

Speak Out

For any advocacy campaign to work, there must be spokespeople who are knowledgeable and skilled in delivering the library message. That spokesperson may vary with the audience and medium. Every library should have a policy that defines who speaks for the library and when. The library's chief spokesperson on policy matters is generally the library director or board president. Heads of departments, such as youth services or reference, may be designated spokespeople in their areas of expertise. Librarians and other staff are generally most effective when speaking as authorities on library and information services and as "expert witnesses" who know and understand the needs of library users. Trustees, Friends and library users can be especially useful when giving testimony before public officials. The president of the Friends or library advocates' network may be asked to address specific issues. In the broadest sense, all library advocates are spokespeople, whether they are speaking to their neighbors, fellow students or faculty or religious groups. Many people are naturally gifted at speaking with the media or to groups. Not everyone is good at both. Try to use your spokespeople where they feel most comfortable and can be most effective. Media and spokesperson training can help build their confidence and polish presentation skills. Whoever speaks for the library should feel prepared and enthusiastic about doing so.

Telling the Library Story

A few carefully chosen statistics can be impressive, but stories bring the library message to life. The most valuable stories are not about what the library does. They are about the people who use and benefit from our libraries. They are the inventor who did his research at the university library, the student who talks online to a scientist at the North Pole, and the grandmother who sees her new grandchild for the first time online at her library. Library advocates have their own stories about how the library has made a difference in their lives. Thank you letters can be a good source of library stories. So can Friends and users. One library asked library school students to spend a Saturday interviewing library users. Every library should have cards placed strategically to make it easy for patrons to share their "success stories." Some people thanked ALA for sponsoring its "Libraries Change Lives" contest and giving them an opportunity to share their stories. Sharing these stories in testimony before governing bodies, interviews with reporters or conversations with the college president, school principal and other leaders is one of the most powerful ways to make the case for library support. Stories can also be a dramatic way to open or close a speech.

Tips

- Keep it simple, brief and personal.
- Have a beginning, middle and end.
- Have a good "punchline."
- Do not use real names unless you have been given permission.

Example

The children's book *Dinosaurs Divorce* was challenged in one library by a parent who felt it might be distressing to children. However, one little girl wrote a letter to her library saying that book helped her to stop crying because it made her realize that she wasn't responsible for her parents getting divorced. What if that little girl hadn't been able to read that book?!