

# Getting Started as a Library Advocate

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## Why Should You Advocate for Libraries?

**Because you care about free access to information:** No one should be denied information because he or she cannot afford the cost of a book, a periodical, a Web site or access to information in any of its various formats. You care about libraries because they are great democratic institutions that serve people of every age, income level, location, ethnicity, or physical ability, and provide the full range of information resources needed to live, learn, govern, and work. Because libraries bring free access to all, they also bring opportunity to all.

**Because you care about intellectual freedom:** A democracy presupposes an informed citizenry. The First Amendment mandates the right of all persons to free expression, and the corollary right to receive the constitutionally protected expression of others. The publicly supported library provides free and equal access to information for all people of the community it serves. We enjoy this basic right in our democratic society. It is a core value of the library profession. Advocates actively defend the right of library users to read, seek information, and speak freely as guaranteed by the First Amendment.

**Because you believe in literacy:** Libraries help children and adults develop the skills they need—the ability to read and use computers—understanding that the ability to seek and effectively utilize information resources is essential in a global information society.

**Because you know that libraries are a legacy:** Libraries offer each generation the heritage of the past and the promise of the future. To ensure that libraries flourish and have the freedom to promote and protect the public good in the 21st century, they must be preserved and protected.

**Because libraries need you:** Libraries are America's great information equalizers—the only place where people of all ages and backgrounds can find and freely use a diversity and balance of resources, along with the expert guidance of librarians. When the hours are shortened or programs and services are reduced, you know that it hurts everyone, but most of all it hurts those who have the least access to such resources outside the library. Libraries need informed members of their communities to make the case, loudly and clearly.

## Who can be a Library Advocate?

You can. No matter if you are a library professional in a public, school, academic setting; or if you are a library Friend, trustee, patron or even a citizen who rarely sets foot in your local library, the library has an impact on your life and you have a role in your library's future.

## You Can Make a Difference

Your voice is crucial in making the case for libraries. You – the library patron, the library Friend, the library lover – are the heart and soul of the library community, and you can capture the attention of decision-makers like no one else.

Your voice can be made stronger if many individuals such as you stand up and speak out in a unified manner. Critical to library advocacy is the idea that library staff, trustees and Friends must work together to make their voices heard. Once community leaders and citizens at large are convinced about the

importance and necessity of libraries, they can begin to speak out for libraries at the state and national levels.

We hear people say, “Everyone loves libraries.” This is a true statement, and yet there are threats to the very survival of libraries. They are taken for granted, expected to always be there; they are the targets of reduced funding when compared to other “more essential” services, and they are the brunt of questions about their basic values. Everyone loves libraries, but libraries can’t live on love alone. The library community needs to grow this grassroots effort to ensure that there is a future—a bright future—for libraries of all kinds.

### **What Is Library Advocacy?**

Advocacy has been defined as “the process of turning passive support into educated action by stakeholders.” On a basic level, advocacy is simply voicing your support for libraries and encouraging others to do the same. You might encourage them to use the library. Library use by itself can often turn other people into supporters. You might voice your support to a Mayor, or a School Principal, a State Representative, or a U.S. Senator. You might speak out as an individual or you might lend your voice to other voices in a more organized campaign for general support or for support of a more specific project.

You might advocate for more funding, a new or improved facility, adding information literacy to the curriculum, or a piece of legislation or policy that relates to libraries. The best way to influence those who control the policies and the purse strings is for those who use and value library services to speak out. The more people who speak out, the stronger the voice of libraries.

Grassroots advocacy is said to be the key to the success of our libraries. In an increasingly complex world, with fierce competition for funding, the library community must stand up and speak out for America’s libraries.

### **How Do I Begin?**

This Web site, as well as many other sources to which it will point, will familiarize you with great successes that advocates across the country have achieved, as well as provide you with tools to guide you through the steps of organizing your local group. It’s designed to give you assistance in becoming a successful advocate. You can learn what works, what doesn’t, what others have done, current issues and how to address them. Help can be found here, and it is ample. There are many willing contacts who will guide you on your way.