

## **PR R<sub>x</sub> Toolkit**

### **Section IV: Decision Makers**

#### **Introduction**

Whether one reports to a city council, a principal, school superintendent, university board, or a corporate division, the process of getting a favorable library policy codified or securing adequate budget funds is one of justification, persuasion, and commitment. Many library administrators and supporters are familiar with some advocacy techniques and understand the importance of promoting their library's services to existing clients, potential clients, and governing bodies. Effective advocacy covers both a broad range of ongoing strategies and specific goals to achieve in the short and long term.

Many library professionals are already familiar with ongoing PR activities, such as developing newsletters and hosting regular events. Librarians and library supporters tend to be less familiar with techniques and strategies targeted specifically to decision makers. These efforts are, to a large degree, lobbying efforts.

Library stakeholders can often become intimidated by the prospect of "lobbying," especially in relation to elected officials. And, while the tips and suggestions delineated in this section are very applicable to communicating with elected officials, the practical application is much broader. Lobbying is basically persuading, and persuading decision makers is highly specialized but important area of public relations. The contents of this section are designed to help library stakeholders successfully communicate with decision makers.

Whether you are a library foundation chairman approaching city council for an increase in the library's budget, a school librarian approaching a principal about hiring a library clerk, or an academic library director wanting to build library interests into a university-wide distance education grants, the resources and checklists included below can help clarify and strengthen your request.

This section is organized into three main sections: communicating in writing, communicating in person, and building relationships. We have also added a resource sheet for helping state employees communicate (legally!) with state elected officials.

## Communicating in Writing

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Writing a letter is, at once, the most difficult and simplest way to communicate. For many, setting a request on paper is much less threatening than a face-to-face request. Additionally, writing a letter is a formal means of expression that serves to clearly document a request or petition.

Of course, the difficulty with writing a letter is ensuring that you write a strong and persuasive letter. Before you can accomplish that task, you must have a clear message or request. You must have done research and analyzed the impact of your request. In short, you must be in a position to persuade. Remember, when you ask a decision-maker for something you are seen as someone knowledgeable about that request. You must be prepared to state your position in a way that supports your request.

Note: Emails are also a great way to communicate a short simple message. Emails should follow the same rules as writing a hard copy letter, except that they are short and should only cover one topic. Always be formal and be sure to include your name and address. For formal requests, however, stick to the printed letter. If time is short, you can fax the letter and then mail the hard copy.

### Information You Will Need

**Know who you are addressing.** In all cases, do your homework. Research the kinds of results and programs a decision maker has supported in the past. Find out the political or policy leanings of those individuals you must contact. You may have to convince people who may not be favorable to your cause. So, your letter should be crafted to answer any potential objections they may have. If you are writing to a supporter, do not assume you have their support. Help them help you by focusing on principles/policies they can promote. And, of course, be ready and eager to follow up your written letter/proposal with an in-person visit.

**Show you are an expert: know your users.** Go beyond demographic data. Find out who uses your library and why. Most importantly, be able to draw a concrete image of those users and the value they bring to the organization, educational setting, or community. Connect your request in outcomes to the people you serve and, in turn, the decision maker you are contacting.

**Set priorities.** One of the most common errors when asking for something is the aggressive pursuit of too many items at once. While no one suggests not advocating for everything the library needs over the long term (in fact, professional librarians have an obligation to do so), in the immediate decision-making arena, one cannot ask for a wish list of 20 items and expect to get them all. In fact, you run the risk of not being taken seriously.

You need to ask yourself: What does my library need most? What can I most likely get this year? While you can ask for that list of 20 big-ticket items, remember that you will have to spread your energy promoting them all, and you run the risk of being viewed as someone who asks for the moon and has no real sense of practicalities. In the lobbying world, few perceptions are more damaging. You lose credibility quickly. Ask for what you really need now.

