



Rethinking Advocacy as Year-Round Mission

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Let's rethink advocacy.

It's not once a year at Tennessee Legislative Day.

It's not asking commissioners for money.

It's year-round.

It's about building relationships.

And it's about telling stories.

Two people have shaped my views about advocacy in the past year. One of them is Suzanne Freeman, now president of the Knox County Friends of the Public Library and formerly advocacy chair for FOTL. The other is John Nye, longtime member of FOTL and a trustee of the Art Circle Public Library in Crossville. Suzanne's program for preparing for Tennessee Legislative Day covers a period of months, and John's advice about how to advocate for your library is both wise and practical.



- Identify your legislators. If you don't know who they are, ask your local library for help in finding out.
- Weeks before Library Legislative Day, let legislators know, preferably by e-mail, that you are coming to Nashville for the event. Invite them to have lunch with you (your treat), and make an appointment for a private audience with them on that day.
- A day or two before the event, send another e-mail telling the lawmakers that you are looking forward to seeing them shortly.
- On Library Legislative Day, enjoy a friendly and pleasant lunch. Later, in private meetings, acquaint your legislators with programs, services, and facilities at your libraries.
- And at this point John Nye's wisdom comes into play. Don't ask for money. Legislators already know that libraries need and want money. Instead, tell stories that help them understand how funding improves and benefits the community and how powerful your group of advocates is. Tell stories about how your libraries are helping

people during the economic downturn - by offering help with drafting resumes, for example, or searching for and applying for jobs online. Report your librarians' statistics on how many library card holders there are in your area and how much computer demand has increased. Talk about the numbers of children and teens who participated in summer reading programs. Tell them how many Friends are active members in your group and how they are helping to close the gap between funding and demands for services. Mention how much money your Friends' group invested in the library in the past year. Thank lawmakers for the Tennessee Electronic Library, which the state legislature has funded.

- After Legislative Day, follow up with an e-mail thanking them for meeting with you.
- Whenever the lawmakers come to their regions to meet constituents, be on hand. Remind them of your affiliation with Friends of the Library, and bring several of your members with you.
- Consider sending someone from your group to National Library Legislative Day. You will learn a lot because Jeanne Sugg, state librarian and archivist, and her staff will prepare for you position papers on specific issues that the delegation is addressing.
- Locally as a Friends' group consider polling candidates for county commission on their views about the library. Publish their responses. During National Friends of the Library Week or National Library Week, treat your commissioners to lunch, and again, tell stories about the services that your libraries are rendering.
- Become inveterate letter writers to your local newspapers, especially if you can hook them to something that is timely. For example, call the public's attention to a program at the library, or recognize the library staff for its help with a community activity. A letter every month or two from your Friends' group will make an impression on your community and your local funding agents.
- Drive home your advocacy by adding a "Support Tennessee Libraries" license-plate frame to your automobile. Contact your FOTL regional representative (page 2) for information about buying some for your group.
- Pick up ideas from other Friends' groups and other advocates on FOTL's website, and Facebook page, and in its newsletters. Get to know folks in nearby Friends' groups; consider a joint activity to share expenses and publicity. Be sure that your local group has a member designated as an FOTL liaison to disseminate ideas and to report successes.
- At your public library's reference desk, look into the possibilities of applying for grants. Talk to officials about Kroger and Food City programs for non-profit fundraising.
- What I am advocating is a more public and a more active advocacy year round at home, in the state, and in the nation throughout the year. Our libraries have need and deserve it.