



Illinois Library Association

A large, stylized rainbow graphic composed of concentric, semi-circular bands in a gradient of colors: red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. The bands are separated by white spaces, creating a vibrant, multi-layered effect.

READY SET ADVOCATE

Library Advocacy Tool Kit



Developing a Relationship with State and Federal Legislators

Never forget that your legislators are impactful people. Every day they make decisions that impact everyone in Illinois, and across the country. Your job is to develop a positive working relationship with them and be an effective advocate for your library.

What is the first step to getting to know them?

When your legislator gets elected into office make sure you send a letter of congratulations and invite them to your library for a tour. Make sure all of your legislators are on your mail and email lists. If your legislators are on Facebook, you need to friend them. If they are on Twitter, you need to follow them.

How do I connect with them?

- Make an appointment to meet with them either in your office or their office.
- If you cannot get an appointment directly with your legislator, ask to meet with a staff person. Building a relationship with your legislator's staff is just as important as building a relationship with your legislator. Legislators generally rely heavily on their staff when they are making legislative decisions.

When I meet with them, what do I say, what do I bring?

- Your first meeting will usually be a short one. You will be introducing yourself and your library and talking briefly about issues that are of importance to your library and its users, who are also their constituents.
- Bring your business cards. You will give one to the administrative assistant or other staff person and one to the legislator.
- Bring things to the meeting that will showcase your library, such as:
 - Statistics about usage of your library.
 - Newspaper or online media that details a recent library program or service.
 - A testimonial from a satisfied patron.
 - Your newsletter featuring upcoming events.
 - The most recent "palm card," which presents ILA's state and federal legislative agenda on one piece of paper (available at www.ila.org/advocacy)
 - An item with your library logo is always appreciated, such as a mug, pencil, or tote bag.

What do I do after the meeting is over?

- Always end your appointment by thanking your elected officials for their support. Thank the administrative assistant or scheduler for any help they gave you in setting up the appointment.
- Send a thank you letter and enclose any answers to any unanswered questions you might have had during your meeting.



Developing a Relationship with State and Federal Legislators

What else can I do to strengthen my relationship with my legislators?

- If your legislator recently passed a piece of legislation you can support, take the time to congratulate them. The official will appreciate your support.
- Check to see if your elected officials have a library card. If they do not, contact them and invite them to your library to get one and make a press event out of it.
- Invite your elected officials to come for a tour of your library. Take their picture. Post it in your library newsletter (print and online) and on library social media and website and email a copy to your official.
- Select a program that the official could be involved in such as a poetry reading, handing out awards to summer reading participant, and the like. Take their picture. Invite the press to cover the event. If the press cannot make it, send them a picture.
- If you have anyone on staff that is good with Photoshop and the ALA READ poster software, consider making READ posters with your elected officials and their favorite books. Hang them in the library, post online, and make sure your elected official gets a framed copy.
- Make space for your elected officials to conduct town halls and open meetings for their constituents in your library. You're not only supporting civic engagement for your community; you are also reinforcing your relationship with your officials.
- If you hear that your elected officials are appearing at a community forum, take time to stop by. Chances are most of the topics won't impact your library, but this is an opportunity for you to see your representative and let the official know you appreciate their support.
- If possible, attend fundraisers for your elected officials. Your officials will appreciate your being there. Again, take a moment to thank them for their support of library issues.
- You'll think of other ways to engage your legislators as you get to know them. Once they get to know you, they will start to think of you as their expert on library issues and will contact you from time to time to get your take on a specific issue.