

# Cultivating Your Local Notables

## What's in a Face? A Toolkit for Cultivating Your Local Notables for Library Advocacy

### Why enlist the help of a well-known person?

About 130 years ago, a smart London advertiser had an innovative idea: Attach a famous face to your product and increase sales. He approached Lillie Langtry, the legendarily beautiful British actress who was also the reputed paramour of royalty. With a little coaxing - and a healthy payment - Miss Langtry agreed that her likeness could appear in advertisements for Pears Soap. History remembers this event as the first time a celebrity was paid to endorse a product, and it ushered in a new age of promotion.

In 1980, ALA began its highly successful Celebrity READ poster series, showcasing some of the most recognizable faces in the nation. Those READ posters still continue today, featuring familiar people from literature, music, television, music, sports and politics, each holding a book they love. The popularity of those posters has grown over the years, providing libraries of all sizes with the distinction of being associated with someone whose image lends a special status to the library that nothing else quite equals.

Today, libraries of all kinds are more focused on advocacy than ever before, so ALA developed an initiative in 2010 called *Our Authors, Our Advocates*. This initiative takes the concept of notable people endorsing libraries in a new direction, emphasizing that authors, in particular, are the natural allies of libraries in challenging times. For this initiative, ALA has enlisted passionate, enthusiastic and notable authors to speak out on the importance of not only sustaining but also increasing support for libraries. For more information about *Our Authors, Our Advocates*, visit

<http://www.ala.org/ala/newspresscenter/mediapresscenter/presskits/oaoa2010/index.cfm>

But the idea doesn't stop there. ALA has also developed this *What's in a Face? Cultivating Your Local Notables* toolkit for libraries of all sizes and types to develop complementary initiatives in communities all over the nation.

### Does your community have local notables?

Certainly! Every community, whether it's a town, an organization, or an educational institution, has local notables (and maybe some genuine celebrities) who can step forward and speak out personally and passionately in support of the library. They may be authors, or they may be notable for other reasons. They may live in your community now, or they may have grown up there and now live elsewhere. There is hardly a community without individuals who are well-known and influential.

How can you interest your local notables in advocating for your library? What can you expect from them, and what should they expect from you? How do you use their name, face and reputation most effectively? This toolkit will provide you with ten steps to help you.

## 1. Determine whether this kind of advocacy is right for your library

*Should you pursue a local notable or celebrity for library advocacy? Weigh the advantages and disadvantages.*

**Advantages:** These are probably obvious. When well-known people speak out in support of your library, they bring a distinction and prestige that feels very special. It tends to make people think, “Wow! If this person thinks our library is important and valuable, it must be!” When celebrities speak out or visit your library for any reason, it generates a lot of buzz. People want to see the celebrity for themselves, and the media want to be there for pictures and a story. Your library can get a lot of mileage out of that endorsement, both in print and electronic formats, and its resources, staff, and users get to glow in the spotlight.

Certain notables or celebrities appeal to certain audiences, so selecting advocates who can target your library’s message to a selected audience will be a great advocacy strategy. Such an endorsement may make individuals and organizations that never thought much about the library stand up and take notice. It could increase your door count, circulation, resource usage and program attendance. It could also make more people in your library’s community pay attention to the library and appreciate its value.

**Disadvantages:** It takes a lot of effort. Identifying, contacting and working with celebrities require a good deal of time, advance planning, attention to detail and follow-up, and all that work might result in disappointment. Celebrities can also be unreliable. They are notorious for last-minute schedule changes. They can be controversial, even polarizing.

Do celebrity endorsements make a difference? Absolutely! If they didn’t, advertisers would not pay huge sums to ensure that we see celebrities pitching every kind of product. However, there have also been instances in advertising when the celebrity was so important that he or she overshadowed the product and no sales gain was realized from the celebrity endorsement. Matching the right celebrity to your library will reduce the chance that these problems will happen to you and make it much more likely that this approach will give you a real advantage.

## 2. Create a working committee

*You’re going to go for it. Who should you ask to help you get started?*

Your chances of success will be greater if you work with the right people. Start by forming a small Local Notables Committee, and find people with the skills and connections you need. Recruit your committee members from the following groups:

1. **People who know people.** We’ve all encountered those amazing individuals who seem to know everyone. Their personal or professional networks read like a “Who’s Who” of your community’s leaders. Maybe they are your colleagues if you work in a school or academic library. Enlist their help! Get them on your committee. They can give you valuable insight into

who might be willing to serve as a passionate, vocal advocate for your library, plus their personal connections may be the best way to reach your local notables/celebrities.

