

Friends Make the Difference

A Practical Guide to Advocating for Your Library at Home

Your library needs your voice - not just during the legislative session, but all year long!

Friends of the Library are among the most valuable advocates a library can have. You are community members, voters, volunteers, donors, and library ambassadors. You understand what your library means to the people it serves, and you can share that story in ways that make a lasting impression.

You don't have to be a policy expert to advocate for your library. You simply need to care about your community and be willing to speak up.

Why the Friends' Voice Matters

When Friends speak up for libraries, they bring a powerful perspective. You aren't speaking as a library employee protecting a job. You're speaking as a citizen protecting a community resource.

Friends have credibility because they are part of the communities they serve. Your experiences, relationships, and personal stories help elected officials understand the real-world value of libraries.

The goal is to build relationships, share stories, and help elected officials see the library as an essential part of their community.

Make Your Library's Impact Visible

Don't assume elected officials know everything your library does. Help them see it!

When you host a legislative tour or meet with a decision-maker, highlight examples such as:

- Education: Early literacy, tutoring, homework help, and lifelong learning.
- Economic opportunity: Job-search assistance, workforce resources, technology access, and skill development.
- Community connection: Programs, meeting spaces, cultural events, and opportunities to connect with neighbors.

- Access for all: Books, digital resources, internet access, and services that help bridge gaps in opportunity.
- Community support: Partnerships, outreach, and connections to local services and resources.

Tip: Pair a statistic with a story. Numbers show the scale of your library's impact; stories show why that impact matters.

Your Story Is Your Strongest Advocacy Tool

People remember stories far more readily than statistics. Think about what your library means to you and your community.

Take a moment to finish these sentences:

I support my library because...

One way I've seen my library make a difference is...

I want our elected officials to understand that...

You don't have to be an expert. You don't have to know every bill or budget line. You simply have to share what you know and care about.

What Can You Say to a Legislator?

You don't need a speech. Start with a genuine conversation.

To invite a legislator:

"Have you had a chance to see everything our library offers? We'd love to invite you for a tour and introduce you to the people and programs making a difference in our community."

To explain why funding matters:

"Our library provides services that people in our community rely on every day. We want to make sure those services remain available and accessible for the people who need them."

To share your personal experience:

"I support our library because _____. I've seen firsthand how it makes a difference when _____."

To say thank you:

"Thank you for supporting libraries. Your support helps our community maintain access to learning, resources, and opportunities for people of all ages."

To build a relationship:

"We'd love to keep you informed about what's happening at our library. May we invite you to future events and share occasional updates about our community's successes?"

10 Practical Ways to Advocate for Your Library

1. Invite legislators into your library.

- Offer a personal tour of your library.
- Show them spaces where children learn, families connect, and community members gather.
- Highlight services they may not know exist.
- Make the invitation personal, welcoming, and nonpartisan.

2. Invite elected officials to library events.

- Invite them to summer reading celebrations, author visits, community programs, and special events.
- Introduce them to library users and volunteers.
- Give them opportunities to see the library in action.

3. Share your library's success stories.

- Tell stories about a child who discovered a love of reading, an adult who gained new skills, or a family who found support.
- Share library news and accomplishments with elected officials.
- Include positive stories in community newsletters, local newspapers, and social media.

4. Build relationships before legislative sessions begin.

- Get to know your local, state, and federal representatives throughout the year.
- Send a friendly introduction or thank-you note.
- Invite officials to coffee or a library tour.
- Keep communication going when you aren't asking for anything.

5. Attend library board meetings.

- Learn about your library's budget, goals, needs, and challenges.
- Show support for library leadership and staff.
- Speak during public comment when appropriate.
- Encourage other community members to participate.

6. Write letters and make calls.

- Thank legislators who support libraries.
- Share concerns about legislation that could affect library services or funding.

- Explain how decisions affect your community.
- Keep messages respectful, personal, brief, and specific.

7. Support library funding.

- Understand how your library is funded and what local and state funding makes possible.
- Help community members understand the value of investing in libraries.
- Share factual information about funding needs and community benefits.
- Encourage sustained support for library services and resources.

8. Participate in legislative advocacy days.

- Join your library, Friends group, or state library association at advocacy events.
- Meet with legislators and other decision-makers.
- Practice explaining why libraries matter to your community.
- Encourage first-time advocates to attend with you.

9. Speak positively about libraries.

- Share a favorite library memory or a recent experience.
- Correct misconceptions with facts and kindness.
- Celebrate library staff, volunteers, programs, and accomplishments.
- Make library support a regular part of everyday conversations.

10. Grow your Friends group and tell your story.

- Invite a friend, neighbor, or fellow library user to join.
- Explain what your Friends group accomplishes.
- Volunteer, donate, participate, and encourage others to do the same.
- Help new members find their own reasons to advocate.

Your Advocacy Action Plan

Choose one thing you can do in the next 30 days:

- ☐ Invite an elected official to visit the library.
- ☐ Attend a library board meeting.
- ☐ Write a thank-you note or letter to a legislator.
- ☐ Share a library success story on social media.
- ☐ Talk with a neighbor about the value of the library.
- ☐ Invite someone new to join the Friends group.
- ☐ Ask library leadership how the Friends group can support advocacy efforts.
- ☐ Volunteer at a library event.
- ☐ Learn more about library funding and legislative priorities.
- ☐ Share my own library story with someone who can help spread the word.

My next step: _____

Who can help me? _____

When will I do it? _____

Remember: Advocacy Is a Year-Round Effort

You don't have to wait for a legislative session, a funding crisis, or a request from your library director to make a difference.

Build relationships. Celebrate successes. Invite people in. Speak up. Bring others along.

Be visible. Be positive. Be persistent. Be a Friend.