



Advocating for Minnesota's Libraries

An Advocacy Toolkit

Introduction

The Minnesota Library Association (MLA) supports efforts of advocacy for the mission of ALL Minnesota's libraries. MLA advocates for critical funding, intellectual freedom, access to information, and for the placement of school media specialists in every school.

It is our job as library advocates to ensure that local officials at the city, county, state and national levels are aware of the value of libraries and the benefit to our communities.

We have created these guidelines to empower you to communicate with your local officials in person or via email, at the capitol or in your community. The following talking points and resources are for you to use and share with your friends, family, neighbors and colleagues. We know it can be difficult to jump into advocacy alone, so we hope this helps build solidarity around your advocacy efforts.

Personal Reflection

We encourage you to reflect on the following prompts and your "why" for engaging in library advocacy.

- Why do you care about fighting for funding, intellectual freedom, access to information, etc.?
- How does the current situation impact you and the people you care about?
- How would a change in the current situation impact your life and the lives of those in your community?

Steps You Can Take

- Become a member of the Minnesota Library Association
- Attend the summer/fall MLA Legislative Forum
- Form a relationship with your elected officials by writing emails, making calls, or speaking directly to your elected officials
- Attend public meetings and forums in your community
- Write an op-ed or letter to the editor in your local paper
- Learn more and become well versed about the issues
- Identify other people in your community who care about libraries and activate them to take action along with you
- Attend the monthly MLA Legislative Updates on the first Wednesday of the month via Zoom at 10:00 a.m. Register through the MLA events calendar.

Top Ten Quick Advocacy Tips

When library issues arise in public policy debates, library advocates should be ready to reach out to their public officials and persuade them to protect libraries and our rights!

1. Get to know your local elected officials. Do not wait until you need something to connect with them.
2. Do your homework. Visit the [MLA Advocacy/Legislative](#) page or contact the Legislative chairs for information on a specific issue.
3. Know your audience. Research the positions of elected officials in advance. Understand what they care about and consider how your request aligns with their priorities.
4. Contact elected officials personally. A meeting is better than a phone call, a phone call is better than an email, and an email is better than no contact at all.
5. Always start with a thank you. Find something the elected official has recently supported which has had a positive community impact.
6. Keep it brief! Most meetings with legislators last ten to fifteen minutes!
7. Make it personal. Explain how the issue impacts you and your community - and their constituents.
8. Make a clear request. Ask them specifically to support or oppose legislation, or help to change legislation.
9. Be polite, but direct and try to get them to commit to support the library position.
10. Follow up. Once the issue is resolved, make sure to thank those who support the library, and know that more work needs to be done with those who did not.

How to Talk to People Who Disagree with You

It can be a challenge to talk to people who disagree with you. Here are five approaches to discussing political differences:

Focus on the people, not the politics

- Build a relationship before talking politics
- Don't take comments personally
- Share your own relevant experiences
- Give a relatable hypothetical situation

Find common ground

- Bond over less polarized issues
- Be open to listening and understanding
- Ask questions to understand a different viewpoint
- Focus on shared beliefs

Stick to the facts and avoid confrontation

- Stick to information that can be verified
- Back up your opinions with evidence
- Limit emotion in discussion
- Avoid confrontational language

Be an advocate, rather than an opponent

- Adapt conversational style to audience
- Avoid words that might upset people

Pick your battles

- Talk about local politics instead of national politics
- Focus on policy instead of party
- Avoid hot-button issues

Source: Duchovnay, Marley, Moore, Casey, and Masullo, Gina M. (202, July). How to Talk to People Who Disagree with You Politically. Center for Media Engagement. <https://mediaengagement.org/research/divided-communities>

Tips for Contacting Your Local Officials

- Keep your message brief
- Be clear and concise when conveying your message.
- Share a personal story and about how legislation will impact you, your family, or your community
- Use data or talking points to make your opinion stronger
- Thank them for their service

Call Script:

Be prepared to reference the bill # (SF# or HF#).

Hello, my name is ____, I live in ____.

I'm reaching out to speak to you about _____ issue (provide some context).

I'm asking you to support (or oppose) bill _____ because...

If you have any questions about this bill during the session, I would be happy to discuss this issue further. Feel free to contact me by ____.

Thank you for your time.

Sample Email or Letter Script:

Subject Line: (include the bill number and topic)

Dear Senator ____ (or Representative ____),
My name is ____, I live in ____.

I'm reaching out to speak to you about _____ issue (provide some context).

I'm asking you to support (or oppose) bill _____ because...(provide one or two sentences).

If you have any questions about this bill during the session, I would be happy to discuss this issue further. Feel free to contact me by ____.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Name
Address
Email or Phone

Content of this toolkit has been adapted from a number of resources, including the American Library Association Frontline Advocacy Toolkit, Taking Action in Your Community (ACLU of ND), Cedar Rapids Public Library Advocacy Toolkit and Center for Media Engagement, How to Talk to People who Disagree With You Politically