their stories with you? Libraries can make this easier in a number of ways. Make it a practice to:

- Have a place for library patrons to write, text, or email their library experience
- Learn how to capture stories yourself: Don't be afraid to ask!
- Ask people to share or take photos (with permission)
- Post stories and photos on social media (again, with permission)

With a little practice, your users will appreciate the opportunity to talk about the ways in which the library is impacting their lives. And, you will have a growing array of stories you can use to dramatically illustrate the real impact your library has on real people.

The Reaching Across Illinois Library System, and the Illinois Heartland Library System have pages where you can share library stories—and see what stories other libraries have collected. ILA and the American Library Association always need stories that can show elected officials at the state and federal level how libraries are impacting people's lives. Many millions of dollars in local, state, and federal support have been secured because of the stories that you can tell.



Using Data—and Stories—to Show Your Library's Impact and Value

Data has always been—and will continue to be—important in advocating for your library. The fact that your library circulates a million items each year, or that thousands of children attend library story hours is as important as ever. In most communities, the library is the most widely used public service, and provides great monetary value for the tax support it receives. Most people have no idea just how much the library is used.

But the combination of data and the real stories you have now collected can be an incredibly powerful advocacy tool. Whether talking with community members, community leaders, or state and local officials, stories based on real people's experiences provide the emotional connection that numbers alone cannot.

Knowing that 2,000 children participated in the library summer reading program is valuable information, but knowing that James, a five-year-old with reading problems ended up becoming an avid reader over the course of the summer and is now “doing just great in school” this fall makes a much more dramatic point: “Kids who read succeed.” Knowing that Jane’s homebound elderly mother finds her library books a “life saver” during months of isolation brings dry circulation statistics to life much more than any chart or graph.

Stories can be used in presentations to local community groups, to illustrate talking points, and to support local, state, and even federal initiatives. The story you share can have as great an impact on a Senator in Washington, D.C., as it does on a neighbor next door.

With the messages you have developed—and the stories you can now tell—you are ready to put your advocacy plan into action.





Developing Your Advocacy Plan

An advocacy plan is defined as a plan that is:

1. A detailed proposal for doing or achieving something
2. An intention or decision about what we are going to do

The good news? You already have a plan: to be a more effective advocate. That's actually the most important step.

Your Library Advocacy Plan

A large library with many branches and staff may need to have a more complicated plan, but for most libraries a good advocacy plan does not need to be a multi-volume tome. In fact, the simpler it is, the more likely it is to be successful. The easiest way is to select areas of advocacy focus for the coming year, and for each area, identify one or two goals or activities. Here are some examples:



Focus Area	Goal or Activity
Building relationships	Reach out and meet with the heads of two new community groups this fall
Your library message	Develop a basic message about the library that can be shared in written communication, visits with community groups, and staff interactions with patrons
Library stories	Collect a new library story every week
Communicate the message	Share a new library story every week on social media
Developing relationships	Invite three new community groups to visit the library Invite your state rep to hold public office hours at your library



Developing Your Advocacy Plan

Having these goals and activities in writing will help keep you focused, and they can easily be shared and discussed with others. Everyone involved with the library—all your stakeholders—should know what the library advocacy goals are and how they can help move them forward.

Probably the simplest and most useful form of plan is a simple annual timeline and/or monthly checklist that outlines what activities need to occur, when they occur, and who does them.

In developing your plan, some of the things you'll need to think about are:

1. Set your goals and key issues: What are you advocating for (your message)?
2. Who is the audience you are advocating to?
3. Develop your talking points
4. Communicate your message: newsletters, social media, emailing, press releases, presentations
5. Who is going to deliver the message?
6. Build your network: Who are your key advocates to help you with your messaging?

Advocacy planning should be incorporated into the library's overall planning, and remember that a plan should always be fluid; it should be examined regularly and updated as circumstances change or as you evaluate the impact of specific activities.

Your Personal Advocacy Plan

Within the broader context of your library plan, each of us should think about our personal advocacy goals. No matter what role we play in the library, advocacy is a great opportunity to display our leadership skills while advancing the goals of the library and community. And for the many libraries that are one-person operations, your library plan is your personal advocacy plan.

Is my goal to learn how to share the library message, or to find those library stories that demonstrate the library's impact on people's lives? Is my goal to help build better relationships with community groups I am part of? Is my goal to learn more about how I can be part of the advocacy team?

