

INTRODUCTION

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Advocacy is a planned, deliberate, sustained effort to raise awareness of an issue or issues. Advocacy is thus an ongoing process whereby support and understanding are built incrementally over an extended period of time.

– Canadian Association of Public Libraries (CAPL), Library Advocacy Now! Toolkit

What Is Advocacy?

No matter what type of library you are involved with – Academic, Public, School, Health, Special – support from your local stakeholders, decision-makers, and leaders is essential to ensuring that you and your library have the resources and connections you need.

Advocacy Is About:

- Building positive relationships with stakeholders, decision-makers and local leaders;
- Demonstrating how your library is an important asset to your community, school, or institution; and
- Raising awareness about what your library needs and the challenges you face.

Advocacy Is a Spectrum: Small “a” vs. Big “A” Advocacy

When people think of advocacy, they often picture large public campaigns or meetings with government officials. In reality, advocacy takes many forms, and both small “a” and big “A” advocacy play important roles in strengthening libraries.

Small “a” Advocacy

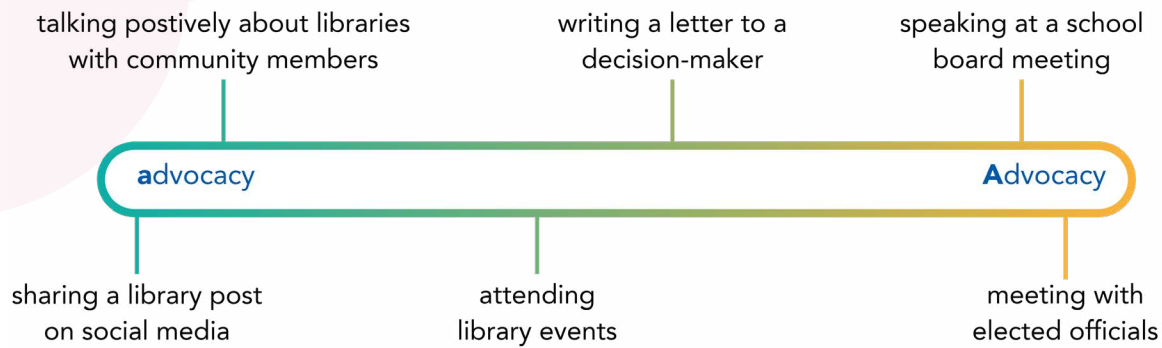
Small “a” advocacy happens in everyday moments. It includes the conversations you have with patrons, students or colleagues, the relationships you build within your organization and broader networks, and the ways you highlight the value of your library’s services in your daily work. These actions may feel informal, but they are foundational, shaping how people understand and support libraries over time.

Big “A” Advocacy

Big “A” advocacy is more formal and often more visible. It involves engaging with decision-makers, contributing to policy discussions, participating in campaigns, or speaking publicly about library issues at the municipal, provincial, or national level. This type of advocacy can influence funding, legislation, and system-wide change.

Both forms of advocacy are interconnected. Strong small “a” advocacy builds the trust and stories that make big “A” advocacy more effective. Whether you’re sharing a success story with a community member or meeting with an elected official, you are contributing to a broader culture of advocacy that helps libraries thrive.

The Spectrum of Advocacy



Why Do Libraries Need Advocates?

Libraries continue to be among our most trusted and valued institutions and are an essential part of our social infrastructure. Yet in today's social, political, and economic climate, that broad public support cannot be taken for granted.

In recent years, libraries have become more visible sites of public debate, particularly around issues of intellectual freedom and collection development. At the same time, economic constraints are straining public resources, and libraries are often asked to do more with less. Increasing political pressures, misunderstanding of the library's role and value, and competing institutional priorities make advocacy more important than ever.

Advocacy helps ensure that decision-makers and communities:

- Understand your impact
- See your relevance to priorities
- Recognize the consequences of underinvestment

Whether through everyday conversations or coordinated efforts, advocates play a critical role in ensuring that libraries remain resilient, responsive, and accessible to all.

Advocacy Is Part of the Job — For Everyone

Whether you are a library CEO, frontline worker, school library professional, or solo librarian, everyone has a role to play in advocating for libraries. **Advocacy will look different depending on your context**, your community, and your place within it. As you consider your role, it can be helpful to reflect on questions such as: *What is my position? Whose story am I telling? How can I ensure my voice supports and amplifies others?* At times, this may mean stepping forward to lead; at others, it may mean creating space or supporting someone else to be heard.

