Proactive Advocacy

Back in 2011, my large urban library system faced a $10 million budget crisis. Our city department was directed to cut nearly 300 positions and reduce hours at our 79 branches, a devastating blow to both our staff and the communities we serve.

We were stunned but not submissive. Once the initial dust settled, library employees rallied together to speak out about the critical roles of libraries in our city’s communities and to take action that made a meaningful difference for our patrons and colleagues. (I even joined some other children’s librarians in hosting a read-in in front of the mayor’s office at City Hall. Yes, really. There are pictures.)

It turns out we weren’t the only ones ready to speak out and take action. As soon as the budget cuts became public, my phone started to ring. Site directors at early childhood centers wanted to write letters of support for my branch and our efforts. Seniors wanted their aldermen’s phone numbers so they could make calls and give their local policymakers an earful. And parents made in-person visits to my children’s room to say, “Miss Jenna, tell us what we can do, and we’ll do it. Anything. We can’t lose you or this library.”

While I count myself among the luckiest of librarians, our patrons’ willingness to act on the library’s behalf had less to do with sheer good fortune and more to do with what I call “proactive advocacy.” Site directors, seniors, and parents didn’t end up at our door by accident. The lasting relationships we cultivated with them over many months and years set the stage for their investment and support. We didn’t have to wait for a time of uncertainty to tell our patrons about the purpose and value of libraries and librarians. Because of our efforts, they already knew. They were ready to speak and act for us.

See, Everyday Advocacy isn’t only something we do when there’s an imminent threat upon us or when a crisis on the horizon. That’s “reactive advocacy,” which has its place but can be tough without its many pieces. Proactive advocacy is a sustained effort over time that ensures we always have a cadre of library supporters at the ready. It’s what we do before we need crisis advocacy that counts.

Use this issue of Everyday Advocacy Matters and the resources on the Everyday Advocacy website to think about how you can take steps toward proactive advocacy in your work with children and families. As you’ll see, the Fight for Libraries has only just begun, and you’ve got an important part to play.

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Everyday Advocacy Spotlight

Meet the Research Agenda Task Force!

For the 2017-2020 strategic plan period, ALSC is placing greater emphasis on helping members champion and articulate the purpose and value of strong and meaningful library service to children. (If you haven’t checked out the new strategic plan yet, take a peek right now!)

The Advocacy area of strategic action includes the following four objectives:

1. Establish an accessible content stream of valuation tools and research updates, including customizable content for members, by September 2018;
2. Articulate a prioritized research agenda, including but not limited to summer learning/out-of-school time, by September 2018, and pursue avenues for conducting and/or supporting the research by September 2020;
3. Amplify librarians’ essential role as information literacy experts through advocacy outputs, including communications, webinars, and establishing collaborations, by September 2018; and
4. Increase targeted messaging to the wider library profession and the public about the expertise of ALSC and our members to demonstrate the purpose and value of strong and meaningful children’s librarianship by September 2019.

ALSC leadership has already taken swift action on Objective 2, so Everyday Advocates, meet the Research Agenda Task Force!

The ALSC Research Agenda Task Force consists of seven virtual members including the chair and a Board liaison. Convening now through the end of the 2018 Annual Conference in New Orleans, the task force is charged with creating a division-wide and subject-specific articulation of current research trends, areas of further exploration, and current needs in the field that might be addressed through research; and recommending avenues for pursuing this research.

It’s no small feat, but we know our dedicated task force members are ready to take their challenge in stride! A very special thanks goes out to Brooke Newberry (chair), Kathleen Campana, Enid Ruth Costley, Dr. Annette Y. Goldsmith, Cheryl Lee, Jo Schofield, and Christine Caputo (Board liaison) for all their work ahead.

Everyday Advocacy 101: The Power of Stories

If you’re new to Everyday Advocacy or just want a refresher, you’re in luck! Each issue of Everyday Advocacy Matters helps you dig into the initiative’s five tenets—Be Informed, Engage with Your Community, Speak Out, Get Inspired, and Share Your Advocacy Story—by directing you back to the great content on the Everyday Advocacy website.

This issue helps you understand the power of stories with this excerpt from the Be Informed section:

Human beings learn through stories. A well-told story is an extremely compelling way to convey your message, which will linger longer in the mind of the listener than a fact. Why? Because the listener has engaged with your message by creating mental pictures that complete your story. Use these strategies to help your audience cement your message through images:

Be permanently in story-gathering mode. Ask for feedback at every program through use of a comment sheet. Try these sample prompts/questions:

• Your comments—the good, the bad, the ugly, and the life-changing;
• Your name (optional); and
• May we use your name and comments on our web site or with funders?

Let people know how their stories will help you help them. Tell your audience how their comments can help you persuade funders to provide them with more programs like the one they’re attending today.

Get personal. As you gather feedback, ask people for permission to use their names and personal details when you share their stories. Consider which of these statements is more compelling: “A man in my city recently said...” or “Tom Smith, who owns the pet store, told me...”

Capture great stories immediately. When a parent tells you a great anecdote about what a difference storytime has made for his child, say you need to remember that wonderful story! Immediately write down what you just heard, verify that it’s correct with the parent, and ask if you might use the age of the child and the child’s first name when you tell this story to others. Why not ask for the parent’s name and phone number, too? If you want to use the story in other ways requiring more permission (with a photo in an annual report, for example), you can contact the parent at a later date.

Solicit stories. Ask parents how the Summer Reading Program is making a difference in their children’s reading or if the library’s technology camp has sparked their students’ interest in math. If the responses are positive and interesting, capture them!

Make your stories local. A story that takes place right in your community is always more compelling than one set further afield. Whenever possible, use a local story that involves constituents of your audience. (Examples: City residents for the mayor or city council, district residents for a representative or senator.)

