

ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



PREPARED BY

ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION'S ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

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Ontario Libraries: Advocacy Toolkit

Purpose

This toolkit was created to increase the capacity of OLA members, from all library sectors, to advocate for their libraries and to broaden the community of library advocates in Ontario. This toolkit aims to provide guidance as to how to advocate effectively and link to additional resources for members who wish to learn more.

Vision

OLA members are informed and empowered to secure greater support for and understanding of libraries, and in line with the OLA Government Relations plan.

Acknowledgements

Content in this toolkit has been adapted from a number of resources, including the Canadian Association of Public Libraries (CAPL) Library Advocacy Now! Toolkit (2011), Wendy Newman's Advocacy Unshushed MOOC (2015), the Ontario Non-Profit Network's Elections Toolkit (2018), and the Ontario Library Associations Elections Toolkit (2018).

It was prepared by members of Advocacy Committee and OLA staff, with gratitude to members of OLA's Councils and Board of Directors, the Special Libraries Committee, the Indigenous Task Group, as well as Wendy Newman, Margie Singleton and Kate Johnson-McGregor for their feedback and guidance.

Advocacy Committee Members

Co-Chair: Dana Vanzanten (Public Library)
Co-Chair: Jesse Carliner (Academic Library – University)
Sherry Lawson (First Nation Public Library)
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Kerry Badgely, OLA President 2018

and

Ex-Officio members

Shelagh Paterson, Executive Director, OLA
Sarah Roberts, Advocacy & Research Officer, OLA

Something to add?

If you have questions, comments, or ideas for topics not covered in this toolkit, you can always fill in [this feedback form](#)!

INTRODUCTION

What is advocacy?

No matter what type of library you are involved with – Academic, Public, School, 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;
- Promoting your library as an important asset to your community, school, or institution; and
- Raising awareness about what your library needs and the issues you face.

Why do libraries need advocates?

Though libraries continue to be viewed positively by most users, community members and stakeholders, libraries cannot live on love alone! It is important to continue to demonstrate the **value and relevancy** of your libraries – whether to government, within school boards, within your unions, within your institutions, or across your communities.

You mean this is my job?

Yes, whether you are a library CEO, front-line worker, school library staff member, teacher-librarian, solo-librarian, or self-employed, everyone has a role to play in advocating for your libraries. Advocacy will look different for individuals in different contexts.

Some examples of advocacy:

1. Local public and school libraries collaborating to **meet with the local Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP)** to talk about the role of the libraries in the community.
2. **Prepare a report** highlighting the impact of work in the library learning commons to advance school goals and meet with administration
3. Front-line workers **sharing outcomes and positive impact stories** in conversations at work and in the community.
4. **Encouraging your local City Council to pass a resolution** in support of an increase in provincial funding for libraries.
5. **Sharing stories** on your library's social media of the essential role that the library is playing in your community.

“

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

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 biannual Library Day at Queen's Park;
- Coordinating advocacy around Ontario's annual provincial budget process, including meetings with provincial Ministers of Culture, Tourism and Sport and Education, submissions to the Ministry of Education's 2019-20 Education Funding Guide Consultation, and coordinating OLA members' meetings in local ridings to build province-wide support;
- 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), Chiefs of Ontario (COO), Rural Ontario Municipalities Association (ROMA), and more;
- Conducting research on the impact school libraries have on student success;
- 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.

Speaking with a clear and unified voice

Remember: If you are engaging in advocacy for libraries with MPPs or other provincial stakeholders, it is important that libraries speak with a clear and unified voice. The Ontario Library Association works with the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL), libraries and our government relations firm to develop long-term advocacy plans for school and public libraries. As you undertake advocacy at the local level, you can help by staying connected.

1. **Please ensure that any local outreach you are doing aligns with OLA and FOPL's ongoing messaging.** You can learn more about our latest government relations activities by checking out [our website](#). When in doubt, [reach out to us](#).
2. **Share your successes.** Do you have a great local advocacy initiative that other libraries could benefit from? Share your success with OLA and the sector.
3. **Share your concerns.** Have an advocacy concern that OLA and FOPL are not currently addressing? Let us know!

Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA)

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.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Decision-makers are much more likely to be receptive to your advocacy efforts if you are already known and trusted by them. It is important to invest the time developing a personal relationship with members of your community and with decision-makers.

