



YOUR VOICE COUNTS

Anyone can speak up for your libraries—your voice counts! People who are passionate about providing access to information, literature, and lifelong learning have always been at the heart of the American library movement. This is true now more than ever, and citizens must use their voices to ensure our library legacy remains viable and fully funded. Library advocacy doesn't have to be complex; it can be as simple as telling others—at the grocery store, student union, bank, post office, or parties—why you value your library.

Identify Communication Strategies

There are three primary types of communication strategies:

- Outreach to groups
- Personal contact
- The media

In developing your communication plan, think carefully about how best to reach your target audiences. Thinking strategically can save time and money, as well as increase the reach and effectiveness of your message. Although all three types of strategies have advantages, the most effective is one-on-one communication. A visit to a legislator is more likely to be remembered than a letter.

A personal letter of support carries more weight than a direct mail brochure. You're more likely to remember what your neighbor tells you than something from a newspaper or radio ad. One-on-one communication is also the most time consuming, which is why having a network of library advocates ready and willing to speak out is invaluable.

Outreach to groups – through speaking engagements, library tours or exhibits – can be an effective way of reaching specific audiences who share particular interests and concerns. Mass media are most effective in reaching large audiences.

For any of these strategies to work, you must have a well-defined message with supporting points that are meaningful to your audience. You must be ready to answer any questions that might arise. Having effective spokespeople is critical for speaking engagements, radio and TV shows where personal appearance and speaking skills are absolute musts for delivering the message successfully.

In addition to identifying strategies, your communication plan should include goals for the number and timing of telephone calls to targeted leaders, news releases and public service announcements, placement of op-ed pieces, radio and TV interview and speaking engagements.

Consider the following when deciding which strategies to use:

- Who is the audience and what is the key message for that audience?
- What is the best way to convey the information to the target audience – radio, TV, direct mail or another? What kind of image do you want to project? Will it be an effective part of your total communication effort?
- When is the deadline? Will your message be delivered in time to be effective?
- How much will it cost? Is this the most effective use of available funds?
- Why is this the best strategy for this audience?