How do you see yourself as a more effective advocate?





Putting Your Advocacy Plan into Action!

Illinois librarians, staff, trustees, friends, and community members are the heart of library advocacy. Successful advocacy grows from building relationships, strong messaging, solid action plans, and community support. Library advocacy should be a part of all libraries. Below are five key steps that all types of libraries can do with great success.

Advocacy Action Tips for Public, Academic, Special, and School Librarians

1. Promote Your Library

- Promote the programs, services, messages, and tools of your library throughout your community, campus, company, and school.
- Create a newsletter, e-blast, and other tools that will reach all of your library users. If you are in a school or academic library, make sure parents and faculty are on your mail and e-mail lists and social media.
- Break the stereotype of the quiet library and unfriendly librarian; be fun, energetic, and open to new ideas.
- Tell your library story, share your library data, be transparent with everything you do, and be transparent with the difference your library is making

2. Network

- Get to know the administration staff and department chairs, company department heads, and community leaders. Make sure your library message is reaching them.
- Get to know the support staff for the administration and department chairs to make sure your library message is reaching them as well.

3. Be Social

- Don't be a stranger. Attend your community, campus, company, and school functions. Be prepared to talk about your library.

4. Make the Library a Destination

- Make your library an attractive, powerful, and fun place to visit, not only in its physical space, but virtual space as well.

5. Professional Involvement

- Know what is happening in the library profession. Join ALA and ILA and subscribe to your library system's e-news.
- Know what is happening on a local, state, and national level with advocacy and how you can get involved.
- If for some reason you cannot advocate for your institution, make sure you reach out to ILA or your library system and talk to someone in order for your voice to be heard. ILA has an advocacy committee that you can work with.



Building Your Advocacy Network

Staff and Volunteers

Whether directors, managers, frontline, back-room, full-time, part-time, or volunteers, the people who work in libraries can be your most effective advocates. Effective staff and volunteer advocates:

- Understand their library and their community
- Know the mission of the library and its goals
- Know what services the library is offering
- Know what is happening in the library and in other departments
- Get engaged when they are offered advocacy training opportunities
- Understand and can communicate the library's issues and message
- Understand the difference between advocacy and lobbying

Frontline Workers Are Key Advocates!

Frontline workers are those who directly interact with customers. In libraries, frontline workers include the circulation desk attendants, greeters, reference librarians, children's and teen librarians, program planners, outreach staff, and more. While the library director and department heads play critical roles in library advocacy, it is the frontline workers who see library users every day and interact with them on a much more personal level.

Frontline employees also tend to live in the community where they work. They use the local grocery stores, attend the local churches, their children are in the local schools, and they interact with their neighbors, who are more than likely to be local library card holders. They are often lifelong residents and know their community from the ground up.

If you are a frontline staff member, you have an important role to play in advocating for your library. You should not only be aware of what is happening in your library, you should be talking about why your library is so important in your community!

How do you become a more effective frontline advocate?

- Understand your library, know the mission of the library, know what the services are, and what is happening at all times.
- Familiarize yourself with what is happening in the other departments of your library. Maybe attend some of the library programs. Ask if you can assist with programs or outreach programs.
- Make sure you read the library's e-news, website, and internal messages, and stay engaged.
- Ask how you can be a voice for your library. See if you can take some training to help you learn how to be a library advocate.
- Let your supervisor know you want to help promote what is happening in the library and that you want to be an advocate for the library.





Building Your Advocacy Network

Library Friends

Every library of every type should think about forming a Library Friends group. Learn more about Friends groups at United for Libraries, a division of ALA, at www.ala.org/united/friends/factsheets. This includes not only public libraries; school, academic, and special libraries can all have effective Friends groups. It is always heartening to discover how many people really love the library, and are ready to help you spread the message. An active Friends group is a huge advocacy asset.

Community Groups and Community Members

No matter what type of library you're involved with, you operate within a "community," whether it's a geographic area such as a municipality, a school district and its students, a college or university community, or a parent institution. Within these communities, population segments can easily be identified.

Sharing your library's message with community members can involve in-person conversations, mailings and newsletters, local media, and social media. The goal is to use multiple channels and to match your delivery mechanism with your audience. You should also be engaging your community through open forums, programs, and social events that provide an opportunity to talk about the library and its message.