The pitfalls of Sloganeering

"In the library community, we talk a lot about the need for advocacy, and we have assembled great 'talking points' and slogans. We talk about the library as the 'heart of the community' or the 'crossroads of the university.' We say that the library is the preschool child's door to reading and learning. We like to remind people that libraries are about more than just books and journals that go in and out. We present the school library as the way to achieve better standardized test scores, reminding them that, according to research, in the clear and compact sound bite of the American Association of School Libraries, 'Student achievement is the bottom line.' We tweet and blog and email these lines, all of which are true, into a busy and preoccupied world, and we hope some will take root.

We're making a big mistake if we assume these slogans and gestures are going to safeguard the future of libraries and librarianship. They are simply promotional communications. In the marketing business, as my colleague Ken Haycock says, this scattershot approach is referred to as 'spray and pray' – a phrase marketers borrowed from the military. That is, send out as many communications as possible, and hope they will take root somewhere. It doesn't work in marketing, and it won't work for us and for our communities, either. It's not focused, it's not strategic, and it doesn't build relationships with the people in the community who make the decisions about libraries or influence those who do."

— Wendy Newman, *Library Advocacy Unshushed* (2015)

Learn More:

Learn: *Library Advocacy Unshushed MOOC* (Massively Open Online Course). 2015. Wendy Newman.

Watch: *Influence*. 2012. Robert Cialdini.

Read: *Principles of Persuasion*. 2006. Robert Cialdini.

Know your audience and align your messaging with their priorities

Whether you are doing individual outreach or developing a social media campaign, having a clear picture of your audience, their needs and their interests is essential. Ask yourself first:

1. **Who is your target audience?** Who do you want to reach?
2. **What do you know about them?** What are their priorities? What are their interests?
3. **How does or can the library support these priorities?**

Get to know your decision-makers:

Each library sector has a different set of stakeholders and decision-makers. Some possibilities for your context may be:

- Public libraries → your local MPP, Municipal Councillor, Band Council, or other local leader.
- School libraries → your principal, superintendent, school board trustees, professional organizations, unions, subject matter association.
- Academic libraries → your institution's administration.
- For special libraries → your director, your client, etc.

If you are advocating for your library **within your institution, like a university or college library, or a special library**, get to know your administration's strategic priorities. Find ways that the library can or already does align its offerings with those priorities.

For **school libraries** this includes the latest **Ministry curriculum documents** as well as your school or school boards achievement plan.

Similarly, if you are seeking to increase **local community support for your library**, think about the decision-maker you are trying to reach. This may be your local MPP or Municipal Council, members of the public or a community organization.

Tip: Get Help

If you are planning on undertaking a large scale advocacy campaign, you may consider enlisting the services of an outside agency, such as a government relations firm, marketing agency or consultant. These can help with the planning and implementation and increase the impact of your advocacy.

Whatever the priority, the library has a role to play:

Increasing student retention,
Improving math scores,
Fostering evidence-based service-delivery,
Increasing community safety,
Engaging at risk youth,
And much more.

Align your messaging to respond to the priorities of your local decision-makers.

Advocacy Issue Worksheet

Remember! If you are engaging in advocacy for public libraries with MPPs or other provincial stakeholders, it's important that libraries speak with a clear and unified voice.

Please ensure that any local outreach you are doing aligns with OLA and FOPL's ongoing messaging.

The Ontario Library Association works with the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, OLA and FOPL members, and a government relations firm to develop long-term advocacy plans for public libraries.

When in doubt, reach out. Have an advocacy concern that OLA and FOPL aren't currently addressing? Connect with Sarah Roberts, Advocacy and Research Officer at the Ontario Library Association, to tell us about it: sroberts@accessola.com.

If you are working on an advocacy issue at a local level that does not have a provincial focus, you can use these questions to plan your own advocacy response.

1. What is the issue?

2. Issue breakdown:

a. Why is it important (not just to us but to our audience)?

b. Who is being impacted?

c. What are the challenges as a result of this issue?

d. When did this start?

Template Continues on Next Page

TEMPLATE: ADVOCACY ISSUE WORKSHEET

3. What data or research is there around this issue? See the resources section for some good resources to get you started.

4. What is the preferred outcome?

5. Who are your partners?

6. Who are decision-makers/stakeholders?

7. What does success look like? How will your advocacy efforts be evaluated?

MEETING WITH POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES

For some types of 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.

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.

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 the priorities that are important to the person with whom you are meeting. This might include the programs that you run, the resources you make available to your community, and the impact on their constituents.

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.

