



A Legislative Advocacy Guide for Members & Supporters

PART I: THE BASICS

Reasons for Getting Involved in Legislative Advocacy

- Because teens need you!
- While ALA is the official voice of libraries and library workers, individual members have a responsibility to promote the interests of the libraries and to speak on behalf of their library patrons. If, as the saying goes, “all politics is local,” then all advocacy needs to be local.
- In 2014 state legislatures around the country passed a total of 45,564 bills, compared with 352 passed in Congress. Since most of the legislating is happening in at the state level, it makes sense to be an active participant in your home state.
- While library workers are respected members of the community, the competition for the attention and time of elected officials is great, as is the competition for federal and state funding. Every year thousands of associations and interest groups converge on Washington DC to compete for Congress’ attention and federal funds. This also happens at all the state capitols around the country, usually in the spring. Some well-known groups like oil and tobacco can afford to pay for powerful lobbyists, but ALA is not in a position to do that. As such, YALSA relies on our members to help ensure that the needs and interests of libraries, library workers and teens are adequately addressed by elected officials.

Keeping Track of Legislative Issues in Your State

- Visit your state library association’s web site to see if they provide regular updates on advocacy issues impacting libraries in your state
- Read about your state in CQ Roll Call’s 50 State Project <http://connectivity.cqrollcall.com/the-50-state-project/>
- Visit your state legislature’s web site to see if they have any alerts or newsletters you can sign up for
- Visit <http://openstates.org/> to find out about current legislation, track the progress of bills and more
- Visit opensecrets.org to find out where campaign donations to your state candidates are coming from
- Download this free app: icitizen <https://www.icitizen.com/>

Keeping Track of Current Federal Legislative Issues

- From the ALA homepage (www.ala.org) click on the “Contact Congress button.” This page provides you with brief information about top federal issues affecting libraries. From here, you can also find out who your elected officials are. To begin, just type in your zip code into the text box.

- Go to www.ala.org/offices/wo/. This is the homepage of ALA Washington Office. They provide information about federal legislation that affects libraries, as well as resources such as free webinars.
- Check out the ALA Washington Office's blog, District Dispatch, at www.districtdispatch.org/
- Check the category called "Legislation" on YALSA's blog at <http://yalsa.ala.org/blog>
- Download these free apps
 - Congress <http://congress.sunlightfoundation.com/>
 - Countable <https://www.countable.us/>
 - icitizen <https://www.icitizen.com/>

Taking Action

- Visit www.ala.org/yalsa/advocacy for simple things you can do if you have 5, 10 or 15 minutes per day
- Find out if your state library association has a Library Legislative Day in your state capitol or if they have a Legislation Committee
- Take action when ALA, YALSA or your state organization send out requests via email
- Keep your local elected officials informed about issues that affect your library and its patrons
- Use the free tools from the ALA Advocacy University www.ala.org/advocacy/advocacy-university
- Volunteer to serve on YALSA's Legislation Committee. Learn more at www.ala.org/yalsa (click on "Governance" from the left menu)
- Each May the ALA Washington Office organizes a National Library Legislative Day where library workers and supporters converge on the Capitol to advocate for library issues. It is also possible to participate virtually in Library Legislative Day To learn more go to: www.ala.org/nlld
- Download the free app, icitizen, and use their platform to take action on issues you care about: <https://www.icitizen.com/>

Finding Out who your Elected Officials are & when they Meet

- Go to <http://cqrcengage.com/ala/home>. From here you can find out who your federal, state and local officials are. To begin, type your zip code into the text box on the lower right.
- Visit this web page to find out the dates of when your state legislature is in session www.ncsl.org/research/about-state-legislatures/legislative-sessions.aspx
- Visit this web page to find dates on when Congress is in session <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/schedules.html>
- Download these free apps to learn who your elected officials are
 - Congress <http://congress.sunlightfoundation.com/>
 - Countable <https://www.countable.us/>
 - icitizen <https://www.icitizen.com/>

