Guide to Building Support for Your Tribal Library

Tips and tools you can use from the ALA Rural, Native and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds Committee in collaboration with the ALA Office for Literacy and Outreach Services and The Campaign for America’s Libraries

A toolkit for getting the support you need from people who are in a position to help you and the library.
Ongoing advocacy is important for any library, whether you’re at the very beginning stages of developing a tribal library or you’ve already done the work to develop, maintain, and extend library services for the Native people of your community. With limited resources, how do you get the support you need to continue to meet the needs of the people and the tribe? This guide is designed to help you and the people who believe in the power of the tribal library become successful advocates.

What is Advocacy?
Advocacy is about getting the support you need from people who are in a position to help you and the library. It is about getting decision makers, potential partners, and community members on the side of the library through the messages you send on an ongoing basis. You’ll not only need the support of the community, but also tribal leaders, elders, educators, funders, government officials and other decision-makers to help you sustain Native library services.

Advocacy is a combination of public relations and lobbying.
1. Public relations is the everyday advocacy of working to provide the best library services and taking everyday opportunities to tell people about the library
2. Lobbying is advocacy directed at decision-makers and politicians. This may include activities ranging from making presentations at council meetings to keeping local decision makers informed about the library.

Library Advocacy is...
• About educating our communities about why tribal libraries and librarians are essential in an information society.
• An ongoing effort.
• The responsibility of all library workers.

This guide is designed for tribal libraries, whether you have a specific, urgent need for funding/support or are looking for ways to build general support for the library.

Why is Advocacy Important for Tribal Libraries?
Tribal libraries are special places. The possibilities of positive growth are endless. But without support, growth is difficult to achieve. Though decision makers may support the library in spirit, they may not realize all of the potential benefits a well-supported library would have for the community and its people. Now is the time to speak up for your library!

You might find the following points helpful when trying to make your case to your stakeholders.

Reasons why tribal libraries matter

Tribal libraries...

1. Serve a vital role in revitalizing and preserving tribal culture, history, and language
2. Promote literacy for our community
3. Bring technology to our people
4. Are important for the growth and development of our children
5. Empower tribal members
6. Bring reading material and news to tribal members
7. Promote intergenerational activities
8. Strengthen cultural identity
9. Serve as research centers for Tribal and non-tribal members
10. Belong to the people
Who are Library Advocates?

These are the people who believe in the importance of tribal libraries and librarians. They understand vital role tribal libraries play in providing educational, informational, cultural, and recreational services and activities for tribal communities. If the following people aren’t already advocates, you need consider ways to get them on the side of the library. These people include:

Tribal and community leaders
Members of the tribal government, school principals, business owners, tribal college leaders, and members of the local media (including journalists and radio and television personalities) should be in your circle of advocates. Support from such leaders helps to ensure your message will be heard far and wide.

Library users
School children, students, teachers, parents, elders, and researchers are key to any advocacy effort. Decision-makers need to hear about the positive experiences the people have had in the library.

Librarians and library staff
Advocacy is the responsibility of every library employee and should be put into effect both inside and outside the library so that everyone understands the value of the tribal library.

Potential advocates
Many people would be glad to speak out for the tribal library if asked. These are the people who have had good experiences in using libraries in the past, have family members who benefit from the library, or who just believe that tribal libraries are important.

Four ways to win support

1. Use every opportunity to tell people what’s going on in the library. Never assume that others understand what the tribal library does or what it takes to do it.

2. Don’t be afraid to speak up and ask for support. Most people who don’t use the library appreciate its role and wish to support it.

3. Don’t do this alone. Your message is most powerful when others speak up for you.

4. Be generous. Giving is just as important as receiving

To learn more about running a more effective tribal library, review the contents of the TRAILS document. Available at www.ala.org/tribal

Make the Library the Heart of the Community

It’s easier to get people to support the library when they know that the library is working hard to meet the community’s needs. You may be located in the oldest BIA building on the reservation, but you can become known for your excellent service, your outreach programs, your willingness to host community meetings, your memorable summer reading programs and your commitment to serve. The tribal library should be THE source that people go for information, resources, and answers.

Start now. Don’t wait for a crisis.

Let your local tribal government know that the library is theirs. Go out of your way to welcome them and inform them about how the library can help them in their official duties. Irving Nelson, Program Supervisor, Office of Navajo Nation Library

Janice Kowemy, Director, Laguna [Kawai) Public Library, Laguna, NM
Getting started with an official campaign: Steps to success

Making your case for support is all about getting organized and focused. The best way to do that is to keep it simple.

1. Identify what you want
Is it a new building? More computers? Funding for cultural programs? The more specific you can be, the better.

2. Gather statistics
It’s easier to make your case when you can prove that you need support.

Librarians must be able to make the case that materials and space can be shared without detriment. Statistics regarding visitors and circulation, computer use, etc. are crucial to demonstrating the need for library services.