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: 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. 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 local decision-maker, focus on how the library is contributing solutions and value in areas you know are already important to the leaders in your area.

TIP:

See page 16 for a template on Crafting a Value Statement and Elevator Pitch

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 Ontario Library Association works with the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries and a government relations firm to develop long-term advocacy plans for 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

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. 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

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 filling 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 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 to say "I don't know" if you're asked a question that you cannot 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 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.

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.

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.

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]

Crafting a Value Statement

Fill in the blanks!

Our _____

helps _____

who want to _____

by _____

Elevator Pitch – The Value of the Library

Your pitch should succinctly answer these questions:

1. Who are you? Why are you a credible voice on this issue?
2. What does your library do, and who benefits?
3. Why does it matter? What is the impact on your community?
4. (If applicable) What support do you need, and what will you do with that support?

TIP: Draw upon your own personal experiences, and use local examples to help show the impact of libraries in your community.

ADVOCATING IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Libraries of all types are, at their core, public-oriented service-organizations. Advocating for your library should not be limited to engaging with high-level decision-makers at occasional meetings – it's about being deeply embedded in your community and fostering relationships with library staff, volunteers, users, community partners, and stakeholders.

One way you can advocate for yourself and your library is by being an active, collaborative member of the community. The library can provide value in your community in a wide range of ways. Providing meeting space to host community events, dedicated library display space to upcoming events, and retweeting promotions from partners are all ways to support the development of partnerships, while also increasing awareness of the library.

In a school library, this could mean being an active supporter of classroom teachers in the implementation of new technologies and supporting the school or board achievement plan.

In an academic library, this could be attending faculty meetings across departments or engaging with student groups to support upcoming initiatives or events.

In a special library, this could be reaching out to colleagues to educate them on the resources available to them at the library.

In a public library, this may mean establishing new partnerships with community organizations like **Indigenous Friendship Centres**, community associations, hospitals, Business Improvement Area (BIA) groups, and social service agencies.

When you are embedded in your community, you are poised to respond in real time to concerns as they develop.

“

It is essential to anchor library advocacy, not in a goal of great libraries, but in a goal of great communities, however that community is defined. This (1) is a strong ethical starting point and (2) positions the library advocate as being in the community business, and therefore more supportable, than being strictly in the library business.

Wendy Newman

Make sure that you are at the table

“To cultivate those relationships with the decision-makers and influencers, advocates have to be ‘at the table’ ... when the issues are raised and analyzed and solutions worthy of support are proposed. This is where the library’s resources and services are leveraged to improve the quality of life and experiences in our communities.”

“The more deeply and productively embedded librarians are in the actual activity of community, whether it is research and development, the development of family literacy improvement strategies, or the work of teaching in a school, the greater the opportunity for the knowledge and skills of librarians, and the true potential of libraries, to be visible and relevant.”

— **Wendy Newman, Library Advocacy Unshushed (2015)**

The “Ladder of Engagement”

It’s important that everyone in your community understands and believes in the incredible value that libraries bring to your community. These individuals can become partners and advocates for your library.

Think about how you invite community members to increase their engagement as library supporters. The metaphorical “Ladder of Engagement” suggests starting with something small, like following your library on social media or visiting a branch and increasing engagement over time.

Engagement for front-line workers

If you work on the front-lines of a library, you are already an essential team member in advocating for libraries as both a professional and as an individual.

At work, you are the face of the library, and have power to shape individuals’ perceptions of the library’s value to the community. Excellent customer service is a crucial part of building positive relationships and perceptions at the individual level with the public. The service you give and the stories you share shape people’s view of the library and its value to the community.

Relationships are the essence of advocacy. Keep it positive! Put the library’s best foot forward by showing off your love for the work that you do.

At work and at home, you can harness the power of word-of-mouth by sharing outcomes and positive impact stories when at work and when out in the community. These stories do make a difference!

Listen for stories about the impact of library services, so that you can share these stories in your community and in your organization.

TIP: Show off your library love

Sport your library swag - your stickers, tote bags and pins can start a conversation wherever you go.

Learn more:

Read “Digital organizing 101: What is a ladder of engagement and why do I need one?”, 2016 article by Jack Milroy for Medium.com.

Read “Using the Ladder of Engagement: Turning Casual Supporters into Fierce Advocates.”

Learn more:

Read “Librarian as Candidate.”

Read “From Awareness to Funding: Voter Perceptions and Support of Public Libraries in 2018.”

