



# Library Advocacy Do's and Don'ts For Trustees, Friends, Foundations, Staff and Libraries!

## Basic Rules:

- No taxpayer funds can be used on advocacy or vote yes activities. This includes the time of staff as well as the library director. The library's website can be used to educate but not advocate for people to vote yes.
- Advocacy during voter initiatives is different than every day library advocacy of speaking out on behalf of the library, talking about what the library does, etc.

## Trustees:

- As a library trustee, you can educate.
  - Talk about voter initiatives with facts and numbers and some passion but you cannot say "Vote Yes"
  - Advocate for your library talking about funding needs and what the library does to local elected officials who provide your funding
  - Let the public, the community and elected officials know what the library does for the community
    - Statistics from your library's annual report
    - Public service return on investment
- You don't give up your first amendment rights when you become a library trustee
  - If you ask voters to vote yes, you **MUST** be clear that you are speaking as a private citizen and a taxpayer and **NOT** as a library trustee
  - Use the same facts and numbers, express your passion
  - If you write a letter to the editor and ask people to vote yes, do not identify yourself as a library trustee
- Trustees can approve the preparation and dissemination of materials, websites, social media, etc. that educate the public.
  - No taxpayers funds can be used on advocacy materials.

## **Friends:**

- Friends groups must be advocates for their libraries. It's not just about book sales anymore.
- Tax status
  - If your Friends group is a separate 501C3, you can use as much of your budget as you'd like for public education. However, you can only use up to 20% of your annual budget on advocacy.
  - If your Friends group uses the library's tax ID number (essentially acting as a program of the library), the Friends group cannot advocate. It can only educate.
  - If your Friends group has its own tax ID number but is not a 501C3, you can use as much of your budget as you want on advocacy activities
- Friends groups can produce materials, social media, websites, etc. as long as they're working within the limitations of their tax status.
  - Advocating for the library on Facebook, Twitter or other social media channels is free. It has no budget impact unless a post is boosted.
  - Websites can be easily developed with information and the ability to people to show their support.
  - Direct mail and other printed materials may well be the most expensive part of an advocacy program.

## **Staff:**

- The library director should never be put in a situation of saying Vote Yes. S/he is taxpayer funded 24/7, 365 days a year. Anti-tax folks wait for directors to slip up.
- Library staff, when they are at the library, cannot advocate. They cannot ask patrons to vote yes. They can only educate.
  - The role of staff in advocacy activities when they are not on the clock is a personal decision that staff members can make. There can be no perceived or actual coercion for getting staff involved.
- Library staff and the director can be involved in the preparing of public information materials.