

Every Voice Makes A Difference!



“Frontline librarians and library staff should be engaged and empowered to articulate the value of their respective libraries and their value as library employees. By working with their administrators and at their own comfort level, every staff member can be their library’s connection to the people they know best—customers, friends, relatives, and neighbors.” —Dr. Camila Alire, 2009-2010 President, American Library Association

Join the movement! Frontline Advocacy initiative provides online resources to fit the needs of every type of library—special, public, academic, and school. For more information, visit www.ala.org/frontlineadvocacy.

Most of us who work in libraries and information centers believe in what we do. Advocacy is simply a way to share that with others. And it’s not just about talking. It’s also about listening and building a sense of ownership. We encourage everyone who works with libraries to put these tips and examples to work. The more you practice, the easier and more natural it will become! Here are some basic tips to help you get started.

- Know your library’s message. It’s important that all staff speak with one voice.

- Look for opportunities to deliver the message in- and outside the library.
- Be prepared to respond to any negative comments with a positive, factual statement.
- Don’t wait until the crisis comes. Make speaking up for the library part of your life.
- Listen. Gather and report what you hear.
- Have your own message about your work—a message that’s comfortable for you to deliver and can be used to spark conversations outside the library.
- Collect testimonials. Ask people if you can quote them. Use these personal, positive

comments to tell the library’s story to policymakers and others. Some libraries have sheets for their users to fill out.

- Be spontaneous. Avoid the canned messages you hear at many checkout counters, e.g., “Did you find what you’re looking for today?” Make it personal and let your enthusiasm show!
- Keep it going. Ask others to tell their friends, neighbors, council representatives and/or legislators.
- Go for ownership. Your goal should be to not just to tell people about the library but to remind them that it is their library.

There are many situations in our daily lives that lend themselves to advocacy. Here are a few examples to help you anticipate and prepare your own responses.

Breaking the ice

Situation: You're introducing yourself at a meeting or party.

Message: Hi, I'm— and I have a great job. I help our company employees do research and develop new ideas. I work in our library.

Delivering your key message

Situation: You're at a department meeting discussing a new project in the pipeline.

Response: Wow—that sounds like an interesting project. Many departments have told us how much time and money we save them on research. How about we get together and talk about how the Information Center could assist you?

Responding to a complaint

Situation: Someone complains that it takes too long to get a response from library staff.

Message: Thanks for letting us know. The Information Center saves a lot of time and money for our company, but it's getting harder to provide the level of service employees expect with our current budget. We're keeping a record of complaints and are working on some solutions.

Asking for the testimonial

Situation: A client voices a compliment or appreciation.

Message: Thank you so much. Would you mind if we quoted you? It really helps to have good stories to share—especially at budget time.

Building a sense of ownership

Situation: You are making casual conversation with a fellow employee in the cafeteria or lounge following announcement of a budget cut.

Message: Have you heard the latest? It could be worse but we're already starting to get complaints. We're calling together a taskforce to help explore some solutions. Would you be interested?
