

Montgomery County Library Board and Friends of the Library,
Montgomery County

2018 Advocacy Toolkit

FY19 Advocacy Platform

With the current budget being reduced and further cuts across all County departments for FY 19 likely, our goal is to see sufficient funds for libraries in the upcoming FY19 budget to continue to provide undiminished services and support to all County residents, recognizing new initiatives will be postponed and replacements for attrition delayed.

Our priorities for the coming fiscal year remain similar to those in years past, with emphasis on continuing to maintain current hours and effectively leveraging the resources available for collections.

- **Maintain hours of operation**– Most working adults need consistent weekend hours to utilize library services and resources, while seniors desire increased daylight hours, and students can benefit from additional access to resources and a quiet place to study. Hours should be in line with the traffic levels at each branch.
- **Continue FY 18 funding levels for maintenance/upkeep** –Library patrons deserve elevators and escalators that work consistently and clean and well-maintained public library branches. The untidy library interiors and grounds that come from insufficient funds for maintenance and repair must be addressed.
- **Continue expanding the MCPL's book and media collections** – A public library's well-chosen book and media collection continues to be its heart. Resources should be made available to continue the process of securing these materials.
- **Continue FY 18 funding levels for capital development** - The emphasis should remain on the nationally recognized, award-winning Refresh program.

We understand that the County has been good to libraries and that they must also accept reductions as a County department, to stabilize our fiscal situation. Residents appreciate the services that are available to them, and we do not want to take a step backwards. We must continue to look forward and in these straitened times search for means to provide the support people need in this changing informational and technological environment.

Advocacy Questions and Talking Points

These brief talking points and questions can be used as inspiration when you attend meetings with County Council members or interact with the County Executive while attending budget forums.

You should differentiate your approach depending on the event you attend. If you are at a budget forum, you will only have an opportunity to ask one question and possibly a follow-up. Your questions should be focused and short. If you are at a reception, you may have more time with an officeholder, so you can expand the conversation and learn more about his/her library experience.

Talking Points

- Provide an example of a time when branch hours were limited and hindered you from completing a project or being able to visit the library.
- Provide an example of a time when you noticed an ongoing maintenance or upkeep issue at your local branch.
- Give an example of a time when you most enjoyed your time at a library branch.
- If you have visited a library that has completed the Refresh project, speak to what that meant for you and your community.
- Libraries are a valuable resource for all industries and sectors as there is an increased emphasis on technological advances and career support.
- Libraries aren't just for reading. Without libraries democracy has the potential to erode as democracy is driven by information, and libraries provide accurate resources.

Questions to Ask

- How do you plan to support libraries in the upcoming budget process?
- Can you tell me about your experiences with libraries? Which branch do you typically visit?
- Given the key priorities, which one resonates with you most and why?
- What are your thoughts around the recent Refresh programs?

Ways to Communicate with Elected Officials

Email/Letters

When writing your email or letter to your elected official, it's important to develop your message in a clear and concise way, but also weave in your own story. Provide facts about how libraries impact our County and how you have personally benefitted from their services. Provide your contact information for follow-up, and be sure to send another follow-up message in a couple months. Use this method of communication to develop a longer, detailed message in a more formal way.

Telephone Calls

Calling your elected officials' office is a good way to talk through the issue and is considered one of the most effective forms of advocacy. Having a conversation with a staffer or the official allows you to ask questions and receive answers immediately. Follow the same guidelines you would for meeting in-person and always be respectful.

Social Media

Social media provides a quick and efficient way to send a message to candidates or elected officials. When posting, be sure to keep your message to the point and on topic. Use this method of communication to provide a public statement on your position about libraries and to quickly explain your thoughts on an issue.

Facebook

The Facebook platform offers a unique Town Hall feature that you can turn on in your settings. This allows you to see who your local, state and federal elected officials are and comment with a "Constituent Badge." This feature provides you with the ability to comment on an issue without having to worry about whether or not the elected official knows you are a constituent.

Twitter

Twitter is another quick way to communicate with legislators, but it is more difficult to show that you are a constituent with limited characters. This platform is a great source of quick County and individual elected official news.

Tips for Meetings

Keep these tips in mind as you prepare for and attend meetings with County Council Members.

Before the Meeting

- ✓ Review the advocacy platform, talking points, and questions to ask.
- ✓ Do some research on your Member's position and public statements on libraries.
- ✓ Develop your story and practice with your family and friends.
- ✓ Have a plan, before going into the meeting, as to who will speak to what.

During the Meeting

- ✓ Tell your story and explain what libraries mean to you and your community.
- ✓ Talk through the main points in the advocacy platform.
- ✓ Make the ask.
- ✓ Thank them for their time and ask for information so that you can follow-up and stay in contact.

After the Meeting

- ✓ Write a handwritten note to thank the Member for their time and reiterate your position.

Tips on How to Deliver “The Ask” to a Policymaker

Opportunities are few to have a policymaker’s full attention on issues of importance to you. For policymakers, crowded calendars and the need to address multiple issues simultaneously make it difficult to give their full attention on any particular issue of importance to you and for you to deliver it in person. That’s why communicating with policymakers by writing letters, email and social media to express your point of view on your issue is so important to an advocacy campaign.

But talking to a policymaker at a community event is possible. Many of you are active with other groups that sponsor events where Montgomery County policymakers are invited to attend. These are excellent venues to communicate your point of view, but only if you are prepared. Below are some tips on maximizing these opportunities.

- Look for opportunities to have one-on-one chats with policymakers.
- Be brief. Policymakers want to meet with as many constituents as possible. You will leave a positive impression if you demonstrate that you respect the demands on their time.
- Stay focused on priority messages/asks:
 - ✓ A strong message is: “Montgomery County residents want evening and weekend hours at branch libraries to accommodate their busy schedules. Please ensure that MCPL will have adequate budget funding to meet those community needs.”
 - ✓ A weak message is: “We want County support for public libraries to serve the citizens of MC.”
- Be cordial. Don’t argue.
- Be responsive to requests for information.
- Ask for a response.
- Send a thank you letter, email or social media post that includes your “ask”.

Remember, be prepared. Be informed. Be likeable. Be persistent.

Good Luck!

How to Tell a Compelling Story

Meeting with elected officials can be intimidating, but it is important to remember that they want to hear from you as a constituent. Keep the following in mind as you prepare for meeting with or writing to County Council Members and the County Executive ahead of the upcoming budget forums and meetings.

emotional connection relevance call to action

1. Have a goal in mind – enter your meeting or write your letter with an end goal at the top of mind
2. Include the community – within the details of your personal story, try to include examples of how your experiences are shared by the rest of the community
3. Have an ask – never leave an office or end a letter without asking for something (refer back to the platform!)
4. Don't just read – while the platform is important, you want to make sure to tell your story within the context of the overall goals for the budget
5. Structure your story like a narrative
 - a. Develop a beginning with background information
 - b. Structure the middle with the main reason for the meeting and information about the impact
 - c. End with what you want them to do and how you can work together
6. Always be respectful

Storytelling Worksheet

Use the space below to plan the components of your personal story

Goals for the story	Details to share	Hook and ask