

MEETING WITH POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES

For some types of libraries, meeting with your local representative is a great way to build a relationship and to educate them on the positive impacts of libraries and issues confronting the sector.

In general, your representatives want to get to know the important stakeholders in their communities – *that's you* – and will appreciate your perspective and the opportunity to learn about how they can be a champion for you.

Your first meeting with a new political representative should be a meet and greet:

- Take some time to ask questions
- Get to know their interests and values
- Listen carefully to their language, priorities, and constraints to better frame your message.

Be sure to highlight the ways in which the library supports the priorities that are important to the person with whom you are meeting. Come prepared with two to three impact stories that illustrate your work in action. This will help ground your message in real experiences and make it more meaningful.

TIP

People Do Things for Their Own Reasons, Not Ours

In order to be an effective advocate, **it is important to adapt your message to the concerns of your audience and consider their perspective.** Take some time to learn about your local leader and their priorities, values and interests. How does your library align with their political and/or personal priorities? As you start to build your relationship with your local representative, focus on how the library is contributing solutions to issues you know are already important to the leaders in your area.

TIP

Get Creative

Inviting a local leader to participate in a story time or an event is a memorable and fun introduction to your library. It is also a great photo op, allowing both of you to share on social media. October, Canadian Library Month, is an excellent opportunity to do this. Invite your local representative to a Canadian School Library Day or Ontario Public Library Week event at your library. See the section on Leveraging Canadian Library Month for more.

HOW TO: Make the Most of Informal Meetings and Encounters

If you run into your local representative at your library, school, or a local event, be sure to take the opportunity to engage and educate them on the role libraries are playing in your community.

You can advocate for your institution and your profession by preparing a clear and engaging elevator pitch. Practice your pitch so you're always ready to take advantage of a chance to make your case.

These informal meetings are invaluable for fostering a positive, personal relationship with an individual who may become your next representative on your local/municipal Council or the School Board.

Be sure to get their contact information and follow up afterwards. Make sure they know you're always available to answer questions!

TIP

Practise the 27-9-3 framework for your elevator pitch

In no more than 27 words and 9 seconds, communicate no more than 3 key points.

TEMPLATE: [Download the Elevator Pitch Template](#) →

DO

- ✓ **Consult your organization's leadership:** Before you engage your library in any advocacy activity, be sure that your leadership is on board and that your message is consistent with the position of your organization.
- ✓ **Stay focused:** We are most effective when we have a clear and unified message on the necessity of increased support for libraries.

The OLA works with the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and a government relations firm to develop long-term advocacy plans for public and school libraries. These advocacy goals and plans are developed with Ontario's library sector. Please ensure that any local outreach you are doing aligns with [OLA and FOPL's ongoing messaging](#).

- ✓ **Be positive:** Libraries are providing critical services to your community, school or institution. As you engage, position libraries as contributing solutions and value.
- ✓ **Organize and be inclusive:** A well-organized meeting or event should be one where everyone is welcome. When appropriate, think about what people with barriers to participation might need – and how you can help address these.
- ✓ **Prepare:** Do your homework. Your impact will be most significant when you're able to connect our overall messaging with your local perspective and insight.
- ✓ **Get social:** Don't forget to take a picture to share on social media.

Remember: social media is a tool for engagement, not only promotion. Be creative and don't be afraid to engage in dialogue with your community and political leaders. See the section on Social Media below for more tips on using social media for advocacy.

- ✓ **Thank you:** After a meeting or event, send thank-you letters, including a contact person for further questions.

DON'T

- ✗ Ask for priorities that are outside the scope of government. See the Resources section for information on how each level of government impacts each library sector.
- ✗ Be combative.
- ✗ Make partisan statements.

In ridings that span a large geographical area, it may not be practical for all stakeholders to participate in in-person meetings.

Designate a representative to meet in the community easiest for you MPP to access – often where he or she lives or works.

Where possible, consider opportunities to include stakeholders in your meetings remotely – through video conference solutions.

What Does It Mean to Be Non-Partisan?

Partisan political activity is the direct or indirect promotion of a political party, or the direct or indirect opposition to a political party.

As representatives of the library sector, we need you to talk about and share information about our issues – which do not favour or criticize a specific political party – and foster discussion about these important matters. This is especially important during election periods, when maintaining a non-partisan approach helps ensure the credibility of both you and the library sector, and reinforces that our advocacy is focused on community impact—not political alignment. We believe strongly – and we can demonstrate – that libraries positively impact a broad cross-section of Ontarians in every community across the province.

As a sector, we have and will continue to work collaboratively and constructively with representatives of all political parties to achieve meaningful change benefitting our libraries and communities.

HOW TO: Request a Meeting with Your Local Political Representative

BEFORE YOUR MEETING

1. Ask

- Ask in person, call, email, or send a letter introducing yourself, your role and the importance of libraries.
- Request a meeting to discuss further.
- Negotiate a date, time, and location for the meeting. Let the staff know how much time you would like (shorter meetings are always more practical than longer ones) and be prepared to shorten the session if need be.

