

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Setting Goals and Measuring Impact

Setting clear goals at the beginning of an advocacy effort can help focus your work and guide decision-making throughout a campaign. Your goals may focus on:

- Securing specific outcomes (e.g., increased funding, staffing or resources)
- Raising awareness and building understanding about the library and its work
- Strengthening relationships and building trust with stakeholders
- Increasing the visibility, credibility, and recognition of the library
- Encouraging action or support around issues important to your library and community (e.g., intellectual freedom)

Advocacy Planning Checklist

- ☑ Write down your advocacy goals and objectives at the outset
- ☑ Identify the activities and actions that will help you achieve those goals
- ☑ Determine who you need to involve, engage, or communicate with
- ☑ Use your goals and planned activities to guide and focus your advocacy efforts

Along with setting goals and planning your advocacy campaign, it is also important to **track advocacy outputs** such as meetings, events, media coverage, social media engagement, research activities, and outreach efforts. Monitoring these activities can help you assess what strategies are most effective and where best to focus your time, energy, and resources.

Leveraging Canadian Library Month

In Canada and Ontario, libraries can also take advantage of Canadian Library Month in October to celebrate and raise the profiles of their libraries. The month also includes a range of related celebrations and themed weeks that offer additional opportunities to highlight different aspects of library services, programs, and impact.

- First Nation Public Library Week – first week of October
- Ontario Public Library Week – third week of October (unless Thanksgiving occurs during that week, in which case it is moved to the following week)
- Canadian School Library Day – fourth Monday of October
- National Medical Librarians Month – October

The OLA is the provincial coordinator for Ontario Public Library Week. As the coordinator, OLA provides public libraries and public library supporters with various promotional resources for the week, including graphics.

Engaging Your Community During Canadian Library Month

Canadian Library Month is an ideal opportunity to celebrate your library's impact with your community.

- **Showcase how your library supports learning, creativity, and community connection.** This is an excellent time to launch a social media campaign that highlights the impact of your library's work. Profile your staff, take a walk down memory lane by sharing photos of how your library has evolved over the years, and tap into online trends to raise awareness and attract new followers.
- **Host special events, programs, or initiatives to commemorate the month:**
 - Host a [Dear School Library](#) event in your school library.
 - Run a library card drive campaign, offering incentives for new community members to register for a library card.
 - Invite your campus community to a "coffee and chat" gathering in the library.
 - Consider waiving library fines for the month to encourage re-engagement with library services.
 - Host a bookmark design or art competition to engage students and patrons creatively.
 - Organize special author talks, open houses, and activities featuring local entertainment.
 - Invite staff and users to your hospital library for giveaways and engagement activities.
 - Partner with local organizations, such as your Business Improvement Area (BIA), to extend reach.

Canadian Library Month also provides a timely opportunity to connect with elected officials. These moments of engagement can help build relationships and strengthen ongoing advocacy efforts.

Engaging Political Representatives During Canadian Library Month

- **Host a 'Library Day' and invite local representatives to visit your library, attend an event, or take part in a tour.** Use this opportunity to show your work in action. Highlight programs, introduce them to staff and users, and share real examples of how the library supports community priorities such as literacy, economic development, and inclusion.
- **Keep your messaging clear and focused.** Share a few key points about your library's impact, supported by stories and local data. Be prepared to connect your work to issues that matter to them and their constituents.
- If appropriate, **use this opportunity to introduce or reinforce a specific ask**, such as funding for a program or capital project. Even if no immediate decision is required, these conversations help build awareness and position the library as a trusted and essential community partner.
- **Follow up after the interaction** to thank them for their time, share additional information if needed, and maintain the connection beyond Canadian Library Month.

GUIDE: [Download How to Host a Library Day During OPLW →](#)

Learn More About Library Celebrations

[Canadian Library Month \(CLM\)](#)

[National Medical Librarians Month](#)

[First Nation Public Library Week \(FNPLW\)](#)

[Ontario Public Library Week \(OPLW\)](#)

[Canadian School Library Day \(CSLD\) / Journée nationale des bibliothèques scolaires](#)

[Canadian Library Workers' Day](#)

Intellectual Freedom and Responding to Censorship

Libraries play a critical role in upholding intellectual freedom and ensuring equitable access to information. In recent years, Canadian libraries have seen a [rising increase in book challenges](#) and [censorship demands](#). In moments where challenges or censorship concerns arise, it is essential that library staff communicate from a shared foundation of values and principles.

Consistent Messaging Through Policy and Training

Clear, consistent messaging is essential when responding to issues related to intellectual freedom and censorship. When library values are embedded in both policy and practice, staff are better equipped to communicate confidently and respond in a unified way.

