

ADVOCATING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

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It is essential to anchor library advocacy, not in a goal of great libraries, but in a goal of great communities, however that community is defined. This (1) is a strong ethical starting point and (2) positions the library advocate as being in the community business, and therefore more supportable than being strictly in the library business.

– Wendy Newman

Libraries of all types are, at their core, public-oriented service organizations. Advocating for your library should not be limited to engaging with high-level leaders at occasional meetings – it's about being deeply embedded in your community and fostering relationships with library staff, volunteers, users, and community partners. One way you can advocate for yourself and your library is by being an active, collaborative member of the community.

In your context, this might mean...

- **School Library:** Actively supporting classroom teachers in the implementation of new technologies and advancing the board's School Improvement Plan.
- **Academic Library:** Attending faculty meetings across departments or engaging with student groups to support upcoming initiatives or events.
- **Special Library:** Connecting with colleagues about the resources available and how they can help them achieve their goals.
- **Public Library:** Establishing new partnerships with community organizations like [Indigenous Friendship Centres](#), community associations, hospitals, Business Improvement Area (BIA) groups, and social service agencies.
- **Health Library:** Setting up collaborations with clinicians, researchers, and hospital leadership to support patient care initiatives.

When you are embedded in your community, you are poised to respond in real time to concerns as they develop. Leverage communication channels to engage your community and share timely information.

Make Sure That You Are at the Table

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To cultivate those relationships with the decision-makers and influencers, advocates have to be ‘at the table’... when the issues are raised and analyzed and solutions worthy of support are proposed. This is where the library’s resources and services are leveraged to improve the quality of life and experiences in our communities. The more deeply and productively embedded librarians are in the actual activity of community, whether it is research and development, the development of family literacy improvement strategies, or the work of teaching in a school, the greater the opportunity for the knowledge and skills of librarians, and the true potential of libraries, to be visible and relevant.

— Wendy Newman, *Library Advocacy Unshushed* (2015)

The “Ladder of Engagement”

It’s important that everyone in your community understands and believes in the incredible value that libraries bring to your community. These individuals can become partners and advocates for your library.

Think about how you invite community members to increase their engagement as library supporters. The metaphorical “Ladder of Engagement” suggests starting with something small, like following your library on social media or visiting a branch and increasing engagement over time.

Learn More

[The Engagement Ladder Theory](#)

[Read “Digital organizing 101: What is a ladder of engagement and why do I need one?”, 2016 article by Jack Milroy for Medium.com.](#)

[Read “Using the Ladder of Engagement: Turning Casual Supporters into Fierce Advocates.”](#)

Engagement for Frontline Workers

If you work on the frontlines of a library, you are already an essential team member in advocating for libraries as both a professional and as an individual.

At work, you are the face of the library and have the power to shape individuals’ perceptions of the library’s value to the community. Excellent service to users – whether customers, students, or institutional staff – is a crucial part of building positive relationships and trust at the individual level.

Relationships are the essence of advocacy. Keep it positive! Put the library’s best foot forward by showing off your love for the work that you do.

At work and at home, you can harness the power of word-of-mouth by sharing outcomes and positive impact stories when at work and when out in the community. These stories do make a difference!

Listen for stories about the impact of libraries across all sectors, so that you can share these stories in your community and in your organization.

TIP

Show Off Your Library Love

Show your library pride! Wear or carry library-themed items like tees, pins, stickers, and tote bags to spark conversations wherever you go.