Follow: EveryLibrary Twitter

COMMUNICATIONS

Whether your communications are supported by a team of experts or off the side of your desk, strategic communications is a key component of advocacy.

HOW TO: Make the most of social media

You can help raise the profile of your library through your social media engagement. A tweet or a Facebook post can be used to share the impact of libraries in your community, to demonstrate your support for libraries, or raise awareness of the issues confronting the sector.

DO

- ✓ Be FUN, be moving, be inspirational – make people feel something about what they are hearing.
- ✓ Be visual – make the most of good photos, GIFs and video to capture attention.
- ✓ Keep it current – use social media to share and respond to developing news stories.

Setting up Google Alerts for library-related news in your own community is one great way to stay on top of news stories.

- ✓ Engage – use social media to connect with people in your community, not as a one-way messaging board for promoting the library's programming.

Social media is an opportunity to connect with your public and be part of the conversations that matter to your community.

- ✓ Work within larger channels – if you are a smaller public library, or a library within an institution, use your municipality or institution's social media channel.
- ✓ Use hashtags like #ILoveONLibraries #LibraryLove and #LibraryLife to join the bigger conversation of the library community.

DON'T

- ✗ Be combative or negative – use social media to foster positive relationships with your community.
- ✗ Use social media only for announcements. It is great to promote your library's events, but social media should also be about engagement. If you are ONLY using social media to promote your programming and services, you are missing a crucial opportunity to build relationships with your public.
- ✗ Bite off more than you can chew – if you have limited resources to dedicate to social media, choose your engagement wisely. Be selective about which platforms you use, and how and where you post.

Ideas for social media content

- Photos of your library's beautiful spaces
- Highlight items from your special collections
- Give a window into your work with "behind the scenes" content, such as putting together displays, getting new books ready for circulation, etc.
- Photo and video from special events, like author readings and workshops
- Highlight the value and impact of programming with patron stories or profiles
- Link in with current events, like by doing a **"Stacked Poetry" exchange** during playoffs with your city's opponent's library.
- Write articles or keep blogs to share on social media

TIP:

There is some great library-related advocacy content on [@EveryLibrary's Twitter feed](#) and [GeekTheLibrary's Facebook page](#).

Participating in celebrations of libraries

In Canada and Ontario, libraries can also take advantage of Canadian Library Month in November, as well as Ontario Public Library Week and Ontario First Nations Public Library Week in October to celebrate and raise the profiles of their libraries.

The Ontario Library Association develops graphics and taglines free of charge for libraries across the province to use in their communities.

Learn more about Library Celebrations:

[Ontario Public Library Week \(OPLW\)](#)

[First Nations Public Libraries Week \(FNPLW\)](#)

[Canadian Library Month](#)

[Canadian School Library Day / Journée nationale des bibliothèques scolaires](#)

HOW TO: Pitch a story to local media

Every library is full of great stories. Strategic engagement with local media, like such as local cable stations, newspapers, radio/TV stations, local podcasts, and others, is one great method for ensuring those stories reach as many eyes and ears as possible. Before you reach out, find out if your organization has any policy around who can speak to media.

What's your story?

Most media outlets receive far more story pitches than they have space or time to publish. What sets your story apart and makes it interesting enough for readers, listeners or viewers to care? Think back to the storytelling basics.

- **Compelling characters:** Who is your story about? If the story is about a new program, who does this program serve or impact? Who created the program, and what was their motivation? Was a community partner involved? Did one patron's needs spark the idea?
- **Interesting plot:** Most good plots involve some tension, like a challenge or obstacle, and show the characters navigating that tension and achieving resolution or a path forward.
- **Evocative images:** Include good quality photos or video to "illustrate" the story in the mind's eye of the journalist you're pitching.

Who's your audience?

Examine your goals and define your target audience. Do you want parents to understand the role of the library in post-secondary readiness? Raise awareness about a copyright issue impacting academic libraries? For the first story, you might contact a parenting blog, while the second story might be best for a trade publication for lawyers or publishers. Create a shortlist of outlets that reach your target audiences.

Who to reach out to?

Many outlets have a masthead page on their website that lists their staff. For print outlets, look for a reporter and/or section editor focused on your subject area. For broadcast media, skip the host and go directly to the producer(s) of the program, who typically do the work of planning episodes. If you've written an opinion piece yourself, there is often an editor who handles editorials.