**Show the crisis!** Librarianship is one of the few professions that seems to do more work with fewer resources. If budgets are cut, then staff works twice as hard so that patrons do not suffer. And yet, it seems as if libraries are often penalized for performing well. Since few libraries appear to be on the verge of some crisis, decision makers tend to allocate funding to departments or agencies that are in trouble.

For so long, librarians have struggled to present a positive image of libraries, to combat stereotypes and modernize the library image. It is understandable that libraries want to project a positive image unmarred by troubles. In one sense, library managers have to do so. They are accountable and must act as good stewards of public funding and provide quality services. The problem is that, without showing some sort of crisis, libraries will likely not receive large allocations of resources.

In advocacy, the strongest technique (because it is the most urgent) is to show a real need for something. Library managers, in fact most librarians, have little experience speaking in terms of disasters and crisis. Lobbying is, in some ways, a competition against other priorities. Whatever is most pressing is what will be funded.

**Or, show success.** An important qualification is, if you are writing to be included in some project or you hope to expand your services, you will need to focus on your successes. Crises don't help here.

### **Checklist**

- Find the correct address, title, and salutation for the person you are writing
- Determine if you or someone else will sign the letter (will it be on official stationery or sent personally?)
- If you are asking for a specific action by a certain date, make sure you send the letter with sufficient time.
- Use direct, professional prose. Do not ramble.
- Introduce the purpose of your letter quickly
- Use good data but do not just send facts and figures
- Illustrate your point
- Give outcomes
- Ask for something specific.
- Be polite and offer thanks.
- Try to stay to one page.
- Keep a copy and make sure you copy anyone else who should be copied.

- Assume your letter will be read by people who support you and those that do not.
- Add documentation as needed.

You will also want to consider having multiple signers to your letter. In some cases, getting several key people to sign a single letter is much more effective than multiple letters. Such an action shows consensus and a call to action.

Be careful, however. Depending on the tone of the letter and the nature of the issue, a letter with multiple signers can lead the recipient to take the letter as a subtle—or not so subtle—warning.

## TEMPLATES AND SAMPLES

Letter to get vendors involved in policy advocacy:

Dear Colleague:

As a library stakeholder, you are in position to help shape the future of Texas libraries. You are doubtlessly aware of the grim economic news on the national and state level. In Texas, the best predications put the budget shortfall at around \$10 billion, and many people fear that number is closer to \$16 billion. In short, every state agency—and consequently every institution relying on state funding—is going to be faced with cuts.

This news translates into direct cuts in library budgets and, it relates to the potential end of library, school, and higher education funding available through the Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (TIF). While you may be unfamiliar with TIF, libraries that you do business with are not. Over the last seven years, TIF has channeled approximately \$131 million to Texas school, public, and academic libraries. And, that amount does not reflect the hundreds of millions that have gone to schools and higher education through separate TIF grant programs. Without direct legislative action, TIF funding for libraries, schools, and colleges and universities may end as early as 2004.

TIF has been critical for Texas libraries. Not only has this funding paid for almost all technology services, hardware, and software available in libraries; it has allowed libraries to use existing funds for other needs. Texas libraries are in the fight of their lives.

We are asking for your help. If your business has an office in Texas, you can help speak out on the importance of TIF and other funding initiatives for libraries. Your perspective is very valuable in this process, as it speaks not only to the overall importance of libraries but also to the interrelation between libraries and economic vitality.

We would like you or a representative of your company to attend TLA's Legislative Day. There is no cost to participate in Legislative Day, and appointments will be made by TLA members. You would be assigned to make visits according to your address information, and you would receive a packet with all informational materials necessary.

We believe the events planned for February 11 and 12 are important for all library stakeholders. By participating, you will have the chance to help support Texas libraries, as well as work closely with key members of the Texas library community.

We will all be in attendance in Austin for TLA's Legislative Day, and we hope to see you there.

Sincerely,

The letter was signed by executives from three leading library vendors.

