

Advocacy with Political Leaders

One way to advocate for the interests of your library is to engage directly with your local political representative.

Reaching out to your local MPP, Municipal Councillor or other local leader can be intimidating, but remember, 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.

TIPS: Developing relationships with your political representatives is a long-term process

If you have a new MPP, Municipal Councillor or other local leader, it is important to build up trust over time and to demonstrate that you are a valuable ally to them. The best way to accomplish this is to develop a personal relationship.

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.

***Adapt your message:** Take some time to learn about your local leader and their values. How does your library align with their political and/or personal priorities?*

As you introduce yourself and share the role that your library plays in the community or school, be sure to highlight the ways in which the library supports those priorities. This might include the programs that you run, the resources you make available to your community, and the impact on these have on the community.

***Get creative:** Inviting a local leader to participate in a story time or event is a memorable and fun introduction to your library. It's also a great photo op, allowing both you and them to have a positive social media moment.*

If you work in a library, you can show off the work that you are doing with a visit to your location and a library tour. This provides further opportunities to highlight the wonderful, new, and fun things going on at your library.

DOs and DON'Ts

✓ DOs

- ✓ **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 Ontario Library Association works with the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and a government relations firm to develop long-term advocacy plans for public 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 & 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:** Demonstrate what we already know – libraries get the digital world and new ways of communicating.

When using social media, remember, this 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.

X DON'Ts

- × Ask for priorities that are outside the [scope of government](#).
- × Be combative
- × Make partisan statements

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 – and foster discussion about these important matters. 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

For school, public and First Nation public libraries, meeting with your local representative, whether they are your MPP, Municipal Councillor, Band Council, School Board Trustee or other representative is a great way to build a relationship and to educate them on the positive impacts of libraries and issues confronting the sector.

Start by following these simple steps:

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, 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 people.

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 intimate meeting.

- Review your key message and your ask – most local leaders will expect you to have a request of some kind for them.

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

- 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 who will start the meetings off and help keep the conversation on track.
- Ask a volunteer 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.

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 fill out [this short form](#).

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.
- Be prepared to be flexible. Your representative may not have time or want to go through the full agenda. The chair should be able to cut to the chase 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.
- Remember that it's okay to say "I don't know" if you're asked a question that you can't answer. 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 can be short, sweet and to the point – outlining just your key messages/your ask.

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

- Thank them for their time, provide a contact person for further questions or information, and indicate that you will be following up.

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

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.

TIP: People do things for their own reasons, not ours

In order to be an effective advocate, it is important adapt your message to the concerns of your audience. Do some research about your local leadership to understand their priorities, their interests and their needs. As you start to build your relationship with local leaders, focus on what the library can do to further their priorities.

This could be:

- *Increasing community safety,*
- *Engaging at risk youth,*
- *Increasing economic prosperity,*
- *Streamlining public services,*
- *Etc.*

Focus on how the library is contributing solutions and value in areas you already know are important to the leaders in your area.

TEMPLATE: Local Representative Meeting Request Email

This template has been written from the Public Library perspective, but can be adapted as needed to reflect other library sectors

Subject: Meeting Request - [local library name]

Dear [name of local representative or staff person],

In my capacity as [role] of the [local library name], I would like to request a meeting to update you on the value that public and school libraries provide in [COMMUNITY].

Libraries are Ontario's farthest-reaching, most cost-effective resource for empowering positive change in education, community economic development and poverty reduction. As [title/role] of [organization/library], I've seen first-hand how our public and school libraries in [community] contribute to our community. [Provide any local examples if appropriate]. This meeting is an opportunity to discuss the importance of [local library name] in [COMMUNITY].

Please feel free to contact me to coordinate or if you have any questions: [email] or [phone].

Thank you,

[name and role]

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 your local representative.

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

Questions or Feedback?

Email Sarah Roberts at sroberts@accessola.com

Or

Fill in [this feedback form!](#)