And remember...You are not alone! Here are some of the groups that can be part of your support/advocacy network:

- Teachers
- Faculty
- Parent groups
- Students
- Service organizations
- Community leaders
- Chamber of Commerce members
- Who else??





The Public Library Trustee as an Advocate

The following was taken from Urban Libraries Council; Leadership Brief, Leadership Roles for Library Trustees.

The trustee's advocacy role is broad and overarching. It includes raising the library's profile among decision makers and community stakeholders, showing how the library supports community priorities, supporting specific library and program needs and keeping the library and its work visible in the community. Successful advocacy grows out of broad knowledge about the library mission, goals and programs combined with a deep passion for the library as an essential anchor institution and a champion of equity, inclusion and democracy.

Examples of ways trustees carry out their advocacy role include:

1. Communicating with confidence and passion about the important role the library plays in the community in diverse settings rather than only in library-specific meetings
2. Becoming familiar with the range of library programs and services to be able to answer questions and speak with authority
3. Interpreting the library for local leaders to demonstrate how libraries support leadership and community priorities
4. Interacting with local leadership individually and as a group to strengthen connections and address specific issues
5. Wearing a library hat at all times to become known as someone who is connected to, knowledgeable about, and committed to supporting the library
6. Building public awareness of the library particularly among audiences who tend to fall out of the library's natural reach
7. Participating in meetings where library programs and priorities are being discussed and bringing the library into key conversations
8. Writing letters and communicating with decision makers in support of specific library priorities and needs in partnership with the library CEO to ensure consistent messages
9. Embracing advocacy for the library as an ongoing, front-line trustee responsibility





Developing a Relationship with Local Officials

While your federal and state legislators are very important people in the legislative process it is your local officials who 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:

- Make sure the mayor and all elected officials of your community are on your mailing and email lists.
- Keep them informed by sending them your periodic library newsletter and other communication pieces.
- If they are on social media, make sure you are following them.
- Invite your elected officials to the library for a tour. Take their picture. Post it in your library newsletter (print and online) and on library social media and website and email a copy to your official.
- When forming focus groups or writing your library's strategic plan, make sure you include your local elected and appointed officials.
- Check to see if your elected officials have a library card. If they do not, contact them and invite them to your library to get one and make a press event out of it.
- Select a program that your official could be involved in, such as a poetry reading, handing out awards to summer reading participants, or the like. Take their picture. Invite the press to cover the event. If the press cannot make it, send them a picture.
- If you have anyone on staff that is good with Photoshop and the ALA READ poster software, consider making READ posters with your elected officials and their favorite books. Hang them in the library, post online, and make sure your elected official gets 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 officials know you appreciate their support.
- If possible, attend fundraisers for your elected officials. Your officials will appreciate you being there. Again, take a moment to thank them for their support of library issues.
- 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 such as the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, and the like.
- 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.



Developing a Relationship with State and Federal Legislators

Never forget that your legislators are impactful people. Every day they make decisions that impact everyone in Illinois, and across the country. 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 make sure you send a letter of congratulations and invite them to your library for a tour. Make sure all of your legislators are on your mail and email lists. If your legislators are on Facebook, you need to friend them. If they are on Twitter, you need to follow them.

How do I connect with them?

- Make an appointment to meet with them either in your office or their office.
- If you cannot get an appointment directly 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. Legislators generally rely heavily on their staff when they are making legislative 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, who are also their constituents.
- Bring your business cards. You will give one to the administrative assistant or other staff person and one to the legislator.
- Bring things to the meeting that will showcase your library, such as:
 - Statistics about usage of your library.
 - 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," which presents ILA's state and federal legislative agenda on one piece of paper (available at www.ila.org/advocacy)
 - An item with your library logo is always appreciated, such as a mug, pencil, or tote bag.

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 or scheduler for any help they gave you in setting up the appointment.
- Send a thank you letter and enclose any answers to any unanswered questions you might have had during your meeting.



Developing a Relationship with State and Federal Legislators

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 them. The official will appreciate your support.
- Check to see if your elected officials have a library card. If they do not, contact them and invite them to your library to get one and make a press event out of it.
- Invite your elected officials to come for a tour of your library. Take their picture. Post it in your library newsletter (print and online) and on library social media and website and email a copy to your official.
- Select a program that the official could be involved in such as a poetry reading, handing out awards to summer reading participant, and the like. Take their picture. Invite the press to cover the event. If the press cannot make it, send them a picture.
- If you have anyone on staff that is good with Photoshop and the ALA READ poster software, consider making READ posters with your elected officials and their favorite books. Hang them in the library, post online, and make sure your elected official gets 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 their support.
- If possible, attend fundraisers for your elected officials. 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.