SAMPLE

March 23, 2004

Senator John Cornyn  
U.S. Senate  
Room 370 Russell Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cornyn,

On behalf of the Texas Library Association (TLA), I am writing to ask for your help in securing critically needed funds for Texas libraries. Funding the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) at a level of \$232 million would bring almost \$11 million to Texas public libraries. Additionally, setting funding the Improving Literacy through School Libraries Program at \$100 million would allow every state—including Texas—to begin receiving support for school library literacy and reading efforts.

This funding is urgently needed in our state. In the last Texas legislative session (given the approximate \$10 billion state deficit), library programs were severely affected. Public library programs were decreased by almost 12%, and state school library funding was completely eliminated. The millions of children and adults in Texas who rely on library services are facing the loss of content, programs, and services.

Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) and Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) are circulating a letter of support for LSTA funding as well as for the Improving Literacy through School Libraries Program. Please contact Sen. Collins's office to add your name to this letter, which is addressed to the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittees.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if I might be of any assistance to you or your staff. In advance, I thank you for your consideration and assistance in this matter.

Sincerely Yours,

SAMPLE

Open Letter to the Texas Legislature on “UCITA”

Dear Member:

Many groups representing the business, academic, consumer, library, and government sectors are united in opposition to the “Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act” (UCITA). This controversial and massive software license enhancement act has been hotly debated in various states and at the national level for several years. Though UCITA has already been introduced in many states, only Virginia and Maryland have passed differing versions of the act, and Virginia is now in the process of amending that law. Other State Legislatures have reviewed and either deferred or postponed action on UCITA, or have killed the initiative outright.

While there are many unanswered questions about the various restrictions, implications, and intention of UCITA, the greatest problem with UCITA is that it fundamentally upsets a long-standing balance between the rights of both the sellers and consumers of computer information products. UCITA grants unprecedented control to licensors of digital and computer information products while superseding numerous fundamental public protections. If enacted, UCITA would materially and adversely affect businesses and consumers alike.

In view of these grave concerns, the organizations named below have voted to oppose the introduction of a UCITA bill in the 77<sup>th</sup> Session and to oppose any such bill if filed. Though both proponents (generally software manufacturers and affiliates) and opponents of UCITA understand the complexities of the changing environment of digital and computer transactions, we remain divided. So far, this split is wide and irreconcilable.

Each side has committed to continue the dialog for as long as it takes in an effort to come to some mutual accommodation. Therefore, the representatives of the following entities and organizations respectfully request that you neither introduce nor support the filing of any UCITA bill during this Legislative Session.

Sincerely,

Texas Association of Business and Chambers of Commerce, Texas Library Association, Prudential Insurance, Sunoco, Texas Society of Professional Engineers, Boeing Corp., Humana, Inc., Texas Civil Justice League, Texas Municipal League, Consumers Union, Conoco, Alliance of American Insurance, Independent Colleges and Universities of Texas, Texas Oil and Gas Association, Phillips Petroleum Company, Celanese, PPG Industries, Health Insurance Assoc. of America, National Assoc. of Independent Insurers, Texas Retailers Association, Lockheed Corp., Texas Association of Life and Health Insurers, Exxon Mobil Corporation, Dow Chemical, Oxy Permian, Koch Industries, Inc. , American Council of Life Insurers, Texas Public Citizen, The Williams Companies, Nationwide Insurance, USAA, and Anadarko Petroleum Company

## Communicating in Person

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Do not assume that decision makers will read all your reports, understand your proposal, and intuitively grasp the importance of what you need. Take the time to present your request in person.

Your face-to-face communication with decision makers is a critical time to make your case. While successful PR efforts involve constant communication with decision makers and are based on building relationships, you will likely have the opportunity to make your library's case through several formal and essential venues. Scheduled policy meetings, formal presentations, and testimony should be the crowning task of your PR efforts which involve policy or budget matters.