Know your audience, and choose your story accordingly. If your legislator is a rancher, don’t talk about the prairie dog rescue program you had.

Use stories effectively and sparingly. Go for quality rather than quantity. After you conclude a story, wait a moment or two for the story to sink in before continuing on.

Consider when to use a story. Sometimes stories can be effective conversation starters, prefaced with a sentence or two about why you’re addressing an individual or group. Wrapped up with a one-sentence reminder of what you want the audience to do, stories can also leave powerful parting images in the minds of your audience.

Keep your stories fresh. If you used a story the last time you met with this official, find a new story for this visit.

Reinforce your message with a story. Don’t underestimate the value of stories to provide humor and elicit good feelings. But the most powerful stories don’t just give us a warm, fuzzy feeling—they compel us to take action. Find a story that underscores your main message, then craft it carefully. Find some ideas from Robbinsdale School District (Minnesota).

Shape your story. Work with your story until the wording is strong. Run it by others for their input, then practice it until it flows from your mouth easily. Everything involving communication gets better with practice!

From the ALSC Advocacy Committees

Check out these recent ALSC blog posts for the latest from the child advocacy committees led by Priority Group Consultant Matt McLain:

Advocacy and Legislation Committee
News You Can Use

Fight for Libraries Update

At the 2017 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, ALA Washington Office Associate Executive Director Kathi Kromer and Office of Government Relations Managing Director Adam Eisgrau let conference attendees know that this spring’s Fight for Libraries push is far from a one-and-done thing: Continued differences in partisan thinking make it clear we still have work to do. As Adam stated so well, “Fight for Libraries is a permanent campaign until it doesn’t need to be one anymore.”

Now entering Phase II, Fight for Libraries efforts are the most fundamental ways ALA and ALSC members can act locally to make a federal impact. This grassroots approach is what Everyday Advocacy is all about, so it’s down to each and every one of us—including you—to keep up the momentum.

Here’s what you can do right now to make sure you’re acting locally to make a federal impact:

1. Register for action alerts and timely District Dispatch posts with background information as soon as they are issued.
2. Use the “Tell Your Story” link on the Fight for Libraries website to make sure your local library’s story gets shared with Congress.

Connect with Congress During District Work Weeks

Did you know summer break isn’t just for kids? Even Congress gets some time away from Washington, D.C., during the heart of the summer months. It’s no day at the beach for our U.S. Senators and Representatives, though! They’ll be back in their home districts to hear from constituents about the issues that matter most to them.
Taking place this year from July 31 to September 4, District Work Weeks coincide nicely with the end of our summer library programs and the beginning of the busy back-to-school season. Consider inviting your legislators to a library program or visiting their offices to share all the ways your library makes a difference for children and families in your community.

Need help finding your elected officials? Check out the Legislative Action Center to get all the details and contact information.

Have a District Work Weeks success story to share? Submit the Share Your Advocacy Story webform or email the details to us.

**Call for Submissions: October 2017 Everyday Advocacy Matters**

Did you know that the Everyday Advocacy Matters (EAM) e-newsletter is always in production? As soon as we finish one issue, we’re looking ahead to the next one. That means our October 2017 issue is on the horizon, and we need your content to help make it great!

Consider submitting a feature or news item for one or more of the following EAM sections:

- **Everyday Advocacy Spotlight.** We’re looking for short articles (250-500 words) to use as our Savvy Success Story feature.
- **News You Can Use.** Help us highlight advocacy events, opportunities, and news items our colleagues can use to learn, share, and make a difference for youth and families in their library communities.
- **Get Inspired!** Let us know what motivates you and helps keep you going as an Everyday Advocate so we can inspire others, too.

Send your ideas so we can start working on a plan together. Don’t wait, though! The submission deadline for October 2017 is September 15.

**Get Inspired!**

**Rice Wins 2017 Sullivan Award**

When you think of awesome Everyday Advocates, you’ll definitely want to remember Lisa Rice, winner of the 2017 Peggy Sullivan Award for Public Library Administrators Supporting Services to Children.

As stated in ALA’s April press release, “The Sullivan Award is presented annually to an individual in a library administrator role who has shown exceptional understanding and support of public library service to children.”

Read the complete release for details on the 2017 Sullivan Award Committee’s selection of Rice, who was presented with the honor during the ALA President’s Program at the ALA Annual Conference in Chicago.

**Nominations Open for 2017 I Love My Librarian Award**

We bet you know more than a few librarians who make an Everyday Advocacy difference for children and families in their communities. Why not nominate a public or school library colleague for the Carnegie Corporation of New York/New York Times I Love My Librarian Award?

Just complete the online nomination form for a public librarian, a school librarian, or college, community college, or university librarian, but act fast! Nominations close September 18, 2017.
Celebrate Library Card Sign-Up Month

As public library professionals, we know we’re handing kids the world when we hand them library cards. The best part? Our school library colleagues know that, too. That makes September the perfect time to collaborate with the schools in your community. It’s more than just back-to-school business. It’s Library Card Sign-Up Month!

Why not join DC’s Teen Titans and capitalize on this fantastic opportunity to advocate jointly with local schools to spread the word this fall among parents, caregivers, and students? ALA’s made it easy with a press kit and sample promotional materials—all free for you to use.

Once you make those connections, we’d love to hear all about your successes and challenges. Submit the Share Your Advocacy Story webform and let us know how things turned out!

Calendar

Congressional District Days
August

Library Card Sign-Up Month
September

Banned Books Week
September 24-30

Banned Websites Awareness Day
September 27

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http://www.ala.org/everyday-advocacy/