

Tips for an Effective Meeting with your Legislator on Library Legislative Day

Library Legislative Day is about relationship building. Find out about your legislators before you attend. Legislative biographies and committee assignments are available at <http://azleg.state.az.us/MemberRoster.asp>. Arizona has a citizen legislature, so our representatives live and work in our communities. Any personal connections you can make with your legislators help to build your relationships. Do you attend the same church, belong to the same civic group, or do your children attend school in the same district? It is also helpful to know your legislators' committee assignments. Committee assignments often parallel legislators' personal interests in policy.

Make your appointment well in advance of Library Legislative Day and expect to spend anywhere from 5 to 30 minutes with your legislator. Whenever possible, bring patrons, students, and others not employed by libraries with you to Legislative Day. This helps legislators understand that AzLA members are advocates for libraries in general, not for their own employment.

Invite a legislator from your district to eat dessert with you on the Senate lawn. A casual conversation over a dessert continues the relationship building process. And not all the talk has to be about libraries! Legislators are human, too, and a little break in their day will help develop that all-important relationship.

Be cordial and diplomatic. Thank your legislator for serving your district. Use your meeting to talk positively about the great things happening in libraries. Avoid negativity and complaints. This is your chance to begin building a positive relationship with your legislators. Positive relationships will take your advocacy for libraries further than adversarial ones. Address your legislator as Senator/Representative Smith, or Mr./Ms. Smith. Our legislators are public officials who work very hard and deserve our respect.

Be sure to bring along copies of your library's newsletter or any other useful promotional pieces. If you think your legislator is particularly unfamiliar with library services, provide him or her with a general information brochure or sheet. Promote the teaching skills of your library staff. What formal and informal programs do you offer that make people feel more comfortable and confident using technology? How do businesses use the resources your library has to offer? How does your library help educate future or current workers? Another program to highlight is National Library Week. What programs is your library promoting in conjunction with this national event?

Use the power of story to illustrate the impact of libraries in Arizona communities. Libraries are vital resources for economic development. Offer examples of how libraries help the local and state economy improve. For example, public libraries are resources for job seekers or retoolers. Libraries provide entrepreneurs with essential information for developing their ideas and enterprises. School and university libraries help develop information literate workers. If you have real life stories about how your library has helped individuals or companies improve economically, share them with your legislators.

Most importantly, thank your legislators for their past support and encourage their continued support in working with AzLA to improve Arizona's libraries.

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