### “THE Meeting”

**Make an appointment.** When you are advocating for something, do so formally. While you may have many water cooler conversations about your library and may also have the opportunity to talk with decision makers socially, do not assume that informal advocacy—while very helpful—replaces a formal request. In a meeting, you are forced to clearly articulate what you want and why. You state your case and then let the decision maker know that you expect consideration of the issue and some institutional/governmental response to it. In a formal meeting, you completely eliminate any potential conflict of friendship because you are presenting your case within your institution's professional practice.

**Schedule the meeting at a time that is not too late or early in the decision-making process.** Timing is everything. Do not surprise decision makers by making last minute requests. A county commission budget hearing should not be the first time commissioners hear about your library's needs, especially not if you are asking for large capital items. Do not submit requests once a budget has been finalized. Learn when decision makers are studying their budgets and priorities. Be prepared to meet with them at that formative time—when they have not yet committed to one particular course of action and can integrate your plans with theirs.

**Know who to talk to.** In legislative matters, for instance, you would need to speak with the chairman and members of the appropriate committee. If you are not already certain, find out who actually makes decisions about your budget and your requests and find out who recommends action to those individuals. Be sure to talk with key aides or assistants, because support staff is often responsible for gathering information that decision makers need to prioritize their ultimate actions.

**Assume bosses/political leaders are trying hard to do the right thing.** Too often, we allow ourselves to accept the cynical clichés that politicians are less than honest or that bosses are more interested in their personal agenda rather than in carrying out good policy. While some of that may be true, in most instances, people are trying to do the best job they can. Just as the library manager has many pressures, so does the state legislator or the university president. The fact is, decision makers must make tough choices and are themselves ultimately accountable based on their actions.

Often, advocates assume that the reason decision makers have not supported them before is because the decision maker is inept or somehow uncaring about education and the services libraries provide. Approaching any decision maker with that attitude is not only insulting; it is counter productive. Politeness and professionalism are only a beginning. Whether you agree or not, give them the benefit of the doubt—assume that they would like to support the library’s services. And, never tell a decision maker, “Do this because it is the right thing to do.” Do not cast yourself as a judge on their morals.

**Be targeted—do not be derailed.** Just as you prioritized library requests, state your case using clear rationales. Stick to the topic at hand and do not ramble on about anything unrelated to your library request. If you have set up a meeting to discuss a particular topic, do not dilute that presentation with talk about other matters. Avoid the following phrases: “as long as I’m here,” “while I have your attention,” “I’ve been meaning to mention,” “there’s this other problem we’re having,” “What do you think about national security?” and so on. Time is precious—yours and theirs. Do not spend it on any discussion that cannot help you promote your cause.

By the same token, do not allow the decision maker to derail you from your topic. A common trick is for a decision maker to ask you about a number of topics so as to “run out the clock” or limit any potential request he or she may not want to hear about. Keep them on topic. While you must naturally be cordial at the start of a meeting, get to your point quickly. If the decision maker raises some totally unrelated issue, smile and agree that the point is fascinating and say that your library probably has a book on that. Then continue making your case for the library’s needs!

**Librarians tend to say too much.** Librarians love what they do and want to explain the complexity and wonder of library service to people. Most decision makers do not want to hear it though. When you have a key decision-making meeting, get to the point and make your request. Give the rationale and then stop. Let the decision maker ask you questions. While you must certainly be prepared to respond and have lots of facts and figures available (which you will, of course, present in written form), give that information when it is requested.

Too often, librarians will over explain an issue or give too much detail. Not only do you expend precious minutes on the clock, but you also run the risk of lulling the attention you have worked so hard to get. The most extensive information you can provide is about the impact that your library has on people and the effect that the proposed request

(should it be approved) will have on the people you (and the decision makers) serve. You do not need to give decision makers a lesson on library work or dazzle them with jargon. If they want that information, they will certainly ask for it. And, no matter what you are asked, be succinct.