–Robin Levin
Head of Library Services
Fort Washakie School/Community Library, Wyoming

3. Build your team
You will need a core group of supporters to help strategize. Try to find people who both believe in the library and are well connected in the community. Start with your library’s biggest fans—your users.

Your team could consist of other tribal libraries that are working to achieve a similar goal.

4. Make an action plan
The plan is your roadmap to success. It should identify key strategies and tasks (outreach, publicity, fundraising, volunteers, etc.), deadlines, and budget.

See the Small Is Powerful Online Toolkit at www.ala.org/rural/advocacytoolkit.htm

5. Identify strategies
How will you deliver the message to the people you want to reach? Who will deliver it? Your action plan should identify specific strategies, a timetable and who is responsible.

6. Have a memorable message
You will need a simple, powerful message, one that is easy to say and remember—about 10 words. Use it consistently in publicity materials and presentations. The more you use it, the more likely people are to “get it” and act.

Examples:
“Our heritage can be revitalized and preserved at the tribal library”
“The tribal library brings us together”

7. Target your audiences
Identify those whose support is most critical and make them your highest priority. Tribal leaders, parents, educators, and elders are typical target audiences for tribal libraries. Don’t forget to include your internal audiences: staff, board members, and volunteers.

8. Encourage everyday advocacy
Make an ongoing effort to keep your community informed of how the library contributes and what it needs to provide the best possible service. It is much easier to win support when key officials and community members understand its importance and are enthusiastic. Take advantage of everyday opportunities to talk about the library.

Collaborate

Getting other tribal departments/offices and other libraries to lend their support will strengthen your library’s case.

Successful partnerships with other tribal departments can not only enhance library programs, but can also boost the library’s image within the tribe. The support for the library can swell when employees in other departments realize the positive impact libraries can have throughout the tribe.

Libraries with similar goals, such as other tribal libraries, can band together to make a stronger case on larger advocacy issues such as at the state and national levels.
How to influence decision makers

Your goal should be to make it easy for decision makers to understand and support the library.

- Attend meetings throughout the year, not just when you need help.
- Get on the agenda to provide brief monthly or quarterly reports.
- Call or drop by to chat.
- Be clear about what you are asking.
- Link the library’s message to their concerns, e.g. language revitalization, technology, Indian education, diabetes prevention, high school drop outs, etc.
- Talk about the library’s successes and possibilities, as well as its needs. Always have a fact sheet available.
- Invite decision-makers to the library so they can see for themselves how well used it is, what you do, and what the needs are.
- Keep them informed. Maintain a VIP list and send the library’s newsletter, annual report and other items of special interest.
- Thank them. In person, in writing—and in public—whenever possible.
- Stay on good terms. Even if they don’t support you this time, they may the next.

Speaking successfully

You may be nervous about speaking in front of a group, but remember that your voice increases the visibility of the library and informs people about the success of the library as well as its potential for growth. Remember that people don’t know what you want unless you ask.

Speaking Tips

- Share compelling real stories and pictures that your audience can relate to.
- Avoid reading your statement.
- Open strong and end strong.
- Look out at your audience.
- Remember to smile.
- Be brief—10 minutes max plus questions.
- Introduce yourself in the Native language, if appropriate, and acknowledge key decision makers in the audience.
- Practice, practice, practice!

Tips on Creating Your Message

- Focus on the needs of your audience. Use examples that your audience understands, e.g., children need to hear stories from the elders; students need a place to get homework help; families need the Internet to connect to our sons and daughters in the Armed Services.
- Paint a positive picture. Talk about the library’s successes, not only its needs. Focus on benefits more than problems.

Get to know your individual tribal Council members on a personal note before going to talk to them as a group. Even knowing one or two makes it easier to talk to the group as you know someone likes you. I always make my messages happy, what I can do for them. – Carlene Engstrom, Library Director, D’Arcy McNickle Library, Salish Kootenai College
Telling your library’s story

Go where the people are

The only way to get more support from the community is to get out of the library to reach them—otherwise they may never know that your library could use their support or how great your library is. Posters and bookmarks are great publicity tools, but too often they end up sitting inside the library. Think outside of the circle to reach others, either through printed publicity materials or delivery of one-on-one messages.

Here is a list of places you might distribute printed materials:
- Post office
- Tribal offices
- Committee meetings
- Grocery store
- Community events
- Football/other sports programs
- Fairs
- Powwows
- Schools
- Have a Tribal Library float in a community parade
- Post messages about the library on the tribal employees e-mail news board

Speak Up!

Learn to recognize opportunities to talk up the library and its services. You might find yourself talking to the cashier at the gas station about your upcoming summer reading program or telling your son’s friends about the graphic novels they can check out at the library. Be sure that everyone on the reservation knows about the library and what it can do for them—so that they can become supporters of the library, too.

