

Board Literacy 102 Speaking Notes

Updated May 2023

1) Welcome and Introductions (Slide 1)

Presenters will introduce themselves to the group at the beginning of the session. Some +participants may be new, and introductions of everyone attending are necessary at this point.

Warm Up Activity:

- Each participant should **write down 1 thing that they LOVE** about libraries and ONE specific program that they believe brings value to the Community.
- Participants will greet their neighbours (one at a time), sides, forward, and back, **introduce themselves and share** both things.
- —Classroom-style Discussion --
 - a. *What was something your neighbour said that surprised you or resonated with you?*
 - b. *How difficult did you find it to answer these two questions?*

2) Overview of the Purpose of the Board Literacy 102 Session (Slide 2)

In addition to getting to know each other, participants should be told that they will be provided with information about:

1. Review of BL 101
2. Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of Advocacy
3. Tools of the Trade and where to find them
4. Target Practice

3) Review Board Literacy 101

It is important for board members to be aware of the areas of the Act that stipulate the operations of the board, the powers of the board, and the legislated requirements for the provision of library services. The Act includes specific directions for the first meeting of the library board.

Libraries Act (Slide 3)

The **Libraries Act** is the legal basis for library boards in Alberta. It sets rules for:

- Board formation, trustee appointment and removal, selection of board chair
- Financial accounting
- Board meeting frequency and recordkeeping

- Bylaws relating to library safety, use, and fees

The Act applies to:

- Forming or joining a library system
- Library system agreements
- Policy and Service Planning
- Grants and Borrowing

So, anytime your board is posed with something that seems like a unique new challenge, odds are, if you refer to the Libraries Act you will find AT LEAST a starting point for how to go about handling it.

Libraries Regulation

This document **provides guidance to Library Boards in the planning and development of library service** both at the local and system levels. It sets out the responsibilities of Library Boards to develop policies and to cooperate with other Library Boards in the access to public library resources. Authority for the *Libraries Regulation* is provided by section 40 of the *Libraries Act*.

The **Libraries Regulation** includes required management practices:

- Public status of meetings and policies
- Province's right to inspect the board and library operations
- Professional librarian requirement for libraries in communities over 10,000 population
- Rules for the operation of public libraries housed in schools
- Annual report requirements
- Required policies and plan of service

Roles and Responsibilities: Due VS DO (Slide 4)

The Library Board and the Library Manager share the responsibility **to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of their library**. Their work in leading the library is quite specific and requires different skills and different information from staff. The library manager is the **expert**, employed by the board, and **trusted to make sound decisions** for the benefit of the organization. This is the *Due Diligence*. The board directs the Vision and Mission of the library and ensures that the community's needs have been met **but has no direct responsibility for library operations**. The board is focused on what the library should accomplish, and the Library Manager focuses on **how it is done**. This is the *DO*.

Key Takeaways: (Slide 5)

- The board is **accountable for establishing the library's Vision and Mission** and setting the rate of progress in achieving these.
- The municipal library board is **the legal entity that manages and controls the library**.

- The library board is a **governing board, not an advisory board**, unlike other non-profit boards formed under other legislation (e.g. the Societies Act). The difference between the two is the *authority* that a governing board has.
- The library manager is **the official delegate of the library board**, and it is their **responsibility to manage the day-to-day operations** of the library and fulfill the vision and mission of the library as established by the board.

4) Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?

Who (Slide 6)

Who is the advocate? That part's easy—it's you. It's me. Honestly, it is anyone that believes in the value of library service.

Who are we advocating to? Well, honestly. Also everyone.

We advocate to people **who just told us they never use the library**.

We advocate to **law makers** and other decision-makers or influencers.

We advocate to **friends and family**.

We advocate to **people we met on vacation**.

We advocate to **the teller at the bank**.

We advocate to **anyone who makes eye contact** with us.

—Classroom-style Discussion -- *When was the last time you gave your elevator speech?*

Why? (Slide 7)

First, last, and always, we advocate because of what libraries ARE. Libraries shape, change, and even save lives. Libraries are literally the **last bastion of free, unaffiliated support** that members of any community can expect to access, with **minimum boundaries and maximum welcome**.

We advocate because **NOT knowing HOW valuable the library is, is an incredible privilege**. It means that **all of your needs are being met elsewhere**. Your social needs, your educational needs, your enrichment, your access to information, and culture, and “an adult who knows how to do the thing” – all of that you have the resources to provide for yourself. And as a trick of fate—**the people who have that level of privilege are almost always the kind of people who end up in positions of power**. They are the people who LEAST understand how valuable libraries are, and they are voting in favour, or not in favour, of supporting libraries. It's **our job to help them understand that libraries are not a luxury**. They are not just books on a shelf and a cute little storytime program for other people's children.

Now, you might be thinking, “Alberta just got an increase in library funding, so surely the situation is not so urgent over here,” but I want to assure you of one simple thing. A silent library is an invisible library. **An invisible library is very easy to misplace.**

What (Slide 8)

Advocacy is not a sporadic activity. It's not something to be **frantically engaged in when the wheels** are falling off the bus. Advocacy should be a **consistent endeavor** that board members and library lovers **remain engaged in through every season**, through good times and bad, in sickness and in health.