**Talk about outcomes.** Service facts and figures are fine support information, but everyone today is talking about outcomes. Tell the story that demonstrates the library's role in helping someone graduate, start a business, cut costs, or get off Welfare. Provide a context and a means for decision makers to understand the overall contribution the library makes to its particular community. Relate those outcomes to the priorities established by the decision maker.

**Get others to argue your point.** Get some of the people you serve or perhaps other leaders to talk with decision makers about your library's needs. While librarians are clearly the people most informed to talk about library requests, they are also seen as the most biased. Patrons, school kids, parents, library board members, and other officials, for instance, are particularly effective because they represent the "lay" perspective.

**Follow-up!** Send a thank you note and continue discussions with the decision maker and his/her staff. Keep them posted on the library's activities and on the progress of your request.

**Almost everything is negotiable.** There will be times when a librarian must state unequivocally a position and hold to it at all cost. Be warned, however, those times are seldom. Do not force yourself into a corner. If you say to a decision maker, I absolutely must have this, or I cannot live with that mandate under any circumstance, you had better mean it. Budgets, staffing, and even policy discussions are open to consideration.

While certainly everyone begins a debate with a given position, the decision-making process is about crafting workable compromises. If you refuse to negotiate (particularly for non "life and death" issues), you will be seen as unreasonable. Your input into broader institutional or community policy will not be sought. In short, you will make the most catastrophic of all mistakes: you will keep yourself out of the negotiating table.

When you must absolutely hold a position, do so. Just remember that almost any policy can be made workable.

## EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED ANSWERS

### Some General Scenarios and Suggested Answers

1. A decision maker says to you, “I don’t understand why libraries need so much money for electronic resources. People can find what they need on the Internet. Let’s work smarter. The money that the state has invested in electronic resources should be offset somewhere else in the library budget!”
  - Not all information is available on the Internet. And, not all information on the Internet is reliable. “The Internet is a mile wide and an inch deep.”
  - Electronic resources, like all other products and services, are becoming more expensive. In addition to yearly increases, libraries must also bear the cost of maintenance, training, upgrades, and numerous other responsibilities that are involved in providing access to electronic information that are not necessarily involved with print materials.
  - Quality electronic information is usually available only for a direct fee or through subscriptions provided by libraries. The cost has not gone away—the difference is that the library is making the investment for the community.
  - Internet services like the highly publicized Google are a wonderful tool. HOWEVER, Google will provide access only to books in the public domain—those published before 1930. For more recent books, Google will provide the equivalent of a library catalog record along with information on how to purchase the book or order it through interlibrary loan service at one’s public libraries. And, Google, will not provide access to commercial journal subscriptions and reference resources.
  - Even with the advent of electronic information, people still need and want access to printed materials. We are fortunate to live in a time when people can have access to more information than ever before. The great advantage of technology is not that it changes what we can access. The advantage is that we have access to more information in diverse formats. That flexibility and increase in informational resources is driving the world economy, and Texans must have access to that wealth of information if they are to remain competitive.
  
2. A legislator says to you, “Why do you need special funding for school databases. Just plug them into what you already have!”
  - Databases work somewhat like cable television. You pay for the access you get. Just like a new family moving into your neighborhood can’t hook into your cable access, school libraries have to be properly subscribed. That requires the payment of licensing fees.
  - While the Texas State Library and Archives Commission can certainly negotiate the best deal as a large state purchaser, the agency must have the funds to pay the vendors for providing access to school libraries.
  - In the marketplace of online commercial subscriptions, the business model is one based on market share. This means vendors license broader contracts based on a return for the market share “lost.” This is one reason why a central state

purchase of databases makes sense—the state can leverage (given its large purchasing power) the best cost for the most users.