Getting in Touch with Elected Officials

- Click on the "Take Action" button on the ALA homepage for pre-written messages you can email to your members of Congress.
- For contact information for federal and state officials, visit Go to <http://cgrcengage.com/ala/home> and type your zip code into the text box on the lower right.
- Twitter handles for members of Congress: <https://twitter.com/verified/lists/us-congress/members>
- Download these free apps and contact legislators through the apps
 - Congress <http://congress.sunlightfoundation.com/>
 - Countable <https://www.countable.us/>
 - icitizen <https://www.icitizen.com/>

Communicating with Elected Officials

- If time permits, make your communication as personal as possible. A well thought out, personal message has more impact than a form letter or form email.
- Method of communication: The best methods, especially if timing is critical, are phone calls to the official's office.
 - For members of Congress, all snail mail is irradiated at a location off site, so there is often a significant lag between when you send a letter and when it is received. Additionally, the irradiation can make the letter brittle and/or hard to read. So, faxes are actually a better method than mail.
 - Emails are ok, but know that some officials have spam-blocking software that could prevent your message from being received. Also, some officials only allow email via an online form on their web site.
- If contacting the official's office by phone, do not expect to speak with him/her. Only staffers answer the phones, but do not be put off by this. Their job is to take messages and tally how many calls are received and the topic of the calls.
- When communicating in writing, address the official as "The Honorable Firstname Lastname." For example: "The Honorable Elizabeth Warren."
- Always identify yourself.
- Be concise, specific, and support your views with facts when possible.
- Be polite and respectful.
- Stay on message and keep to your main points.
- Always be sure to thank them for their time.

These tips on communicating with elected officials are adapted from the American Institute of Architects' document "How to Lobby Elected Officials—A Guide for AIA Members," at:
www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/howtobby.pdf

PART II: RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

You don't want to wait until there's a particular issue or bill before connecting with your elected officials, especially ones at your local and state level. By opening the door of communication with them before there is a time of need or crisis, you're paving the way to make future interactions easier and more productive. You'll also be building

awareness about the important work that the library does. Therefore, it is beneficial for you to be proactive and seek out opportunities for positive interaction, and to create a process that allows you to educate and inform them about key issues relating to libraries and teens. Don't forget that the elected official's staff are also important to engage with.

1. Some easy ways to connect with your elected officials

- Follow them on social media
- Add them to your library's newsletter mailing list
- Provide them and/or their children with a library card
- Send cards or notes for important occasions, like congratulating them on getting elected (this could also be a good activity for teen patrons)
- Put a photo of them up in the break room, so that staff will recognize them if/when they come to the library

2. Some typical reasons to contact elected officials are:

- Take advantage of certain celebrations and use it as a reason to get in touch, like National Library Week
- To thank them for something they did that was in any way supportive of libraries or teens, such as voting on a particular issue, saying something in a speech, visiting a library or school, etc.
- Educate or inform elected officials about the work that libraries do
 - Send them photos or articles that demonstrate the ways that libraries help teens
 - Send them a calendar of library events and highlight any they might be interested in
 - Send them a copy of a recent report or study with a note about why you thought it was important for them to know about it
- Call attention to particular activities or achievements at your library
- Invite them to attend or participate in an event at the library (YALSA has everything you need to plan a successful visit at: http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/District_Days)
- Offer your skills, expertise and access to resources around topics related to libraries and teens. For example, you could
 - Recommend individuals who can attend forums, briefings, seminars, focus groups
 - Recommend individuals who could speak at an event or provide testimony in a hearing
 - Recommend experts who can serve as a topic on a particular issue
 - Provide research/data, annotated bibliographies, fact sheets, reports, personal stories, case studies and/or photos on a particular topic
 - Organize onsite exhibitions or demos
 - Organize library tours
 - Offer the library as a venue for a meeting or event

- Ask them to support a resolution about the importance of libraries. Instructions and a sample resolution can be found here:
www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/ResolutionForLibraries.docx

PART III: ON THEIR TURF: MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Meeting face-to-face with elected officials can provide a very effective and valuable opportunity to voice your concerns, share your views about a legislative issue and/or to ask the official to support or oppose a particular bill. Not surprisingly, there are a number of ways that you can make a success – or a failure – out of a meeting.

Keep in mind that you don't necessarily need to travel far for a meeting.