Make the most of media

Newspapers, radio and TV may be few and far between where you live. If so, you will need to look for other opportunities such as newsletters published by schools or the tribe. You may even decide to start your own library newsletter. If you do have local media, don’t hesitate to approach them. Many newspapers with small staffs welcome news items and columns that you write. Remember that even very small publications/stations take their role seriously. Whatever you can do to make their job easier will make your job easier.

Tips
- Start by asking them questions. What kind of stories are they looking for? When is their deadline? Do they prefer hard copy or email?
- Expect to be asked hard questions—especially if money is involved. Be prepared to answer and don’t take it personally.
- Be prepared to give “sound bites” or “quotable quotes” that make your point, along with examples and statistics.
- Learn how to write a good basic news release starting with the most important information and ending with the least. Use simple sentences and keep it brief.
- Take advantage of letters to the editor and guest columns to make your case.
- Feel free to suggest feature stories about various services, perhaps on a quarterly basis. You may even be asked to write them.
- Send public service announcements to your local radio station. These brief announcements (about 70 words) are aired free of charge for nonprofit organizations.
- Send items to a local columnist to include (“Did you know you can rent movies—for free—at the library?”) or consider writing your own column.
- Remember to thank them—especially for coverage that is above and beyond.
Key Message
“Books bring the world to the reservation”

Talking Points

1. The tribal library is a community gathering place where people come to learn, connect, and read.
   
   **Benefits**
   - It’s the only place on the reservation where people of all ages go to learn and enjoy.
   - We introduce children to the joy of reading and help with their homework.
   - We have brought the Internet to the community, making the library the only place on the reservation where families can freely connect to loved ones far away.

2. We are missing out on serving a portion of the reservation who most need us—very young children, the homebound, elderly, and those without transportation to the library. (Problem)
   - The Headstart program does not have a regular story time or ways for the children to check out books.
   - Our location is not near any neighborhoods or other tribal offices. People on foot are very unlikely to come to the library.
   - Elders and their caretakers often aren’t able to leave their homes for reading material.

3. We have a plan to bring books to people in isolated areas, (Solution)
   - We will schedule time at the Head Start to bring story-time and books to the children there
   - We will deliver books to people’s homes, the community hall, and the Elder Care Home on a regular basis.

Statistics

- Since we moved to our new location, our average number of books checked out have dropped from ??? books per month to ??? per month.
- ??% of our people live outside of the 5 mile radius surrounding our library
- ?? number of our children, or ??%, attend Head Start

Stories/Examples

Sally Mae, who was taking care of her grandma at home last year said that oftentimes, the Meals on Wheels delivery person was her lifeline—providing her with not only meals for her elder, but also brought books and magazines that she could read to her grandma and for herself. Sally said that a regular book delivery service would have been very much appreciated at that time of great need.

Call to Action
“We need your support.”

- We have an opportunity to apply for a grant to buy a delivery vehicle, for maintenance, and to build the lending collection.
- We’ll need the tribe to support this program in the long-run
- We ask that you support a mobile library for our reservation.
**Basic tools**

**Annual Report**
A basic tool for telling your library’s story, it should be brief, attractive and reinforce the library’s key message. Make sure it gets into the hands of tribal government officials, funders and other key stakeholders.

**Business Card**
Don’t forget the obvious. Be sure to include the library’s URL and hours. Give it out as often as you can.

**Brochure**
Another medium to publicize the library with basic information (hours, location, and URL). An attractive brochure should catch the eye of the public.

**Communication Plan**
A plan will help you get a bigger bang for your buck. Elements are: goals, objectives, positioning, key message, target audiences, strategies for delivering the message and evaluation.

**Fact Sheet**
A good way to present key points quickly. Keep narrative to a minimum. Use bullets to highlight key facts/statistics. Shorter is better—no more than two pages. Use with tribal officials, community groups, reporters or anyone who wants information—fast.

**News Release**
Newspapers and other media welcome a well written news release and will often run it “as is.” Start with the most important information and end with the least. Be sure to cover the 5Ws (Who, What, When, Where, Why)—and H (How). Keep it short—one page if possible.

**Public Service Announcement**
Free space for ads may be available from local newspapers and radio stations. Ask about availability and guidelines.

**Website/Blog**
Both can be useful tools for providing timely information, especially to those who might not come into the library. The trick is to keep them simple and current. You might consider utilizing social networking sites, such as MySpace and Facebook, to keep people informed about the library.

For tips, strategies and more tools, see the American Library Association’s Communications Handbook for Libraries at [www.ala.org/commhandbook](http://www.ala.org/commhandbook)
Get recognized

Your library should have a brand so well known that everyone on the reservation immediately recognizes it. Libraries across the country now have their own brand—@ your library®—thanks to ALA’s Campaign for America’s Libraries. You are free to adopt this brand as your library’s logo or use it as you see appropriate. You can use it on your bookmarks, website, posters, flyers, etc.