3. A legislator says, “We need new prisons, health insurance for children, we need to protect our parks. If we fund libraries, which of these other priorities should we cut?”
  - All of these items are necessary to the people of Texas. Libraries are as critical to the overall well being of state as any other of its major institutions. In fact, libraries play a role.
  - "Libraries are perhaps the most empowering means of helping youths. Certainly we are all better off working to get kids into libraries rather than out of trouble or illegal situations. Libraries remain one of the most effective means of solving tomorrow's problems today." - Chief C.O. Bradford, Houston Police Department
  - Libraries are one of the best investments a state can make in its people. People who are better informed lead healthier lives, are better educated, and more responsible citizens.
  - As an elected official, you have a great responsibility in making choices—choices that meet both the immediate needs of the people in local communities while establishing long lasting tools that will continue improving Texas for Texans.
4. A councilman asks, “Why should we fund libraries when libraries don’t protect kids? Libraries expose children to pornography on the Internet.”
  - Libraries teach children and their parents how to find information that is appropriate to their needs. The best way to protect children is to make them smart and skilled information users, as well encouraging parents to work with their children and helping them decide as a family how to deal with vast resources and tools of the information age.
  - Over 95% of all libraries have Internet use policies, and almost all the rest are developing them.
  - We believe that decisions about children’s use of the Internet are best made at the local level.
  - Filtering software promotes a false sense of security—since, on average, filtering software only blocks about 80% of “offensive” sites while blocking many legitimate sites.
5. A decision maker says, I support all your needs, but I don’t have the final budget decision; Or, they say, I don’t serve on the Appropriations Committee/Finance Committee. And, I don’t serve on the committees that will hear your bills.
  - Yes, I understand, but I know you hold great sway with your colleagues. Please speak with members of the appropriate committees and ask them to support these issues.
  - When this matter comes to the floor for a vote, please support these initiatives.
  - Please make a point of mentioning the value of libraries when you have an opportunity to do so with your legislative colleagues.

## **Testimony**

The rule of thumb for public testimony is to draft one page of comments or about five minutes. Testimony should never be read but should be prepared to hand in and used to keep the speaker on target. Be direct, compelling, and illustrate your point. Always begin by introducing yourself and stating your position.

## **SAMPLES**

### **Testimony House Public Education Committee**

Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members. My name is XX, and I am with the Texas Library Association. I very much appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to speak in support of HB 661, and I would like to offer my thanks to Rep. Branch for authoring this legislation.

HB 661 is, I believe, a very straightforward bill. If enacted, the bill would accomplish two things: 1) it would give the Texas State Library and Archives Commission the statutory authority to license database access on behalf of school libraries (This licensing for school library access would be added to the licensing that the State Library currently does for the state's 700 public libraries and libraries in colleges, universities, and community colleges that are part of the TexShare resource sharing consortia.); and 2) the bill would accomplish is it would allow the State Library to collect fees from those schools that want to participate in the State Library's negotiating process.

The bill does not require any schools to participate. As it has no fiscal cost to the state, the bill does not include funding to pay for school library access. The bill does, however, provide an important option for those schools who want to try and secure database licensing at the very economical pricing the State Library is able to secure given the large purchasing power it already wields with the TexShare program.

For that alone—the outcome of giving school libraries additional options for securing economical online school library resources—HB 661 is a good, important, and needed step forward.

More than this, however, HB 661 is a first step in working to reinstate full, equalized state access to digital library online resources. Since the demise in 2003 of the state's statewide school library database program, the level of access throughout the state has become extremely uneven. While better funded districts are able to secure database access on their own or have help from ESCs, many schools throughout the state—we think as much as half—have substantially less access than they did previously.

HB 661 is also a mechanism to try and secure a needed first step to rebuild statewide access. Donna XX, the school librarian from Kermit writes that, since the end of the state's school library databases, students think that Google is the only place to go when searching for information for their class assignments. We get requests often for biographical information for science, math, and English classes. Also, one of our UIL sponsors is always searching for information about authors to verify some part of their biography so that students will be able to prove that their authors are in compliance with the guidelines of their UIL events.