Training plays a key role in strengthening this consistency. Training opportunities, such as the [Intellectual Freedom Course for Public Library Staff](#) by Centre for Free Expression (CFE) and Edmonton Public Library, should include all library staff. This ensures that everyone, regardless of role, shares a common understanding of library values and response approaches.

Strong policy and procedures are essential when a library is faced with a book challenge or demand for censorship. They provide a consistent, transparent framework for responding to concerns while ensuring that decisions are guided by established principles rather than individual discretion. Well-developed policies outline:

- the steps for review
- the roles and responsibilities of staff, and
- the criteria used to assess challenged materials

This structure helps ensure that all concerns are handled fairly, respectfully, and in alignment with the professional standards of librarianship.

Need help developing a policy or a procedure for responding to a challenge? The following resources provide sample policies, templates, and examples that you can adapt for your own context:

- [Canadian Library Policies Database](#) (Centre for Free Expression)
- [The Canadian Library Challenges Database](#) (Centre for Free Expression)
- [A Guide to the Selection and Deselection of School Library Resources](#) (Ontario School Library Association)
- [Collection Diversity Toolkit](#) (Canadian School Libraries)
- [Selection & Reconsideration Policy Toolkit for Public, School, & Academic Libraries](#) (American Library Association)

Maintaining Momentum in Your Advocacy Work

Advocacy can take significant time, energy, and persistence, and setbacks are inevitable. It can be discouraging when the impact of your efforts isn't immediately visible, especially in the face of ongoing funding pressures and emerging challenges.

Sustaining your advocacy over the long term depends on the strength of your relationships. Stay connected with colleagues, community partners, and your broader library network. These connections can offer support, fresh ideas, and renewed motivation, helping you navigate challenges and continue your work with purpose.

It is important to remember that **advocacy is a long game**. The results of your efforts may take years to fully materialize, and progress often happens incrementally rather than all at once. Timing matters, as does the ability to pivot as priorities and contexts shift. Obstacles will arise and focus areas may evolve, but keeping this perspective can help you stay adaptable, persistent, and grounded in the long-term nature of the work.

How to Respond When Values Are Challenged

At times, you may encounter challenges to core library values such as intellectual freedom, equitable access, or inclusion. These situations can be complex and, at times, emotionally charged.

- **Ground your response in your library's policies, professional ethics, and established procedures.** Focus on clearly communicating the role of your library, its mission and values, and how your library's services, programs and collections serve its entire community.
- **Keep the conversation respectful** and focused on shared goals, such as learning, access, and community wellbeing.
- **You don't have to respond alone.** Consult with colleagues, leadership, or trusted peers to ensure your approach is consistent, informed, and aligned with your organization's values.

Dealing With Media Scrutiny

In times of controversy or heightened attention, media interest may increase. Preparation and clarity are key.

- Ensure that staff understand who is authorized to speak to the media and what internal processes should be followed.
- Develop clear, consistent messaging that aligns with your library's values and policies.
- When responding, keep your focus on facts, community impact, and the role of the library.

If you are not the designated spokesperson, it is appropriate to refer inquiries to the appropriate person within your organization. **Taking the time to coordinate a thoughtful response is far more effective than reacting quickly without alignment.**

Media attention can feel intense, but it also presents an opportunity to reinforce the value of libraries and the importance of your work in the community.

Protecting Staff Wellbeing

Advocacy work, particularly during difficult moments, can take a personal toll. **Prioritize staff wellbeing by creating space for debriefing, reflection, and mutual support.**

Encourage clear boundaries around work and communication, especially during high-pressure situations. Ensure staff know when to refer issues to others within the organization, rather than feeling they need to handle everything themselves. A supportive workplace culture is essential to sustaining advocacy over time.

Dealing with online harassment? Check out [PEN America's Online Harassment Field Manual](#) for practical strategies on how to protect yourself and others.

When to Escalate to OLA

Some issues may extend beyond your individual library or require broader sector support. Consider reaching out to the OLA when:

- An issue has potential province-wide implications
- You are facing coordinated challenges (e.g., censorship efforts, policy pressures)
- You need guidance, resources, or a unified sector response
- Media attention or public scrutiny is escalating beyond your organization's capacity

OLA can provide support, amplify key messages, and help connect you with others facing similar challenges. Escalation is not a sign of failure; it's a strategic step in collective advocacy.

Advocacy Checklist: 10 Actions You Can Take

If you do nothing else, do this:

- ☒ Build one relationship with a decision-maker
- ☒ Know your library's top 3 impact stats
- ☒ Create your 30-second elevator pitch
- ☒ Share one impact story per week
- ☒ Align your message with local priorities
- ☒ Use social media intentionally
- ☒ Invite a leader into your library space
- ☒ Collaborate across sectors
- ☒ Stay non-partisan and solutions-focus
- ☒ Stay connected to OLA