2. Prepare

- Once the meeting is confirmed, put together a team to attend the meeting. The larger the team, the more organized you'll need to be at the meeting. Where relevant, it's helpful to have a mix of staff, leaders (e.g., board members), and, if possible, beneficiaries of your service or activities who can provide personal stories of how key issues impact them and how solutions are supporting or will support them.
- Review your key message and your ask – most local leaders will expect you to have a request of some kind for them.
- The size of the group will guide how long individuals can speak. In general, keep the individual presentations to a maximum of three minutes each. More experienced members can help others to organize what they will say. Identify a "chair" for the meeting, someone to start the meetings and help keep the conversation on track.
- Identify someone to take notes, so everyone has the results of the meeting on paper.
- Familiarize yourself with your local representative by reviewing biographical information and any recent media coverage, especially if you do not have an existing relationship.
- Stories strengthen your message. Think of your own examples to convey the impact of libraries on individuals and families in the local community and/or schools.

In some cases, you may wish to keep your meeting one-on-one. It can be easier to develop a relationship with your local representative in a smaller, more personal meeting.

In many cases, OLA and FOPL will have materials prepared with key messages and specific provincial "asks" for the school and public library sectors. Get in touch!

3. Inform

- Tell your representative's staff who will attend the meeting.
- If you are meeting with a provincial representative, let OLA know about your meeting – it helps us coordinate province-wide advocacy to know what is happening at the local level. You can help keep us informed by emailing lkwok@accessola.com.

DURING YOUR MEETING

4. Meet

- Arrive on time and go in as a team.
- Have the chair open the meeting, thank your local representative and briefly outline the purpose of the meeting and the agenda. All participants should introduce themselves. From there, the chair should manage the agenda, making way for the speaker for each item. The representative or their staff may ask questions of individual speakers and the chair should be able to subtly keep the agenda on track.
- Draw upon your own personal experiences and use local examples.
- Be passionate and respectful, not argumentative and confrontational. Listen carefully, seek to understand different perspectives, and respond thoughtfully.
- Be prepared to be flexible. Your representative may not have time or want to go through the full agenda. The chair should be direct so that the most important items are discussed.
- Finish by thanking the representative.
- Focus on conveying the importance of Ontario's libraries in a local context.
- It's okay if you don't have an answer to a question in the moment. You can offer to follow up with the information after the meeting.
- Leave behind some materials and/or swag, with your business card. An effective leave-behind is short and to the point – outlining just your key messages/your ask.
- Thank them for their time, provide a contact person for further questions or information, and indicate that you will follow up.

AFTER YOUR MEETING

5. Follow up

- Send a thank you letter and include any follow up information that you promised.
- You may be asked in the future to follow up by email and phone with your local representative to seek additional support or to request further information.

Providing a written copy of the "ask" helps them to remember you and to be advocates for you and your interests.

If possible, take a photo with your local representative to share on social media. This is a great opportunity for both your local representative and the library.

Templates

TEMPLATE: [Local Representative Meeting Request Email](#) →

TEMPLATE: [Crafting a Value Statement and Elevator Pitch](#) →

TEMPLATE: [Crafting Your Ask](#) →

Advocating During Elections

Elections are a critical opportunity for the library sector to engage political parties and candidates and secure their support in addressing the key challenges facing libraries and the individuals and communities who rely on them. The goal of election engagement is to highlight the vital role of libraries, while raising awareness of the priorities and issues facing the sector.

What Can You Do?

1. Meet with Candidates or Campaign Staff

Meeting with candidates or their campaign teams is one of the most effective ways to build relationships and raise awareness about the value of libraries. These conversations provide an opportunity to share local perspectives, highlight community impact, and position libraries as essential to learning, economic development, and community well-being. Even brief meetings can help establish ongoing connections and identify future champions for libraries.

2. Write or Email Local Candidates

If meeting in person isn't possible, reaching out by email or letter is a valuable alternative. A short, clear message that outlines key priorities and includes a question or call to action can help you understand where candidates stand on issues affecting libraries. Written outreach also ensures your message is documented and can serve as a reference point after the election.

3. Engage through Social Media

Social media is a powerful tool for raising awareness and amplifying your message during an election. Share stories, data, and examples that highlight the impact of libraries in your community. Tag candidates, connect your message to local priorities, and use consistent messaging to help ensure your voice is part of the broader public conversation.

4. Participate in Community Events and Candidate Forums

Town halls, debates, and community events offer valuable opportunities to engage candidates in public settings. Asking thoughtful questions and raising library-related issues helps increase visibility and encourages candidates to consider libraries as part of their platform. These moments also help demonstrate that libraries are a priority for the communities they serve.

5. Make the Most of Informal Engagement Opportunities

Not all interactions need to be formal. Casual encounters—at events, in the community, or within your library—can be meaningful opportunities to introduce yourself, share key messages, and build rapport. These brief conversations can leave a lasting impression and open the door for future engagement.

Learn More

Read [“Librarian as Candidate.”](#)

Read [“From Awareness to Funding: Voter Perceptions and Support of Public Libraries in 2018.”](#)

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