Losing the TLC databases has seriously hindered the research processes on our campuses. The students no longer have access to the quality resources that were provided [previously]. I am always appalled and amazed at the kinds of information that our students find. They have no understanding of reputable versus non-reputable sources. They think that if they find something/anything on the internet that it must be accurate and true. How sad.”

In Midland, school libraries can only afford library databases for secondary schools only, at a cost of \$6000. The librarian there writes, “we all chip in. It has cut deeply into our funding for either books or supplies...The elem kids are suffering, not getting to use the internet for reputable sources and also gaining experience searching as a teaching tool for secondary school.

Diane XX, who is a regional librarian in West Texas, reports that even with the ESCs help, databases can only be provided to the high schools in her area. “I serve Marathon, Presidio, Rankin, Buena Vista, and Balmorhea,” she writes. “These libraries have taken a big cut in services to their students. These libraries are very limited in reference materials. Recently a student doing research on the Berlin Wall in one of the libraries had to use the outdated printed materials and could not determine that the Wall was no longer standing.”

HB 661 by itself cannot correct this problem. But, it is a needed first step. By allowing the State Library to work on behalf of schools to achieve the best pricing, schools will have another needed tool.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.

### **Senate Committee as a Whole Testimony on HB 1**

Good morning. My name is XX, and I am with the Texas Library Association. I am here today to speak on the bill and will direct my comments to one specific area of the proposal—that which is related to the incentive program. First, I do want to thank Senator Shapiro and the other members of the Senate for this opportunity and for your leadership in taking on this critical task of education reform.

The educators in our association, like many teachers and educator organizations throughout the state, are skeptical about incentives in general. However, we recognize that this Legislature is looking at different options to improve student performance and incentive programs merit debate.

The primary issue we wish to highlight is that any incentive program designed to reward teaching should make eligible all educators who teach students and who work directly with them on learning issues and assignments. As currently proposed, the 75% allocation is slated to go to direct teacher compensation. We ask this body to consider including fulltime school librarians in this program. There are approximately 5,000 school librarians in Texas. These educators, like other teachers, interact with students every day and almost every school period. They teach research skills, reading, and critical thinking. They help students with curriculum assignments, class projects, and individual instructional needs. They work with students to improve their English proficiency. School librarians are teachers.

In fact, the newly passed state requirements for school library certification require candidates to have at least two years of teaching experience and a master's degree before these educators can become certified school librarians. State standards for school library programs also attest to the fact that over 60% of TEKS skills can and should be taught in the library. Whether school librarians are working with teachers or directly with students, their role in enhancing student achievement has been well documented. There are numerous state studies linking the presence of school librarians with higher student achievement on standardized test scores.

In Texas, a study commissioned by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission in 2001 pointed to a 4-10% increase in student reading test scores in schools with certified school librarians.

We ask that, if this body determines to go forward with an incentive program, everyone who teaches our students and who shares the responsibility and work of instructing them be treated equitably both in their eligibility for incentive rewards and in expectations of performance.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.

## Building Relationships

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Public relations is a constant process and so is building relationships with decision makers. If you rely only on formal meetings or the occasional letter, you will likely be displeased with the results. Advocacy and public relations build on familiarity and trust—two things that can only be built by consistent and sustained communication.

- Ask them to come to the library and be involved in reading hours for kids, kicking off campaigns, greeting a new round of freshmen at a library orientation, photo ops, tours, etc. You are limited only by your creativity.
- Invite decision makers to sit of your board or to participate in some ongoing activity. Give them an opportunity to be involved and look good doing it.
- Keep them in your library's loop by sending them issues of your newsletters and publications. Invite them to your special events and get quotes from them for your PR materials. Link your name to their interests.
- Contact them with news about your library. Let them know about changes or updates in what you are doing.
- Make yourself available to help them research. The library is there, after all, to facilitate information access.
- Say hello to them at social events and thank them for their good work supporting the school, community, or college students.
- Make a point of visiting with them about library issues in the “off season.” This task is especially important when dealing with elected officials. Visits in the home district are often so much more meaningful than visiting during very legislative sessions.
- Thank them for what they do.

