



Illinois Library Association



**READY SET
ADVOCATE**

Library Advocacy Tool Kit



Getting Started: Know Your Library. Know Your Community.

All advocacy begins with the community you serve, whether it is a city or town or other district, a college community, a school community, or a non-for-profit community. This means that the first important step is to understand that community, its composition, aspirations, challenges, and goals.

You also need to know your library:

- Does your library have a mission statement?
- Are your library's strategic goals up to date? Do you know what they are?
- Are you subscribed to local, state and national library system, state, and association e-lists? (ALA, ILA, RAILS, IHLS, ISL)
- Do you know when your library board meets? Are there board packets you can read to learn what the library is doing?
- Do you know where to get the basic data that explains who is using your library?
- Do you know what services your library offers?

When looking at your community, here are some of the critical questions you need to ask:

- Who are the community leaders/movers and shakers?
- Subscribe to e-lists that your community has available: city, school, park district, chamber, etc.
- Does the community have service organizations?
- What are the key businesses?
- Do you know the school curriculum?
- Can you describe your community?

And as important as understanding your community, you need to be actively engaged there.

Some questions you need to consider:

- Are you a community leader?
- Are you engaged in your community outside of your library?
- Are you serving in leadership roles in your community?
- Are you attending meetings, events, coffees in your community?
- Do you invite other organizations and businesses to come into your library to promote themselves?
- Are you at the community "table?"
- Is your library serving as a "vehicle" for your community?

It has been said that "All politics is local," and this is particularly true where library advocacy is concerned. A good knowledge and understanding of your library and community and engagement with that community are the foundations of successful advocacy.

With the knowledge and understanding you have gained, you are ready to become an important advocate. This is because:

- **YOU** are the person who knows what your community needs.
- **YOU** know what your library can do **right now**.
- Both **YOU** and your library exist within a larger community or organization such as your city, faith community, school, or business community
- **YOU** know how your library can fit within that larger community or organization, right now.

Now that you've laid the groundwork, you're ready for the next steps...