Speaking out

For any advocacy campaign to work, there must be spokespersons who are knowledgeable and skilled in delivering the library message. That spokesperson may vary with the audience and medium. Every library should have a policy that defines who speaks for the library and when.

- The library’s chief spokesperson on policy matters is generally the library director or board president.

- Heads of departments, such as youth services or reference, may be designated spokespersons in their areas of expertise.

- Librarians and other staff are generally most effective when speaking as authorities on library and information services and as “expert witnesses” who know and understand the needs of library users.

- Trustees, Friends and library users can be especially useful when giving testimony before public officials.

- The president of the Friends or library advocates’ network may be asked to address specific issues.

In the broadest sense, all library advocates are spokespersons, whether they are speaking to their neighbors, fellow students or faculty or religious groups. Many people are naturally gifted at speaking with the media or to groups. Not everyone is good at both. Try to use your spokespersons where they feel most comfortable and can be most effective. Media and spokesperson training can help build their confidence and polish presentation skills. Whoever speaks for the library should feel prepared and enthusiastic about doing so!
SPEAKING SUCCESSFULLY

Speaking to groups is one of the most effective ways of reaching out to others to share your concerns and request their support. The best speakers know the library message and can deliver it in a way that addresses the needs and interests of various audiences and media.

- **Personalize your remarks.** Find out about your audience: who will be there, how many and how old they are, as well as their education, income and any special interests or concerns they may have about the library.

- **Be prepared** to answer possible questions, especially the ones you’d rather not answer.

- **Speak in terms of benefits** to your audience—why should they care if their library’s budget is cut?

- **Follow the “golden rule”** of public speaking: Tell your audience what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and then, in your conclusion, tell them what you told them.

- **Practice** a conversational style of delivery that will allow you to look at the audience most of the time. It’s a good idea to have a script (in large print) or notes. It’s not a good idea to read your remarks. Cut out the jargon—your average library user has no idea what millage is!

- **Have a clear message** and call to action. Stick to three main points. Tell the audience why your message is important to them and what it is exactly that you want them to do.

- **Tell stories, your own and others.** Read a touching thank you letter to the library or share your story about how the library deeply affected your own life, explaining how you became a library advocate.

- **Use visual aids** when appropriate. Cartoons, newspaper clippings and charts can help tell the story—but don’t overdo the visuals. Practice using video, overhead transparencies or PowerPoint presentations beforehand. Arrive early to check equipment.

- **Show your enthusiasm.** That is what “sells” the message.

- **Keep your remarks brief,** about 20 minutes plus questions.

- **Thank the audience** members for the opportunity to speak, for being good listeners, and for their support.

DESIGNATE SPOKESPEOPLE

There should be a clear understanding of who speaks for the library and when.

The most effective spokespeople are dynamic and confident whether dealing with the media or speaking to the public. They know the message and are skilled at delivering it. They are able to answer the hard questions and give the quotable quotes or “sound bites,” that reporters need for their stories, both in print and on the air.

While the library’s chief spokesperson on policy matters is generally the library director or board president, other spokespeople may be identified for a particular issue or campaign.

In general, librarians and other library staff are most effective when speaking as “expert witnesses” who know and understand the needs of library users.

Trustees, Friends and library users are especially effective when giving testimony before public officials or other groups.
Try to use your spokespeople where they feel most comfortable and can be most effective. Media/spokesperson training can help build their confidence and polish presentation skills. Whoever speaks for the library should feel prepared and enthusiastic about doing so.

**SPEAKER’S CHECKLIST**

**Preparing the Presentation**

I will:
- Analyze my audience and prepare my key messages.
- Plan my introduction and conclusion.
- Prepare an outline with supporting points and benefits, stories and examples.
- Plan handouts and visual aids.

**Dealing with Anxiety**

I will:
- Write out my speech.
- Make notes in margins.
- Rehearse the speech.
- Visualize myself giving a successful presentation.
- Arrive early, check out the room and test equipment.
- Breathe deeply just before speaking.
- Anticipate questions and prepare answers.

**Delivering the Presentation**

I will:
- Be aware of what I’m saying and how it sounds.
- Be enthusiastic, animated and conversational.
- Use a clear, strong voice.
- Pace my presentation.
- Talk—not read.
- Repeat questions to clarify and answer to the whole group.

**Remember to:**
- Stand up straight.
- Look people in the eye.
- Use — but don’t overuse — hand gestures.
- Keep hands at your sides when not using them.
- Smile.

**Know When to Quit:**
- Time your speech when you rehearse it.
- Don’t go over your allotted time.
- Your goal is to have the audience want to hear more, not less.

**Television Dos & Don’ts**

**Dos**
- Dress in a businesslike way that will make a favorable impression.
- Jacket and tie for men
- Suit with open-collar blouse for women
- Vibrant colors such as blue, teal, rose, red and burgundy
- Extra heavy makeup in your normal shades

**Don’ts**
- Bold plaids, large or busy prints
- Anything too trendy
- Colors that are very dark or very light
- Noisy or dangling jewelry
- A hairstyle that needs to be swept back