As you develop these relationships, keep in mind:

**Understand the climate in which you and your organization operate.** Go beyond corporate and institutional culture. You need to understand the pressures, resources, personalities, and economics affecting the people (and institutions) that make decisions concerning your library. From state legislatures to school board members, city

councilmen to regents, know who you and your bosses are accountable to. Learn their priorities. Relate to them within this framework.

**Be, or at least appear to be, reasonable.** Passion and philosophically driven positions are important, but never let them cloud your judgment or back you into a corner. Just as you want decision makers to understand why your library or project must be funded or why some policy must or must not be implemented, you must be prepared to listen to why decision makers shouldn't support your position. Take decision makers' concerns seriously, address them, and be willing to respond to those concerns in your request if at all possible. Find out what you can do to help them with their work.

**Make partners/develop contacts.** As in all work operations, the greater contact you have with people outside of your institution or department, the greater number of potential proponents you have at your disposal. Keep partners informed of what you are doing and planning, and they will be more likely to support and help you. Sometimes, the best way to position yourself is to have someone else (unrelated to library work) promote your work to decision makers. It's one thing for you to tell your city manager that your library is the center of community education, but it is something else (i.e., extremely validating and objective) if other city department leaders or faculty members say so. Let others help build your relationships!

**Keep records of outcomes not just statistics.** When library administrators discuss library needs, they tend to talk about the library. However, decision makers do not want to hear about space needs and staffing. They want to know how the library benefits patrons and what difference the additional funding will make. Traditional library use statistics, while useful, do not convey a sense of the importance of your library and the difference it makes on the lives and success of individuals. Most decision makers do not really understand differences in circulation records or interlibrary loan data. Moreover, they do not want to learn. They care about outcomes. Help build a relationship by using a language that both of you will care about.

### A Special Note for State Employees

State employees are not permitted to attempt to influence the passage or defeat of a state legislative measure **in their capacity as state employees**. If you are a state employee or have some work limitations on the types of advocacy activities in which you can engage, here is a quick list of dos and don'ts.

- Do remember you can advocate as an individual. An institution cannot bar you from expressing your own views as a private citizen.
- Do remember, however, that you cannot state a position or speak for your institution if you have not been told to do so.
- Do remember that state employees can "inform" legislators of the impact of state programs and funding but must do so without suggesting a particular position or course of action. If you are writing about the effects of some state program on your library, stick to a description of the program. Do not lobby a position or course of action.
- **Do visit and write your legislators as a private citizen.** If you are a state employee, however, do not use institutional letterhead or your institutional email if you are asking a legislator to take a particular position. When visiting with legislators, be sure to say that you are there in a personal capacity.
- Do use personal time and resources for contacting legislators.

The list above is not exhaustive. If you are unsure about a given activity, contact your institution's administration for clarification.

## Resources

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TLA issues: [http://www.txla.org/html/govt\\_aff.html](http://www.txla.org/html/govt_aff.html)

The ALA website is a marvel of publications, best practices, and samples.

For grassroots resources (by library type), go to:

[www.ala.org/ala/issues/grassroots.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/issues/grassroots.htm)

For advocacy toolkits and best practices, go to:

[www.ala.org/ala/issues/toolsandpub/toolsandpub.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala/issues/toolsandpub/toolsandpub.htm)

## Subsection Credits

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“Communicating in Writing” and “Communicating in Person” were partially adapted from Gloria Meraz’s “The essentials of financial strength through sound lobbying fundamentals” published in *The Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2002): 64-69.