Here are a couple of examples developed for tribal libraries. You can download them in the Small Is Powerful Online Toolkit at www.ala.org/rural/advocacytoolkit.htm

Become the Best Librarian You Can Be

You may or may not have a degree in library science, but you can always take advantage of opportunities to develop your professional skills as a librarian. Attend conferences, read about the profession, network with other librarians (tribal and non-tribal), and stay informed about the latest trends in librarianship. Encourage other library staff to do the same. You are likely to get more support from your tribal government and community if people see you and the library staff as highly-skilled professionals. Take pride in being the tribe’s librarian!

More help online

For more tips and tools, see the Small Is Powerful Online Toolkit at www.ala.org/rural/advocacytoolkit.htm

Share your questions, successes, challenges and observations on our electronic discussion list for rural libraries.

To sign up, visit: http://lists.ala.org/wws/info/rntloak to Subscribe.
Our Way Forward: First Nations Advocacy Kit:
www.ourwayforward.ca/Downloads/
First_Nation_Advocay_Kit.pdf
An advocacy kit for First Nation public librarians to help raise awareness about First Nation public libraries. The kit contains advocacy planning worksheets and presentation tips.

ALA @ your library® Campaign:
www.ala.org/@yourlibrary
Promotion ideas, sample press materials, downloadable artwork and PSAs, tips and suggestions for National Library Week, Library Card Sign-up Month and more. Free and designed to be customized by your library.

Canadian Association of Public Libraries. Online Toolkit “Library Advocacy Now!”
www.cla.ca/divisions/capl/advocacy/resources.htm
The cornerstone of this project is the LAN (Library Advocacy Now!) Workbook where you can learn do exercises and gain background knowledge about advocacy.

ALA Office for Literacy & Outreach Services:
www.ala.org/olos
Click on Rural, Native and Tribal Libraries of All Kinds for advocacy, best practices, publications, funding and other resources.

ALA Advocacy Center:
www.ala.org

ALA Public Information Office
www.ala.org/pio
Responsible for national promotions including National Library Week and Library Card Sign-up Month; media relations; public awareness; and PIO advocacy activities for the association. Provides tools and resources for libraries of all types, including sample publicity materials in English and Spanish, a Communications Handbook for Libraries, “Quotable Facts About America’s Libraries,” an Online Media Relations Toolkit and more.

ALA Washington Office:
www.ala.org/washoff
Check here for information on funding and other national issues of concern to libraries. The Legislative Action Center makes it easy to contact your senators and representatives. Also sign up for ALAWON, a free email newsletter.

The Advocacy Guru:
www.advocacyguru.com
Check out the Resources for articles and tips for advocating at the federal level, though many of the tips can be applied to other elected officials.

American Indian Library Association:
www.alalanet.org
Open to anyone interested in American Indian and Alaska Native library issues. ALA membership gives you access to the association’s electronic discussion group.

ALA Library:
www.ala.org/library
Check here for resources and assistance in getting information you need.

Association for Library Trustees and Advocates:
www.ala.org/alta
See Issues & Advocacy.

American Association of School Librarians:
www.ala.org/aasl
Look under Issues & Advocacy for information about the @yourlibrary® school campaign, an advocacy toolkit and other helpful resources.

Kids! @ your library® Campaign:
www.ala.org/kids
Check out tools, tips and ideas for reaching out to parents and children with the message “So much to see. So much to do @ your library®.” Sponsored by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), a division of ALA.

Return on Investment:
http://midhudson.org/admin/eco_impact.htm
One of the easier-to-do formulas for figuring how much money your library saves users. From the Mid-Hudson (N.Y.) Library System.

Small Is Powerful Online Toolkit:
www.ala.org/rural/advocacytoolkit.htm
More tips and tools, including a sample action plan, creating the message, answering hard questions and more.

Smartest Card @ your library® Campaign:
www.ala.org/pla
Look under Issues & Advocacy for the campaign toolkits. Sponsored by the Public Library Association (PLA), a division of ALA.

WebJunction:
www.webjunction.org/rural
Click on Rural Advocacy for a wide variety of tools and tips directed at rural libraries.

What’s Your Story?
Find it at the library:
http://msl.mt.gov/WhatsYourStory/
A good example of an ongoing marketing campaign to promote the value of libraries. Developed by the Montana State Library.

Check your state library website for more advocacy and marketing information.

Contact
American Library Association
Office for Literacy & Outreach Services
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
Telephone 800.545.2433
#4294
Fax: 312.280.3256
Email: olors@ala.org
Website: www.ala.org/olos

This tip sheet can be found at:
www.ala.org/rural
www.ala.org/tribal
www.ala.org/native
www.ala.org/olos