

Become a Better Advocate: Essential Tips for Success & Checklist for Getting Started

Essential Tips for Success

Each of us has countless opportunities to spread the word, whether it's in the grocery store line, across the circulation desk or backyard fence. A letter or phone call to the right person can be the deciding factor. Remember, you can make a difference.

- Look for opportunities to voice your support. Write a letter to the editor. Call into a radio talk show.
- Attend hearings on library-related matters. Ask questions and voice your opinions.
- Write or call legislators and decision-makers to let them know you want them to support libraries. Send a letter.
- Participate in state and national Library Legislative Days.
- Recruit your family, friends, coworkers and neighbors to show their support.
- Support candidates who support the library. Give money. Vote for them.
- Don't give up. Advocacy is about persistence.

Checklist for Getting Started

Following are ways you can support your library. As a member of the library staff, as a Friend, as a library trustee, faculty or administrator, every day is an opportunity to confirm and communicate how important your library is to the entire community, school, or campus.

- **Talk, talk, talk!** Look around you. There are people everywhere who could use their library, and who don't know about the valuable resources just waiting for them. At the grocery store, student union, the bank, PTA or staff meetings, the post office, in dorms, while on a walk with your dog, talk to people and tell them why you love and value the library. Help them see what they could learn there, and how they can help bolster support for this cornerstone of their community, campus or school. It doesn't take much more than a friendly conversation for you to be a hero for your library!
- **Keep informed.** Stay up to date on state and national activity. Contact the ALA Office for Library Advocacy and visit the Advocacy & Legislation section of the ALA website to view the latest resources, publications and information on library advocacy, as well as sign up for advocacy discussion lists. Contact your state association for information on important issues affecting your state.
- **Get to know your representatives (and their staff members).** You've elected them; but how can you get them to help your cause? Get to know them—and their staff—first. Visit your representatives' websites to learn their issues and priorities. Invite them to your libraries and let them see firsthand how valuable your library is to the community and to academic excellence. Let them know you want them to support all types of libraries, and library-friendly policies, and give them specific ways they can get involved. You can schedule an appointment by calling your legislator's office, or even better, invite your representatives to visit the library for a special event you've planned. Let them see how their constituents are using the valuable services provided by the library, and you'll gain an important ally.

- **Work on your library's print or online newsletter.** Many libraries now have a regular newsletter for patrons, students and faculty. Volunteer to write an advocacy column for the newsletter, highlighting ways that users and advocates can help the library: participating in a letter-writing campaign, volunteering at events, calling their legislators, or other means. Collecting all the valuable information in one place helps interested parties pick and choose among the many ways to help.
- **Make—and distribute—handouts.** Important information about the library, its services, and its needs can be distributed in writing for people to read later or pass on to others. If you have desktop publishing skills, or know someone who does, work to build written materials that can be passed along to others. These can include the library's hours and services, a wish list of things the library needs, information about upcoming events, or any other pertinent library information. These ideas should be posted on your library's bulletin board for all to see. ALA provides a wealth of materials to help you get started through [@ your library,](#) [the Campaign for America's Libraries.](#)
- **Plan a library event.** Any event during the year is an opportunity to showcase your library. Create an event or promotion that will get your Friends, trustees or other volunteers involved. You can host the event at the library or a local mall, county fair, park, or any campus venue and invite the media to attend. Visit <http://www.ala.org/conferencesevents/celebrationweeks> for information on initiatives celebrated nationwide, including Banned Books Weeks, Library Card Sign-up Month, Teen Read Week and National Library Week. Always invite elected officials to your events!
- **You have your own built-in army of advocates.** Use it! Many people who work in libraries forget that they have a built-in army: the library staff. From library director to custodian, no one knows—and appreciates—the inner workings of your library like they do. Teach them the basics on library advocacy—share the resources ALA has to offer and keep them abreast of current events.
- **Lobby.** Attend state library legislative days— and the ALA National Library Legislative Day, if possible. Bring Friends, trustees and other supporters.
- **Offer Internet tours.** For those without a computer at home, the library is the number one point of Internet access. Your library can be the window to the Internet for many people in your community. Offer to show patrons how to use it, and walk them through your library's Internet policies. You can even invite local politicians and community leaders to a community-wide Internet orientation event, and show them how the library offers everyone equal access to technology.
- **Get press.** Speak publicly about the specific value in your library. Are you good at public speaking? Call your local or campus radio talk show or TV news show. Like to write? Write a letter to the editor or an op-ed piece for your local paper, or ask students and faculty to write editorials for the campus paper. However you get in touch with the local or campus press, make sure you've developed your key messages and anticipated tough questions ahead of time; be ready with statistics and information you can rattle off on the spot.
- **Be your library's ambassador to the public or academic community.** Go out into your community and do public appearances to advocate for your library. Visit your local Lions, Elks, or Rotary Club, student and faculty meetings, parent meetings at neighborhood schools, union meetings, and neighborhood watch groups—wherever people gather. Offer to speak about the things your library offers, and how many people are served there. Paint a picture of your school and community without this wonderful resource—and then enlist the help of these powerful groups in supporting the people and buildings behind it!
- **Build your network.** You are a powerful agent for change on your own, but involving more people makes your message even stronger. Developing a network of library advocates in your community or on campus is a great way to add voices to the chorus of support. When you find people who are willing and able to help, keep track of their contact information and availability. Start a phone tree or an email list to keep in touch with everyone so that when an issue arises, you'll know just who to contact to get the word out.
- **Add your idea here.** They say that necessity is the mother of invention. As you move forward in your advocacy endeavors, please let ALA know about your successes and new ideas. Send an

email to advocacy@ala.org to share your experiences or tips. Your input—fresh ideas and energy—will keep library advocacy moving forward!