2. **Media representatives.** Individuals who work in the media cross paths with many notable people, and they also tend to have wide personal and professional networks. In addition, media personnel can often help you with the production and placement of your notables' advocacy messages.
3. **Library Friends and Trustees.** Whatever your library, your Friends and trustees (or board members) have an interest in your library that goes far beyond even your most faithful library user. They also understand the current challenging funding environment that your library faces. Choose several of the most energetic members of your Friends and Trustees and put their passion to work on your committee.
4. **Library staff.** Select a few staff members who are well organized, enthusiastic and willing to make calls, write letters and take on a variety of tasks as you pursue and host your local notable/celebrity advocates. Involving your staff is important in sharing the ownership of this effort.
5. **Library volunteers and library lovers in your community.** These people already love your library and would probably be honored to help you find and persuade local notables and celebrities to share their appreciation for your library and its services.
6. **Representatives of unique communities within your community.** If your community is home to a corporation, institution of higher learning, or other prominent or unique organization, look for representation from there as well. For example, if a company is headquartered or extremely prominent in your community, ask for someone from that company to join your Local Notables Committee. This strategy can open doors both to people and to other resources you can use.

### 3. Identify your community's issues

*You have a committee. Now what?*

Call your Local Notables Committee together and work on the following topics:

1. **Define your library's community.** How large is it? What are its boundaries? Is it the neighborhood your library serves? Is it your entire town? Your township or county? Is your library part of an urban system or a consortium? Is it part of a school or other learning community? Defining your library's community will help you determine which people of influence are part of that community.
2. **What are the issues your community really cares about?** Is it employment and careers? Small business development? Higher graduation rates? Better preschool offerings? Crime prevention and safety? Activities that keep children and teens actively engaged? Resources for seniors? Services in multiple languages?
3. **What does your library offer to address these issues?** Your library has services and materials that address every one of these issues. Take time to articulate exactly how your library impacts the issues your community cares about most. Make a list of your library's impact on your

community: How many people come through your door each day? What percentage of your community has library cards? What do you offer people who need high tech services? How do you help individuals who need research assistance? You get the idea.

#### **4. Develop advocacy messages**

*What message or messages do you want your local notables to convey?*

This is critical. You can't say everything, so decide what messages are the most important to communicate. Develop crisp, clear, attention-getting advocacy messages that you can later match up with your local notables to ensure that the most important messages are being communicated by the most appropriate spokespeople.

Stay away from generic messages, such as "I love this library!" Rather, focus your messages. Tie the messages directly to the community issues you've identified. Use your advocacy messages to shine a light on specific library services and resources that address your community's issues. If appropriate for your community, consider translating your advocacy messages into non-English languages.

Some sample messages:

1. XYZ Library is a child's starting line for success. Support funding for libraries.
2. This is the place where AFTER SCHOOL is cool. Keep it open for our families.
3. Great grades start here! Don't lose library homework centers.
4. The Library is our study center. Study groups need late hours.
5. Come for the books, stay for the classes. This library is needed for lifelong learning.
6. This library is "Computer Central." Don't close access to computers for those who need them.
7. XYZ Library is a great gathering place. Protect evening hours.
8. Super jobs are found inside these doors. Libraries support our economy.
9. Small business + the library = Great for our community.
10. This library is for everyone. Protect multilingual library services.
11. Love the library's movies and music? Support a budget that keeps them.

How do you begin to develop your library's message? Easy! This toolkit can help you. For *Developing Your Message*, a tool to take you through the message-creation process, go to <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/developingyourmessage.cfm>.

#### **5. Identify and evaluate local notables**

*Who are your local notables, and who is a good match for your library?*

You've spent time looking at your community. You've identified issues that are important to its members. You've got a good understanding of all the ways your library addresses these issues, and you've developed some engaging and eye-catching messages. You've now reached the step where you

can think about which local notables or celebrities can most effectively deliver your messages. It's time to tie the message and the face together.

Pull your Local Notables Committee together and develop categories of local notables and celebrities. Maybe some of your best-known people have names and faces that grace book jackets or CD covers, movie posters or the media. Maybe they've always lived in your community; maybe they moved there in recent years; or maybe they grew up there (and presumably frequented the library) but now live elsewhere.

