

## Get to Know your Representatives

The more you know about a legislator or official, the more effective you can be in communicating the library message and ensuring a successful outcome from your advocacy efforts.

Some legislators are more important than others because they control more votes, sit on important committees, are members of the governing body's power structure or leadership or are considered experts in a particular area. When deciding which legislators to approach, always ask yourself who can make or break this piece of legislation.

Policymakers who hold appointments on critical committees should be targeted first. After all, if your bill doesn't make it out of committee, it will never be voted on. Committees that often consider issues that affect libraries include:

- Ways and Means
- Appropriations
- Education
- Urban Affairs
- Judicial
- Commerce

## Shaping the Message

To be effective, your message should show how the proposed legislation or policy benefits or harms the lawmaker's constituents. Be clear about what you are asking (vote for or against a particular measure, persuade other committee members to support your side, co-sponsor a bill, or sign on to a Dear Colleague letter).

## Who can be most effective?

Selecting the best person to deliver your message can make the difference as to whether you are successful. Smart legislative advocates know which legislators are most influential on any given issue. They also know the names of those who are in a position to influence the legislator. The most important person to any elected official is a **voting constituent**.

Other important people are:

- Campaign donors
- Local civic and business leaders
- Editors of local media who shape editorial opinions and news coverage
- Potential candidates who may oppose lawmakers in future elections
- Individuals who have had a positive impact on his or her life

Libraries have just about every kind of person imaginable as users and supporters. Just as politicians rank the importance of certain constituency groups in terms of their value, we need to do the same in order to know who can best champion our cause.