Know Your Context

Advocacy looks different depending on where you work.

- External advocacy: engaging government, funders, and the public (public, school)
- Internal advocacy: influencing leadership within an institution (academic, health, special)
- Community-led advocacy: working with your community to shape priorities (First Nation Public Libraries)

Some Examples of Advocacy:

1. A school library collaborates with its local public library to send a meeting request to their local Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP) to talk about the role of the libraries in the community.
2. A frontline staff member shares a story about how a seniors' program recently helped participants learn to identify AI-generated content online.
3. A school library professional prepares a report for administration showing how their new literacy programming contributed to improved EQAO scores by 10% the following year.
4. A library encourages their local City Council to pass a resolution in support of an increase in provincial funding for libraries during Canadian Library Month.
5. An academic library collaborates with faculty to embed research support into coursework, strengthening the library's role in instruction and student achievement.
6. A hospital library tracked a 40% increase in literature search requests during a clinical redesign and used the data in a budget meeting to demonstrate its role in supporting patient care.
7. A librarian informs Band Council of a provincial award they received for their programming to demonstrate the library's recognized impact beyond the community.
8. A library shares a social media post about a job seeker who used library resources and staff support to apply for work and secure an interview.

Feeling Nervous About Advocacy?

It's completely normal to feel nervous when stepping into advocacy work. For many, it doesn't come naturally; it's a skill that develops over time with practice and experience. You don't have to have all the answers or feel completely confident to get started.

What matters is that library voices are in the room when decisions are being made. Your perspective, shaped by your work and community, is valuable and your voice matters.

Remember, advocacy is planned, deliberate, and sustained over time, making it something you can practice both individually and collectively to build your confidence!

Your Association's Role in Advocating for Libraries

You and your library are not alone in your advocacy efforts.

Associations like the Ontario Library Association (OLA) have a role to play in supporting advocacy at the provincial level.

Currently, OLA is working with provincial partners like the [Federation of Ontario Public Libraries \(FOPL\)](#), [The Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario \(TALCO\)](#), and others to support advocacy issues impacting libraries.

OLA has a **V.I.P.** approach to advocacy: help members demonstrate the **Value** of libraries, **Influence** decision-making, and positively **Position** libraries and the people who work for them.

What are we doing?

OLA and FOPL work with a government relations firm to develop long-term relationships with decision-makers at a provincial level. In consultation with the library sector, we are working together to develop strategic advocacy priorities. Some examples of OLA's provincial advocacy work include:

- Coordinating Library Day at Queen's Park (an advocacy day where we facilitate meetings between library sector representatives and MPPs);
- Coordinating advocacy around Ontario's annual provincial budget process, including organizing deputations before the Minister of Finance and the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs; submitting a written submission; and arranging meetings with MPPs and provincial ministers;
- Exhibiting at meetings and conferences such as [Association of Municipalities of Ontario \(AMO\)](#), [Administrators of Medium Sized Public Libraries of Ontario \(AMPLO\)](#), [Administrators of Rural and Urban Public Libraries of Ontario \(ARUPLO\)](#), [Rural Ontario Municipalities Association \(ROMA\)](#), and more;
- Conducting research to support and strengthen advocacy efforts, such as examining the impact of school libraries on student success;
- Training and empowering our members to be sector advocates through resources such as this toolkit, education sessions, and volunteer opportunities to delegate and meet with elected officials;
- And much more!

TIP

Advocacy is a long-term process of relationship building

Advocacy relies on stores of trust built up over time. The best way to accomplish this is to develop a personal, convivial relationship with members of your community and with decision-makers.

Federal Advocacy

For advocacy issues with a national scope, the [Canadian Federation of Library Associations / Fédération canadienne des associations de bibliothèques \(CFLA- FCAB\)](#) is our voice. The Federation was established to facilitate collaboration in library advocacy at the federal level. OLA is a member of CFLA. OLA also works with other national organizations on federal advocacy issues, such as [The Partnership, Canadian Urban Libraries Council \(CULC\)](#) and Canadian School Libraries (CSL).