

Advocacy

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Advocacy as Attitude: Going Beyond the Call

These are challenging and exciting times for health care and information policy -- A new administration -- a new vision -- and new legislation. We have all seen (and often heeded) the request to call our national or state representatives to ask for support for legislation to fund libraries or enhance access to resources. In making the call we help our institution, our users and our profession. Yet, there is more that we can do.

Advocacy is essentially about communicating values and goals. It is a way of encouraging and inspiring activities that go beyond health science libraries to benefit the entire community. A good advocate is a good educator -- one who explains an issue or a desired policy so it is easily grasped by those with the power to make decisions.

But even the best educator cannot achieve results without access. When a piece of legislation is pending it is often too late to be seen as the local expert. That is why it is important to contact your national state and local representatives in their local offices. Offer to provide them with information about libraries and health issues. If they have supported libraries, thank them. Invite them to your library as part of library week celebrations or for

other functions. If they have not supported libraries, make an appointment to talk to them about the issues important to you. It is often much easier to get an appointment at a local office than one in Washington or Albany.

But advocacy involves more than calling or educating legislators. Almost everyone who works in our institutions is dependent on our libraries. If we reach out and get the support of people in other departments and other fields and have them contact their representatives we have multiplied our impact. If you build those alliances and then need to talk to a representative who will not talk to you because you do not live in their district, you will be able to find someone in your organization who does live there and have them make the appointment.

Seize every opportunity (without being pushy, without being a bore) to express your advocacy agenda, educate individuals and groups and enlist supporters. Advocacy can become part of everything you do -- because advocacy is attitude.

For suggestions regarding advocacy activities and briefings on issues see the MLA Advocacy Toolbox at <http://www.mlanet.org/members/advocacy/index.html>