Some outlets also have a general inbox for submissions, but it's helpful to contact a specific journalist whenever possible. If the website does not contain their email addresses, try looking them up on Twitter. Many journalists include email addresses in their Twitter bios.

What's your pitch?

Write a short email pitch to your target journalist(s). Feel free to attach a press release if you have one, but this is not always necessary if your email pitch is solid.

Some good media examples:

Steve Paikin's The Agenda episode dedicated to public libraries.

Articles in the Guardian, and much more!

Brantford The Expositor
- **Libraries approve reciprocal borrowing**

CTV News Atlantic -
Halifax libraries join nationwide movement towards free menstrual products

A great email pitch includes the following:

- Strong, concise subject line
- One-sentence summary of the story and your connection to it
- Newsworthy hook (i.e., how does your story connect with current hot topics on social media or in the news?)
- Reason for contacting this particular journalist/outlet
- Possible interviewees and their connection to the story

Pitch Email to Local Media

SUBJECT LINE:

Inter-generational book club brings teens and senior citizens together

EMAIL BODY:

Hello Jennifer,

I'm a youth librarian with Springfield Public Library, where we just launched a book club for tenth graders at Springfield High School and seniors at Hazelton Retirement Community. One major motivation was to reduce isolation among seniors - a big topic of discussion ever since the City Public Health Officer spoke on WKBL radio last week about seniors living with clinical depression.

I loved your piece about the increase in teen volunteerism, so I thought of you right away for this story. We'd love to have you at next Tuesday's club meeting. You're welcome to take photos, and I can arrange interviews with program participants and/or our staff.

Please let me know if you'd like to join us!

Sincerely,

Keisha Adams
Youth Librarian
Springfield Public Library
(555) 555-5555
kadams@springfieldpl.com

BACKGROUND: HOW LIBRARIES ARE FUNDED

School Libraries

- Municipal Jurisdiction: School Trustees (elected)
- Provincial Jurisdiction: Ministry of Education

The Ontario Ministry of Education administers the system of publicly funded elementary and secondary school education.

School boards receive money in two ways. First, some of the property taxes collected in your community go to your local school board. Second, the province tops up this amount to bring the total for each board up to the amount set out by the provincial funding formula. The provincial funding formula takes into account the many factors that make each school board unique. Funding for individual schools is the responsibility of the school boards. Occasionally there are increases to the funding formula for certain initiatives. Currently, the Ministry funding formula funds 1 Elementary Teacher-Librarian per 763 Elementary pupils and 1 Teacher-Librarian per 909 Secondary pupils.

The current funding formula provides school boards with significant flexibility to choose how to spend these funds. It is up to School Trustees to direct allocated funding to support their school libraries.

Public Libraries

- Municipal: Public Library Board Directors (appointed and includes some municipal councillors who are elected)
- Provincial: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport administers the Public Libraries Act and statutory grants under the Act, as well as developing provincial policies for public libraries. Municipal Councils are responsible for appointing public library boards, and provide most of the funding for libraries (municipal tax dollars). A funding formula consists of a mix of provincial and municipal funding based on population sizes.

Municipal Councils are responsible for determining the composition of library boards and for appointing library board trustees immediately following municipal elections and when vacancies occur. Municipal Council can appoint its own members to the public library board, up to one less than 50% of the total number of library board members. The majority of a library board must be comprised of citizens appointed from the community.

First Nations Public Libraries

- Band Councils
- Provincial: Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Federal Education funds

The traditional source of tax revenue for municipal public libraries does not exist for public libraries in First Nations communities. Instead, provincial funding for these libraries is administered by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Sport through the Public Library Operating Grant (PLOG) and the First Nation Salary Supplement Grant (FNSS). These funds provide on average \$15,000/year to each of these existing libraries.

Federal funding for these libraries is taken from funds that are allocated for on-reserve education. Funding levels for on-reserve education are more than 30% lower than off-reserve, leaving little left to establish new libraries. Band Councils are therefore tasked with providing essential support such as rent, hydro, internet, fax and telephone service.

Academic Libraries

- Provincial: Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities

The Minister of Education and the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) are responsible for the administration of laws relating to education and skills training. MTCU is responsible for distributing funds allocated by the provincial legislature to colleges and universities. Colleges and universities are also fee-based. The funding of academic libraries is at the discretion of the academic institution.

RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

We have compiled some resources to get you started. [Let us know](#) what other tools, resources or research you would recommend.