However, don't worry if you have no card-carrying celebrities in your community because you have other local notables who matter, as the categories you created illustrate. They are people from many walks of life who are front and center of the activities and values that define your community. They are your local movers and shakers. What they have in common is that they are all individuals who are known and respected, whose association with your library is desirable. Are they authors or illustrators? Journalists or media personalities? Sports stars? Musicians, artists or dancers? Actors or directors? Civic leaders? Beloved teachers or professors? Famous graduates? Your high school or college football team or cheerleaders? Everyone's favorite mail carrier? The owner of the local ice cream shop? Think creatively and have fun putting this list together!

It is not enough to identify individuals who will be recognizable and appropriate advocates for your library. They must be appropriate spokespeople for the advocacy messages you want delivered. There must also be compelling reasons why certain people are the best choices to step forward, lend their name and face, and speak out for your library's support.

Who are your most appealing choices? Who can you logically connect with your library and its resources and services? Develop an 'A List' and a 'B List' with first and second choices so you have a fallback plan if your first choices decline your invitation. This toolkit can help you develop the best list possible. Get started with the tool *Identifying Your Local Notables* (PDF):

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/Identifying%20Your%20Local%20Notables.pdf>/ *Identifying Your Local Notables* (Word doc):

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/Identifying%20Your%20Local%20Notables.doc>.

After you've completed that list, the next step will be to drill deeper and really evaluate everyone on it. Answer ten very important questions about each person to determine whether you have a list of winners, or whether anyone should be removed from your list. Ten *Make-or-Break Questions to Ask Yourself* (PDF):

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/Ten%20Make%20or%20Break%20Questions.pdf>/ *Ten Make-or-Break Questions to Ask Yourself* (Word doc):

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/Ten%20Make%20or%20Break%20Questions.doc>.

## 6. Develop clear activities and expectations

*What can you ask your local notable to actually do?*

Once you've identified your best local notables or celebrities, how you use them is up to you, but you must be able to describe exactly what you want each of them to do. This is "the ask." You should be prepared to explain:

- Why are you asking for their help?
- What you want your local notables to say about your library and its services?
- Are they willing to let you provide the message, or do they want to help you craft that?
- Are they willing to appear in photos with your advocacy message?
- Are they willing to visit your library?
- Are they willing to speak out on your web site?
- Will they appear in a YouTube video for your library?

You should be able to explain clearly how their participation in this advocacy initiative creates a WIN-WIN situation for the library AND for the influential person. Maybe your celebrity is a regular library user, or maybe he or she hasn't set foot in a library since high school. Whatever the case, it's your job to provide the person with information on your library, its issues and the message you wish to convey through him or her through some talking points. Do this by creating a brief fact sheet so the person is not in a position of improvising.

Your Local Notables Committee should spend time determining each local notable's most effective advocacy message and activities so you have a clear "ask" to communicate.

For example, you can ask your local notable to:

1. Brainstorm with your committee to develop an advocacy message that he or she feels comfortable with. His or her personality and unique style should be reflected so that the local notable feels he or she "owns" the message and is not just a mouthpiece for someone else's message.
2. Help you by leveraging connections to publishers, authors, or others who might be difficult for you to have access to on your own.
3. Give you a quote that you can use in promoting a specific library service throughout your community. You should suggest the content of quotes, but the quotes should be the notable's own words. The quote can appear on bookmarks, for example, and on your library's website. Download a photo from the celebrity's website to accompany the advocacy quote. For *Using Quotes* from local notables and celebrities, go to <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/usingquotes.cfm>.
4. Come to your library and let you take photos there, and allow you to use those with an important advocacy messages that he/she will be able to approve. The photos and messages could be made into posters, bookmarks, and appear on your library's website. For *Using Photos*

along with your advocacy message, go to

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/usingquotes.cfm>.

5. Visit your library to create an exciting community advocacy event. Photos from this visit should appear in your local paper as well as on your library's web site.
6. Let you film a short video clip of the local notable speaking your library's advocacy message or engaged in a short interview. This would be a great addition to your library's website. For Using Video Images, go to <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/usingvideo.cfm>.
7. Important: Work on developing a long-term relationship with the local notables you work with. Their ongoing interest and perhaps repeat presence will help you with your future advocacy work. Invite their ideas!

Will people do this for free? Yes! Your local celebrity should be willing to help your library without charging you. This is an opportunity for him or her to garner some positive publicity while helping your library promote its important message. Remember, this is a WIN-WIN situation for all.

The only exception to the "free" rule occurs if the person helping you must incur personal costs in carrying out his or her agreement to advocate for your library. These expenses may include food, travel and perhaps some production costs. Your library should find out in advance how much those costs will run and be prepared to pay them. One strategy for covering such expenses is to enlist the support of a business or community sponsor who will pay the costs in exchange for the inclusion of its name and/or logo with the celebrity's images in your campaign. Another WIN-WIN opportunity!