Congresspersons are in their home states in August and during holidays, and state legislators spend most of the year home in their districts. To find out when they're available visit <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/schedules.html> or your state legislature's web site and find out what days they're in session (when they're not, that's when you can schedule to visit with them locally).

1. Always make an appointment in advance – don't just show up

Legislators have numerous demands on their time. Call ahead to schedule an appointment about 4 – 6 weeks in advance, and be flexible about when you'll meet. Keep in mind that legislators' schedules can fill up quickly; try to give yourself as much lead-time as you can.

When calling to schedule an appointment, identify yourself as a constituent and clearly state the purpose of the meeting. The following script may help as you make this call:

"Hi! I'm _____ from _____. I'll be in (your state/capital/city) on (date), and would like to schedule an appointment to meet with (Governor/Senator/Assemblyperson or Representative _____) to discuss proposed legislation that would impact young adults' use of technology and the Internet in schools and libraries. I would be more than happy to meet with the legislative assistant familiar with H.R. 5319 if the (elected official) is unavailable. Is someone available the afternoon of the (date of visit)? If no one is available, I would like to drop by the office to leave information for the (elected official) to review."

Important: Don't just show up to a legislator's office. Chances are you won't get to meet with the official and at best you won't have the time and attention you need to express your views. At worst, you may not be remembered the way you wanted.

2. Research your legislator & understand their perspective

Know his/her history, especially any positions they may have taken on the issue you wish to discuss with him/her.

- Understand that elected officials

- Risk their reputation and money in the election process
- Typically have a short term focus
- Have political platforms and multiple constituents
- Don't like to be surprised or embarrassed
- Expect us to be problem solvers
- Don't like technical jargon
- Are held accountable by voters

taken from: www.slideshare.net/ZakiMustafa/building-effective-relationship-with-elected-officials

- To research his/her voting record, position statements, ratings from special interest groups and other pertinent information, go to: www.vote-smart.org

3. Prepare a concise statement for your meeting.

It's essential that you are prepared to get your point across succinctly and effectively – you won't have more than 15-20 minutes to speak with your legislator or their staff.

- Write down key points you plan to highlight.
- Discuss how the issue impacts the young adults with whom you work on a personal level.
- Be familiar with opposing arguments and be prepared to defend your position with facts.
- Include local data and anecdotes about how the people in your community are affected by the issue.
- Conclude by providing your elected official with a proposed solution to the issue and ask him/her to take a particular action.
- Provide solutions to problems.
- Do not use library jargon or acronyms and be sure to define terms, such as "digital literacy," that the legislator may not be familiar with. It is highly probable that the legislator has not been in a library since his or her college days. This presents a challenge for you: you'll need to paint a picture of what a modern library is like without overloading them with technical terms (e.g. subscription databases).

4. Bring written materials with you

Leave your elected official with resources that provide quick reference or support to the points you discussed. A brief fact sheet, position papers or other resources, along with information about your organization, is helpful. It is most helpful to have information about your particular state. Check out these state fact sheets from ALA: <http://connect.ala.org/node/138571>. These documents can also be useful:

- How Library Programs Benefit Teens:
<https://www.ims.gov/assets/1/AssetManager/Teens.pdf>
- What Public Libraries do for Teens infographic:
www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/Infographic2_FINAL.pdf

- Why Teens Need Libraries brochure:
www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/professionaltools/Handouts/districtdays_web.pdf

5. Be on time & be flexible with your time

Don't be late, even by just a few minutes – it may mean you miss your meeting entirely. If you think you may be delayed, be sure to call ahead and let them know. In addition, be flexible during your meeting. Interruptions can occur, and you may need to communicate your views while walking with your elected official to another meeting.

6. Dress professionally

Wear business attire to the meeting. Don't wear anything loud, such as large jewelry or a necktie with a cartoon character that could distract the official from what you have to say. If you're unsure about an accessory or item of clothing, err on the side of caution.

7. Take notes

A lot of information is likely to be exchanged in a short amount of time. Be sure to take notes so that you can follow up on any necessary items after the meeting is over and relay the discussion accurately to other supporters. Get down the names of everyone at the meeting so you can send them thank you note afterwards.