Communicating Your Legislative Message

Communicating your legislative message can take many different forms. The best way to communicate is to do so in person. The Illinois Library Association (ILA) hosts annual Library Legislative Meet-ups throughout the state at the beginning of each legislative calendar year, usually in the months of February and March. You should be aware of the Meet-ups and make sure you not only attend, but know if your state or federal representatives are attending. If you or your representative can not attend, make sure you follow up with them afterwards so you can make sure they have the important library advocacy messages they need to move any library votes forward with success.

Remember, advocacy does not stop with one event or one meet-up. It continues all year long. Both the American Library Association (ALA) and ILA will reach out to you with high alert advocacy messages throughout the year and ask you to reach out to your representative to let them know how their vote will affect the library. You can communicate with your representative with a letter, phone call, or email. Below are some tips on how to do that with success.

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. Remember; with the new security measures, your letter may take up to two to three weeks to get delivered. As a result, for urgent matters it is okay to email your letters. Visit www.ila.org/advocacy to look up your state and federal officials.

- Individually written letters, rather than mass form letters, make a greater impression on a legislator.
- Make sure you use proper salutations for each representative.
- 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, be sure to identify its full name and number, e.g. House Bill: HB_____, Senate Bill: SB_____ . Try to 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 their 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 them know that. Similarly, if you disagree with the 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 legislators' address by checking their websites.
- Check the Illinois General Assembly website at 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 legislator's district office.



Communicating Your Legislative Message

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.

- Begin your call by 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 decided 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.

Email

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

- 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 they find it necessary.
- Illinois legislators have a drop-down box for email on their legislator websites and you can use this when you want to email a legislator.



Online Advocacy Resources

There are many excellent tools online for the library community to use to get ready to advocate their message. 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.

The Illinois General Assembly provides links to the following information at www.ilga.gov:

- **Legislation and Laws:** All proposed Illinois bills and resolutions are listed here, along with the Illinois Compiled Statutes and 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, their party affiliation, and committee roles. A full list of Senate committees, with transcripts and FOIA information, is also available.
- **House:** Here is a full list of the representatives with short biographies, the bills they sponsor, their district, their party affiliation, and committee roles. A full list of House committees, with transcripts and FOIA information, is also available.

ALA provides the following advocacy topic links at www.ala.org/advocacy:

- Advocacy & Public Policy
- Banned & Challenged Books
- Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
- Intellectual Freedom
- Literacy
- Public Awareness

ILA provides the following advocacy topic links at www.ila.org:

- Look Up Your State and Federal Elected Officials
- 2020–2022 Illinois Library Days and Dates to Remember
- Bigger Than a Building
- Advocacy Toolkit
- ILA Public Policy Principles
- Making Your Case
- Top Ten Advocacy Tips
- Policies and Procedures
- Creating or Changing Illinois State Law
- Legislative Issues
- Intro to Property Taxes for IL Libraries
- Illinois Minimum Wage Resources
- Census 2020 Resources
- TIFs and Public Library Districts in IL





Online Advocacy Resources

Illinois Resources

- Illinois Library Association, www.ila.org/advocacy
- Reaching Across Illinois Library System, www.railslibraries.info
- Illinois Heartland Library System, www.illinoishartland.org
- Illinois State Library, www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/
- Illinois Association of School Library Educators (AISLE), www.aisled.org
- Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), www.carli.illinois.edu

Additional Resources

- American Library Association, www.ala.org/advocacy
- <http://www.ala.org/united/>
United for Libraries: A division of the American Library Association is geared to Friends of Libraries, Library Trustees and Library Foundations.
- <https://www.facebook.com/geekthelibrary/>
Geek the Library is a community awareness campaign designed to highlight the vital role of public libraries and raise awareness about critical funding issues.
- <http://www.ala.org/acrl/>
Association of College & Research Libraries is home to all academic library information, resources, reports, events, and more.
- <http://www.ala.org/aasl/>
American Association of School Librarians is home to all school library resources, tools, forums, events, and more.
- <https://www.ala.org/pla/>
Public Library Association is home to all public library resources, tools, forums, events, and more.
- <https://www.sla.org/>
Special Libraries Association has comprehensive tools for all special librarians.