## **7. Frame your request as a win-win situation**

*What's the best way to ask someone to become your library's advocate?*

Everyone you ask will have his or her own reason for wanting to help support your library's advocacy efforts. Frame your case as a WIN-WIN situation for the library and for the local notable or celebrity. It's hard to refuse such an offer. The argument is a simple one, really. Tell him or her that:

- Both your library and the individual you are asking for help will gain positive public attention from such a partnership. You should talk about why people will care about the individual's advocacy message and how it will affirm not just the aspect of your library's services the message relates to, but it will also elevate the importance of your library in many people's minds.
- Your initiative is well organized and will require only a minimum amount of his or her time.
- That a small investment of his or her time will have a big impact on your library's overall plan for advocacy.

If you already have some well-known, recognizable people who have agreed to help you, share that information and let the individual whose help you are requesting know that he or she will be in illustrious company.

## **8. Contact local notables and celebrities**

*How do you make that important first contact?*

When you request assistance from an influential individual, the absolute best approach is personal contact. That is, have someone who actually knows the local notable or celebrity state your library's case and advocacy message and ask for their help as a visible library advocate. Ideally, the contact should come from someone on your Local Notables Committee if you have populated that committee with well-connected people. If no one knows the person first-hand, find someone who knows someone who does. Remember that networking always helps!

If you can't make a personal contact, you have to resort to other methods. Because you're an information professional, you know that there are many ways to locate contact information for well-known individuals. Your library may own the current edition of *The Celebrity Black Book* (Mega Niche Media, LLC). In the case of many celebrities, information is available on his or her official web page. It may also appear on the celebrity's Facebook page and perhaps on Twitter. For authors, contact the appropriate publicist or agent. In the case of a local television or radio personality, search the station's website for contact information. For sports personalities, go to team websites. For musicians, search for their booking agent.

Don't forget Speakers Bureaus. Some are commercial businesses that charge fees, but some are free. Check your local phone directory to see if any are listed. Go online and search for "speakers bureaus" and follow those keywords with a subject, for example "speakers bureaus authors" or "speakers bureaus athletes."

Follow the instructions for contacting the people you are trying to reach. Be persistent! Be prepared to make not just one contact, but follow-up ones as well.

*How far in advance should you make contact?* The longer the lead time you can give a local notable or celebrity, the better the chance that he or she will be able to work your library's advocacy initiative into an always-busy schedule. Remember that many well-known people are booked out a year or more in advance.

## **9. Obtain quotes, photos, video messages & develop letters of agreement, photo releases, public service announcements**

*What do you do when someone says "yes?"*

First of all, thank the person sincerely for his or her willingness to champion your library. Let your notables know that you value their generosity and their time. Celebrate! This is a great accomplishment for your Local Notables Committee and an exciting opportunity for your library. You are about to embark on a very special experience. Be very organized about the next phase of work because that will



determine how smoothly the experience flows and whether or not you want to do this again. Here is a checklist of tasks that should not be overlooked:

- Confirm the date/time/place and length of time the local notable or celebrity is giving you.
- Confirm exactly what you are asking the local notable to do (speak on behalf of your library, meet funding decision-makers, pose for photos or videos, greet the public, etc.), and what your library will provide (transportation, publicity, food, etc.).
- Spell these details out carefully in writing. You will probably not need a formal contract. Usually, a Letter of Agreement that outlines the points below will suffice:
  - Details of who, what, when and where
  - The amount of time you're requesting the local notable or celebrity to give you
  - The services you're requesting from that person
  - Details of what he or she can expect from your library and its staff
  - Use of the individual's name and image
  - Compensation for expenses incurred (if applicable)

Once you have drafted that letter, send the person who has agreed to lend his or her valuable time and influence two (2) copies and a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you are using the US mail. Instruct the individual to sign one copy and return it to you, and keep the other copy. For a sample *Letter of Agreement* (PDF), go to

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/Letter%20of%20agreement.pdf>.

If you are requesting permission to use photos or video images, you will need a Photo Release Form. This is a short, simple form that spells out how and where his or her photos and videos may be used. If possible, keep the form general to allow your library as many opportunities to use the images as possible. For a sample *Photo Release Form* (PDF), go to

<http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/Photo%20Release%20Form.pdf>.