8. Be prepared to meet with a staff person, if your elected official is unable to make your appointment

It's not uncommon for a schedule change at the last minute. Don't be disappointed if you end up meeting with a staff aide. Key staff aides are sometimes just as familiar – if not more – on policy or proposed legislation. Make the most of your time with them; they, in turn, will communicate your views to your elected official, often at the most opportune time.

9. Be respectful, professional and diplomatic

Let them set the pace of the conversation, and adjust your communication style to fit theirs. Present your case in a straightforward, friendly, and professional manner. Avoid saying no, and never argue about an issue with your elected official – rather, show him/her respect and try to find common ground from the very start, and use that bond to express your views. If it appears you will need to “agree to disagree”, follow up with a letter explaining your views more comprehensively, thanking him/her for the meeting.

10. Listen carefully

By listening to what the official or staffer is saying, you can learn what their priorities are and how yours might overlap. Ask questions to engage them, learn more and demonstrate your interest in what they have to say. Politicians tend to speak generally, avoid the issues and/or go off on tangents. Try to draw out

specific answers to your questions and/or look for topics to connect your point of view with. If the official asks you a question that you do not know the answer to, let him/her know that you will find the answer and get back to him/her.

11. Put the issue in human terms

Let your elected official know how the policy or proposed legislation will impact the young adults you serve every day. Use short but effective anecdotes to support. Help your legislator understand how this piece of legislation will affect the real people he/she represents.

12. Bring a well-spoken teen or parent

When a teen or parent speaks about the same issues that concern you, it sends a message to the official that this issue is one that a large part of the community is concerned with, and not just something limited to librarianship. Also, nothing tugs at the heartstrings of a legislator like a cute kid.

13. Find common ground

We speak on behalf of youth because we want them to have access and opportunities that will help them achieve, succeed and grow into competent caring members (and voters) of our community. This is a point where, most likely, you and your elected official can see eye-to-eye. Finding common ground, then demonstrating how this legislation is counter-productive to those efforts, respects the motivations and the emotions that drive a piece of legislation. Keep the focus on fostering an environment where young adults have the resources they need to thrive.

14. Always have an "ask"

You may not just be there to inform the legislator about a particular issue. You may also want that person to take a certain position, vote a certain way, sponsor or support a particular bill, etc. After you make your points about the issue, make a request of the legislator. You can sum up by saying something like:

- "therefore I'm respectfully asking that you cast your vote against the proposed bill H.R. 5319"
- "Because teen literacy is such an important issue, I hope you will sign the letter that's currently circulating among Senators that is calling for raising the funding for the Innovative Approaches to Literacy Program."

15. Volunteer to serve as a contact for this issue in the future

Legislators will often call on individuals they see as knowledgeable on a specific issue or policy topic. Make them aware of your area of expertise and provide contact information so they can call on you in the future. Leave business cards with the legislator and his or her staffer.

16. Give the official an open invitation to visit your library

Politicians love a photo-op, especially during an election year. What could be better press for him or her than a photo of them reading to kids, helping teens with homework, giving out the summer learning award to the winning teen, etc.? Once they're in your library, take advantage of the opportunity to educate them about library services to teens. YALSA has everything you need to plan a successful visit at: http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/District_Days

16. Follow up and say thank you

Be sure to send a thank you note promptly after your meeting. This offers another opportunity to restate your views, send any additional information or request action on the issue. If you met with a staff aide, be sure to send a separate letter or email to your legislator.

17. Be ethical

Never offer an elected official anything in return for their support, and never discuss campaign finances, PAC contributions or endorsements. Always be truthful and transparent, and be sure to honor confidentiality.

These tips on meeting with elected officials is adapted, with permission, from the "Teacher Leader's Network's Tips for a Successful Meeting with Your Elected Officials," accessed on July 26, 2006, at: www.teacherleaders.org/Resources/talkingtips.html

PART IV: LEARN MORE, DO MORE

This guide from YALSA is just a first step. Visit www.ala.org/yalsa/advocacy for more resources. Use this site for more detailed information on how to reach out to your legislators, launch an advocacy campaign in your community, spread your message via the media and more.