Advocacy

[Library Advocacy Now!](#) (2011) Canadian Association of Public Libraries (CAPL)

[Library Advocacy Unshushed](#) (2017). Wendy Newmans' Massively Open Online Course (MOOC)

[Influence](#) Book by Robert Cialdini (2012)

[Principles of Persuasion](#) Video by Robert Cialdini (2006)

[Valuing Northern Libraries Toolkit](#) - Ontario Library Service - North with Nordik Institute

Digital Advocacy

[Digital organizing 101: What is a ladder of engagement and why do I need one?](#) Jack Milroy, 2016. Medium.com

[Using the Ladder of Engagement: Turning Casual Supporters into Fierce Advocates.](#) Clay Schossow, 2014. New Media Campaign

Library Celebrations

[Canadian School Library Day / Journée nationale des bibliothèques scolaires](#)

[Canadian Library Month](#)

[First Nations Public Libraries Week \(FNPLW\)](#)

[Ontario Public Library Week \(OPLW\)](#)

Library Campaigns and social media

[Geek the Library](#) (by Online Computer Library Center (OCLC))

[Libraries Transform Campaign](#) (by the American Library Association)

Public library impact research

[An Analysis of Public Library Trends](#) (2011) Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC)

[Long overdue: A fresh look at public and leadership attitudes about libraries in the 21st century](#) (2006). Public Agenda.

[Making cities stronger: Public library contributions to local economic development](#) (2007)

[Preschool Early Literacy Programs in Ontario Public Libraries](#) (2012). Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL).

[Technology Access in Public Libraries: Outcomes and Impacts for Ontario Communities](#) (2018). Nordicity and the Toronto Public Library.

Public Library Research by Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)

[How Canadian Libraries Stack Up](#) (2011)

[From Awareness to Funding - A study of library support in America](#) (2008)

[Perceptions of Libraries, 2010 - Context and Community](#) (2010)

[At a tipping point: education, learning and libraries](#) (2014)

Public library economic impact studies

[Burlington Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2017)

[City of Kawartha Lakes Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2015)

[Halton Hills Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2014)

[Free Library of Philadelphia Impact Evaluation Report](#) (2017)

[London Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2015)

[Milton Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2014)

[Newmarket Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2016)

[Ottawa Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2016)

[Pickering Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2014)

[Sault Ste. Marie Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2015)

[Stratford Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2015)

[Toronto Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2013) by the Martin Prosperity Institute and the Toronto Public Library.

[Vancouver Island Regional Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2016)

[Vaughan Public Library Economic Impact Study](#) (2017)

School library impact research

Achieving Information Literacy – Standards for School Library Programs in Canada. (2003). Canadian Association for School Libraries (CASL).

Advocacy and the 21st Century School Librarian: Challenges and Best Practices. (2017). EBSCO.

Building success beyond high school with career- and college-ready literacies. (2016). Carolyn Foote in Knowledge Quest.

Canadian School Libraries Research Archive. Scholarly and Practitioner Research about the School Library Learning Commons. (2019). Canadian School Libraries (CSL).

Connecting British Columbia (Canada) School Libraries and Student Achievement: A Comparison of Higher and Lower Performing Schools with Similar Overall Funding. (2011). Ken Haycock in School Libraries Worldwide.

Creating a Unique Brand for Your School Library: Values, Vision, Voice, and Visuals: Increasing your library's visibility as a form of advocacy. (2017). Barker, K. Young in Adult Library Services. (Available to OLA Members through [Wilson Web](#)).

Exemplary School Libraries in Ontario (2006). People for Education and Queen's University. Ontario Library Association.

Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada / L'Apprentissage en tête: Principes relatifs à la transition de la bibliothèque scolaire vers le carrefour d'apprentissage au Canada. (2014) Canadian School Libraries (CSL).

Libraries (2017). People for Education.

Reading for Joy (2011). People for Education.

School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario (2006). Ontario Library Association, People for Education & Queen's University Faculty of Education.

Research by Keith Curry Lance, US context

Change in School Librarian Staffing Linked with Change in SCAP Reading Performance, 2015 to 2011. (2012)

Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us. (2018).

Academic library impact research

Impact measurement studies. By the Canadian Association of Research Library (CARL).

Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

Academic Library Impact - Improving Practice and Essential Areas to Research (2017).

Action-Oriented Research Agenda on Library Contributions to Student Learning and Success: Initial Report (2016).

Connect, Collaborate, and Communicate: A Report from the Value of Academic Libraries Summits (2012).

Futures Thinking for Academic Librarians: Higher Education in 2025 (2010).