

Every Voice Makes A Difference!



“Frontline librarians and library staff should be engaged and empowered to articulate the value of their respective libraries and their value as library employees. By working with their library administrators and at their own comfort level, they can be their library’s connection to the people they know best—users, friends, relatives, and neighbors.”—Dr. Camila Alire, 2009-2010 President, American Library Association

Join the movement! Frontline Advocacy initiative provides online resources to fit the needs of every type of library—public, academic, school, and special. For more information, visit www.ala.org/frontlineadvocacy.

Most of us who work in libraries—public, school, academic or special—believe in what we do. Advocacy is simply a way to share that with others. And it’s not just about talking. It’s also about listening and building a sense of ownership. We encourage everyone who works with libraries to put these tips and examples to work. The more you practice, the easier and more natural it will become! Here are some basic tips to help you get started.

- Know your library’s message. It’s important that all library staff speak with one voice.

- Look for opportunities to deliver the message in and outside the library.
- Be prepared to respond to any negative comments with a positive, factual statement.
- Don’t wait until the crisis comes. Make speaking up for the library part of your life.
- Listen. Gather and report what you hear.
- Have your own message about your work—a message that’s comfortable for you to deliver and can be used to spark conversations outside the library.
- Collect testimonials. Ask people if you can quote them. Use these personal, positive

comments to tell the library’s story to policymakers and others. Some libraries have sheets ready for their users to fill out.

- Be spontaneous. Avoid the canned messages you hear at many checkout counters, e.g., “Did you find what you’re looking for today?” Make it personal and let your enthusiasm show!
- Keep it going. Ask others to tell their friends, neighbors, council representatives, legislators.
- Go for ownership. Your goal should be to not just to tell people about the library but to remind them that it is their library.

There are many situations in our daily lives that lend themselves to advocacy. Here are a few examples to help you anticipate and prepare your own responses.

Breaking the ice	Situation: Message:	You're introducing yourself at a meeting or party. Hi, I'm -- and I work for you. I work at the Public Library. Do you have a library card?
Delivering your key message	Situation: Message:	You're working in a public area when someone observes that it is getting way too crowded. Yes, business is booming these days. Our community deserves a bigger, better library. We have a renovation plan but we'll need a lot of support. Would you like to know how you can help the library?
Responding to a complaint	Situation: Message:	Someone complains about the library's hours—either a library user or a neighbor. We wish our hours could be longer too. The economy has hurt our budget and we've had to cut back. It's a shame because a lot of people out there are counting on us. Let me give you one of these brochures. It gives some ways that you might support the library.
Asking for the testimonial	Situation: Message:	A customer voices a compliment or appreciation. Thank you so much. Would you mind writing that down so we could quote you. It really helps to have good stories to share—especially at budget time.
Building a sense of ownership	Situation: Message:	You are making casual conversation with a library user. How's it going? Have you heard about our proposed budget cut? Let me give you one of these brochures. It tells how the cuts might affect you/your family and how you can support the library.