

# Chapter 8: Advocacy

---

---

## **This chapter covers:**

- ✓ What advocacy is
- ✓ Why advocacy is needed for libraries
- ✓ What steps and strategies are appropriate for library advocacy

## **What Advocacy Is**

As noted in “Turning the Page: Supporting Libraries, Strengthening Communities,” a publication of the Public Library Association, advocacy is “the actions individuals or organizations undertake to influence decision-making at the local, regional, state, national and international level that help create a desired policy or funding change in support of public libraries.”

## **Why Advocacy is Needed for Libraries**

As budgets at all levels of government and in all areas of endeavor become ever tighter, competition for funding grows ever greater. In connection with libraries, increasing numbers of people are questioning the very need for them as electronic resources expand to include more and more offerings. Thus, it is more important than ever for library boards and their constituents to make known the value of libraries and the need for continuing and increasing support. A well organized and carefully planned advocacy campaign, especially at the time when municipalities set their annual budgets, is an important tool for gaining the support the library needs to continue providing excellent service to the community and to add new resources and activities to its offerings.

## Steps and Strategies for Library Advocacy

Beginning by outlining a plan of action will ensure a smooth flow of activities in the advocacy process. Detailed information on how to go about this is available from a number of online resources, including [www.publiclibraryadvocacy.org](http://www.publiclibraryadvocacy.org) and [www.ala.org/advocacy](http://www.ala.org/advocacy). Since each library's situation is different, each board will want to develop its own action plan. Following are just a few steps that should prove helpful to most boards.

- A **goal** for the campaign should be established, based on the needs to be met or projects to be funded. For example, the goal might be increased funding for ongoing library operations, or financial support for a specific new project or service that the library would like to add.
- **Objectives** should be determined to track the progress of the campaign. These objectives should be specific and measurable to provide a sense of moving ahead step by step.
- An advocacy **team** should be set up that includes members of the various constituencies involved with the library such as board members, administration, staff, Friends of the Library, volunteers and patrons who use the library on a regular basis, all of whom have a stake in its continuing success. The team's role is to reach out to those in a position to help the library achieve its goals.
- Depending on the size and scope of the advocacy campaign, it may be helpful to form **committees** of team members focusing on specific aspects of the effort. These might include an oversight task force to keep things running smoothly, a publications group to ensure consistency in print materials, a media group to coordinate contact with communications outlets and a finance group to keep track of spending on the campaign.
- **Target audiences** should be identified, that is, those segments of the community who need to hear the library's message. These audiences may include elected officials in a position to make decisions affecting the library as well as businesses and private individuals, especially library users, who may be persuaded to aid the library by speaking up for it as well as making donations themselves. If the library does not already have relationships with segments of the target audience, this is the time to form them. Once the audiences have been identified, efforts should be made to communicate with them on an ongoing basis so that they feel a part of the library community and are kept informed on the campaign's progress.
- The main **message** of the campaign should be determined, indicating why the library needs assistance and how it can be provided. The message should also make clear how the library benefits the community being served and what actions the audience can take to help. The message should be consistent throughout the campaign to maintain a sharp focus on what the library hopes to achieve. When appropriate, statistical data can be included to show how much the library does for the community.

- Efforts should be made to involve the **media** in promoting the library by communicating regularly with newspapers, radio and television stations about library services and activities and encouraging media representatives to cover newsworthy events at the library. Since increasing numbers of people rely heavily on social media for information, these resources should also be used creatively to spread the library's message through its web site, Face Book page and other online options commonly in use.

Successful advocacy for any group depends on making a lasting positive impression on decision makers who can advance the organization's goals. Regular and consistent communication with those in positions to assist the library is essential in achieving the support needed to flourish well into the future.

Additional information specific to library advocacy in Connecticut is available on the Connecticut Library Association's web site at <https://ctlibraryassociation.org/Advocacy>.

