

# Protocols for Dealing with Legislators

from the New York Library Association

## 1. Be on Time and Prepared

Legislators are busier than most folks and often have multiple appointments and time commitments in a day. Being prompt allows you more time with the legislator to get your points across. Being prepared is essential to getting your message across; rehearse ahead of time what you are going to say, bring materials from NYLA's website, and information available from other reliable sources that backs up your statements. If you have any questions about what to say or how to say it, please do not hesitate to email or call NYLA's Executive Director at [director@nyla.org](mailto:director@nyla.org) or (518) 432-6952.

## 2. First Impressions

The first thing you should say is "thank you" for being a library supporter. Most legislators are part of the silent majority that support libraries, or have given member items to local libraries or supported increased funding for schools. The purpose of the advocacy is to get them to convert their silent support into a more active and visible role, like speaking up in conference (meetings with their fellow senators or assemblymembers of the same political party) or writing letters to their legislative leadership (i.e., the speaker or majority leader).

## 3. Roles of Advocates

If you are going to see a legislator with a group of colleagues, try to bring a diverse group of constituents, i.e., public, school, academic library personnel. Someone should be appointed to be the meeting facilitator, who speaks first, introduces folks, designates certain members to speak on particular issues of expertise and wraps up the meeting. Another advocate should be designated the note taker, who records what happened at the meeting and the legislator's response. This person should also record any additional information that needs to be sent to the legislator or follow-up taken by NYLA.

## 4. Meeting Tone

Advocates are there to educate legislators about the issues and not to berate or lecture them. Remember that honey always works better than vinegar. You want to educate them about the lack of adequate state funding for libraries and what that means to their local public libraries, library systems, school libraries and academic/research libraries. Never get belligerent or angry. You can express frustration and disappointment at the lack of proper funding for libraries, but do not get mad at the legislator.

## 5. Stay on Message

Many legislators like to talk about their involvement with libraries, or how they know someone involved in libraries, and that is fine and can be helpful if you are able to make a personal connection with the legislator (i.e., legislator's cousin works in your library or their son is a student in member's school, etc.). However, do not let too much of your limited meeting time be used to talk about these pleasantries. You need to bring the conversation politely back to your message of wanting the legislator to take action in support of additional funding for libraries.

## 6. Leave on a Positive Note

As you wrap up the conversation, make sure you repeat one last time what action you hope the legislator will take and then thank them for meeting with you and their past support for libraries. Also make sure you leave them any written material you brought that backs up your point of view.

## 7. Follow-Up

Follow-up is key to successful grassroots advocacy efforts. The meeting facilitator should send a thank you note to the legislator for meeting with them and include any additional information the legislator requested. A record of the meeting should be sent to NYLA's Executive Director ([director@nyla.org](mailto:director@nyla.org)) for follow-up in Albany, so we know which Legislators have already been spoken to and who needs further attention.



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