

VALENTINE PUBLIC LIBRARY ADVOCACY POLICY

People who care about the Valentine Public Library and its ongoing mission and services must use their voices to ensure that the library legacy remains viable and fully funded. Below are some ways to utilize library advocates to make a long-lasting and significant difference for the library.

1. **STAY INFORMED:** Stay up to date about the bigger picture of libraries and library-related issues and legislation.
2. **SET GOALS:** Determine what needs to be accomplished. Does a referendum need to be passed? Does the budget need to be increased? Should there be a new law or policy on the state or local level? Should a piece of legislation be defeated? What will it take to make it happen? Once the goals are identified, then begin organization.
3. **GET ORGANIZED:** Define the goals and objectives. Assess the situation and identify critical tasks. Develop a communication plan, a work plan and a way to evaluate results.
4. **DELIVER THE MESSAGE:** set a communication plan with clearly defined key messages.
 - **Identify communication strategies;**
 - 1) Outreach to groups
 - 2) Personal contact
 - 3) Media

*Remember that the most effective is one-on one communication; i.e., a visit to a councilman, commissioner, or legislator is more likely to be remembered than a letter and a *personal* letter carries more weight than a direct mail brochure.

- **Select communication mechanisms;**
 - 1) News releases
 - 2) Media advisories
 - 3) Non-library publications
 - 4) Op-eds and letters to the editor
 - 5) Partnerships
 - 6) Publications
 - 7) Public service announcement
 - 8) Radio shows
 - 9) Speaking engagements
 - 10) Special events and promotions
 - 11) A telephone tree
 - 12) Web and internet outreach (Facebook, blogs, Twitter, wikis, etc.)
- **Speak out;**

For any advocacy campaign to work there must be spokespeople who are knowledgeable and skilled in delivering the library message to others.

A few carefully chosen statistics can be impressive, but stories bring the library message to life.

- 1) Tell stories about how the library has made a difference in your life.
 - a. Personalize remarks.
 - b. Be prepared.
 - c. Practice a conversational style of delivery.
 - d. Show enthusiasm.
 - e. Use visual aids when appropriate.

5. **TARGET THE AUDIENCE:** Define who will be able to help in achieving the goal. Brainstorm for possible audiences. (For example, if the library enjoys strong support among senior citizens, they may be a primary audience for assisting in the achievement of a particular goal.
6. **DEAL EFFECTIVELY WITH THE MEDIA:** It is important that the library have an understanding on how to deal with media contacts. Designated spokespeople should know or have copies of the library's key message on various topics. They should be prepared and give short, punchy quotes known as "sound bites" that can be repeated easily by the hearers.
7. **Deal with bad news in a positive way:** Although it is never pleasant, bad news can create an opportunity for delivering a positive message and building support. Try to focus on the solution, apologize if appropriate, and prepare one-page message sheets that include key talking points, and answers to the most difficult questions.
8. **Get to know the elected officials:** They have been elected but how can they help the library's cause? Get to know them - and their staff - first.
 - Visit websites and social media pages of officials to learn their issues and priorities.
 - Invite them to the library and let them see firsthand how valuable the library is to the community.
 - Invite them to a special event.
 - Give them specific way they can get involved with the library.
 - Invite them to participate in National Library Week.
 - Send them e-mails or letters to alert them of important concerns and issues.
 - Let them see how constituents are using the services provided by the library.
9. **Talk, talk, talk:** Look around. There are people everywhere who could use their library and who don't know about the valuable resources just waiting for them. At the grocery store, bank, community meeting, post office, or even on a walk with the dog, talk to people and tell them why the library is important and why it is valuable to the community.

- 10. Stay informed:** Stay up to date on state and national activity. Stay in touch with the state library commission for information on important issues affecting our state. Lobby for issues that are important to the library.
- 11. Develop the library's print or online newsletter.** Determine the value and importance of a newsletter for patrons. If it is decided that it would be a good vehicle for the library, it could be a great tool for advocacy as well. An advocacy column can highlight ways that users and advocates can help the library; participating in a letter-writing campaign, volunteering at events, calling legislators and local governing bodies, and many other means.
- 12. Make—and distribute—handouts.** Important information about the library, its services, and needs can be distributed in writing for people to read later or pass on to others. These might include the library's hours and services, a wish list of things the library needs, information about upcoming events, or any other pertinent library information.
- 13. Plan a library event:** Any event during the year is an opportunity to showcase the library. Create an event or promotion that will get the Friends, trustees or other volunteers involved. An event can be hosted at the library, county fair, park or any venue. Always invite elected officials to library events.
- 14. Get press:** Speak publically about the specific value in the library. Write a letter to the editor or an op-ed piece for the local paper. However, the media is used, make sure to have developed key messages and anticipated tough questions ahead of time; be ready with statistics and information that can be used on the spot.
- 15. Build your network:** Although one person can be a powerful agent for change, involving more people makes the message even stronger. Developing a network of library advocates in the community is a great way to add voices to the chorus of support. When people are willing and able to help, keep track of their contact information and availability. Start a phone tree or an email list to keep in touch with everyone so that when an issue arises, it will be easy to contact the right person to get the word out.

Additional Advocacy Tips:

- ✓ After getting to know key officials, stay in touch even when you are not asking for something.
- ✓ Attend hearings on library-related matters. Ask questions and voice opinions.
- ✓ Be on the lookout for good library user stories. Collect them for future use.
- ✓ Create a database with names of advocates, their contact information, and other pertinent information. Keep the database current. Make sure those on the database receive all information such as; newsletters, needs and legislative changes. Set up an electronic mailing list to get information to everyone.

- ✓ Don't give up! Advocacy is about persistence.
- ✓ Keep current.
- ✓ Look for opportunities to voice support. Then write a letter to the editor.
- ✓ Be available to speak to groups when asked.
- ✓ Be willing to work with other organizations or departments. The library has a lot to offer potential partners as a visible, respected place with high traffic.
- ✓ Participate in influential community groups.
- ✓ Participate in state and national Library Legislative Days.
- ✓ Thank all those involved in advocacy efforts in behalf of the library. A thank you note goes a long way in continuing support.
- ✓ Work at keeping a high profile for the library. Keep an up to date marketing plan with a strong consistent message.

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