- Develop a Press Release and Public Service Announcement (PSA). Send these to your local media outlets (newspaper, radio, TV) about three weeks in advance of an event. These give the media and the public advance information about your exciting partnership and announce your local notable or celebrity's advocacy event, if there will be one. For instructions and a template called a *Writing a Press Release* (PDF), go to <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/Writing%20a%20Press%20Release.pdf>. For *Writing a Public Service Announcement* (PDF), go to <http://www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/advocacy/advocacyuniversity/localnotables/Writing%20a%20PSA.pdf>.

A few tips for getting press attention:

- The old fashioned way (working the phones and developing relationships with reporters) works the best.
  - Frame your story with a news hook – a reason to cover it. Find a way to pull out something that is newsworthy and not just promotional in nature (relate it to a local “hot” issue or other story that got press).
  - Be sure your press release and PSA are letter-perfect (no errors).
  - Always include the local AP office in your distribution list.
  - If someone covers your event, take a minute to say thank you via phone, e-mail or note.
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- If a person of influence will visit your library as an advocate, and students or the public can come, make some flyers and bookmarks promoting the visit and don’t forget to promote it via social networking sites as well.
  - If a celebrity will visit your library as an advocate, be sure you have people on hand to greet him or her.
  - Have a clear schedule for the day, particularly if there is a photo shoot, meet-and-greet, or opportunities for recording video messages and/or an interview for your library’s website. Keep it flexible enough to allow for a late arrival, for a photo shoot taking longer than anticipated, etc. but know the exact sequence of activities and approximately when they will occur and how long they will take.
  - Find out ahead of time whether you will need special audio-visual equipment or other unusual requirements.
  - Have a plan for letting the media take photos and get what they need for a story.
  - Have refreshments on hand for those involved in the visit.
  - Have a small thank you gift for your local notable or celebrity.

*What if he or she says “no?”*

If a well-known person declines your invitation to become a visible advocate for your library, your first reaction will understandably be disappointment, but don’t feel discouraged. Influential people get many such invitations and can only accommodate a very few. His or her inability to help you is not a criticism of your library or its services, so don’t take it personally. Instead, say “thank you” for considering your invitation and try to keep the door open. If the person has said, “I can’t do it now, but please ask me again in the future,” create a file that will help you remember that and plan to do it. Set a specific time when you will follow up and ask again: “May I check with you again after the holidays?” Keep a record of all communication to and from your local notables for future reference, and be sure that everyone you contact is on a list to receive regular communication from your library.

## **10. How can you keep local notables involved in your library’s ongoing advocacy strategy?**

Persuading people who are recognizable and respected to speak out for your library and its support should be part of your ongoing promotion of your library and its exceptional services. Keeping your library in the minds of your users and others, and keeping your messages fresh, will go a long way in fostering public support.

Chances are, your library hosts local notables or celebrities for book clubs, lectures, classes, programs, story hours and other events. Don't let them walk out your door without asking for their help! At the very least, ask them for quotes about why they came to your library and what they were impressed by. Ask them for permission to use their quotes. Take photos of them while they're in your library. Get their permission to use the photos to promote the kind of activity for which your library hosted them. Take special (posed) pictures that you can use (with their permission) for a specific advocacy message that matches who they are.

Invest in mini-video camera (they are as small as a cell phone) and keep it handy. Record video messages about why a particular library issue is important to the local notables or celebrities who visit your library. Get their OK to upload these videos on your library's website.

There are so many great library advocacy events throughout the year! These include Library Snapshot Day, National Library Week, Library Card Sign Up Month, Teen Read Week, Banned Books Week, and others. Find out when they are, and use them as "hooks" to create opportunities for your local notables to get involved. Look for these at:

<http://www.ala.org/ala/conferencesevents/celebrationweeks/index.cfm>.

One library uses Banned Books Week to bring a wide range of their local notables into the library (politicians, judges, local actors, radio personalities, even the owner of the local fast food restaurant) to read for 10 minutes from a banned book. Library staff report that the program has helped them make friends with many community members who they would not have otherwise thought of contacting. Great idea!

Look at how another library is doing a wonderful job of their using local notables to promote reading. You can do the very same thing for library advocacy! Click this link:

<http://www.naw.lib.ms.us/kids/posters.htm>

Don't let these opportunities to weave your everyday contacts with your community's notable people into your library's all-important advocacy message. They will boost your confidence and ability to handle the challenges that working with local notables and celebrities bring, while continuously adding to your library's distinction, reputation...and yes, its status as a critical part of your community.

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*The Neal-Schuman Foundation is a not-for-profit corporation formed to aid, assist, and promote research and educational activities for the improvement of library and information services. For more information, contact [www.neal-schuman.com](http://www.neal-schuman.com) .*