What is advocacy, and what does it look like in the wild?

—Classroom-style Discussion —

Advocacy is the act of **publicly supporting a cause**. The purpose of Advocacy is to **engage, inform, and influence** others to join you in supporting that cause. In the library advocacy game, every player matters. There are no small roles, only small actors.

In 2017 the Saskatchewan government voted to defund libraries. Do any of you remember that happening? Did it make its way into Albertan news? Well, for anyone who doesn't know what happened. The **Provincial government** made the decision to **defund libraries by 60%** which DECIMATED regional library systems like ours. Library staff were immediately given notice and we were all prepared to **say goodbye to life as we knew it**. But, the PEOPLE WENT BERSERK! A **grassroots organization called "Save Saskatchewan Libraries"** sprung from the ground (actually facebook) and they **mobilized communities in every part of the province** to demonstrate loudly and synchronically that libraries are EVERYTHING to our small communities, and large ones too. And, without going into an enormous amount of detail, **they saved the day**. Who led this organization? It was a teacher (who did her best to remain anonymous for fear of losing her job) and a **library volunteer who was also member of the local library board**. Two women said, "No way," and then everyone else said, "No way," and libraries were saved. This is a great example what advocacy looks like in action.

When being interviewed, Christine Freethy, the leader of the Save Saskatchewan Libraries movement said, "You know ... I'm not an important person. **I'm just some lady who lives on a farm**. To know that like 7000 other people, pretty much like me, who are kind of a little apolitical and stuff ... didn't just whine about it, **didn't just accept that the government would do this**. We believed that we could change it and we did."

So, here is where we start thinking more about our elevator speeches:

What do you say when someone tells you they assumed libraries were going to become extinct, thanks to technology?

What other circumstances might you encounter that would be appropriate to deliver your elevator speech, or act as an ambassador to the library?

—Classroom-style Discussion --

Where (Slide 9)

There are essentially two streams for advocacy, and both are important to spend some time working on.

The first stream is the most obvious: **Local government and community leaders**. These people are already in a position of power and in order to do their jobs to the best of their ability, they need to know the **role that libraries play in the success of the community**. – This also ties into setting relevant Service Plan Objectives, but that is not our focus today. These people are your local **MLAs, city officials, chamber of commerce, school officials, and other movers and shakers** around town. In many instances your communication with these people will be **more formal, there can be some letter writing** involved in advocacy work—but it’s equally important to find opportunities to **bring these people *along*** with you when you are attending library programs and events, **invite them to participate**, or to simply be an audience member. A few years ago, **Edmonton Public Library Hosted a “City of Learners”** event in which people could set up booths where they taught people how to do something that they were very good at. **Mayor Don Iveson was invited to participate**, and he did; he came and taught people **how to make cheese!** Who doesn’t love cheese? It was awesome and hugely meaningful to have the mayor not only stop by for a photo op. but to attend as a participant and give his time and expertise to support the success of the event. **Advocacy is more than lip service and sound bytes**. And, if somehow your local library is not hosting programs or events that sound interesting to your local leaders—you once again want to turn to your place of service and ask yourself if the whole community is being served by the library.

The second stream is less formal than the first. **Your friends, family, and randos you meet on the street**. So, let’s pause here for a moment and I will ask you a question:

What is the most RANDOM and unexpected place you have ever delivered an elevator speech?

How confident do you feel in your ability to tailor your elevator speech to different audiences?

Is there an audience or demographic that you feel is unlikely to be receptive to a conversation about the library?

What demographic do you think might be MOST receptive to a conversation about libraries?

– Classroom Style Discussion—

Key Messages:

- **The more you know** about the library, the more compelling your message will be.
- **Advocacy is not SALES**. Advocacy is about public wellbeing, not private profit.
- **Start with heart**. Be genuine with people, listen to their stories, show curiosity.
- **Be authentic**. Invite others to JOIN you at library events, not just go themselves, alone.
- **Don’t make it weird**. (I will tell you about **what weird looks like**)

When (Slide 10)

Consistently. **When it is authentic, advocacy becomes a part of your personality**. It doesn’t feel forced, and your “elevator speech” isn’t really an elevator speech anymore. It eventually becomes **genuine passion** for the success of the individual, and the success of the community. But, **there is no amount of advocacy work that you can do, that the job will be *done***. Just as a river flows constantly onward, so do people in a community constantly change and flow and move onto the next place and role and stage in

their lives, and **hopefully they will take those meaningful impressions** of the library with them wherever they go, but in the meantime, **there will always be a fresh flow of people** coming through your community, **a new river to step in and meaningful connections** to make with the people around you.

Consistency is crucial because of what I mentioned earlier. All too often the folks who are in positions of power are privileged enough that they don't *need* the library to support their basic needs. If anything, it might represent entertainment, **a complement to their streaming services and cinema attendance**, a way to test out video games before they make a purchase. Such a limited exposure can only be detrimental to the library, **and a library that is silent is soon forgotten**. Not by those who need it—it is forgotten by those who might have been an **influential advocate** for it.

Makin Moves (Slide 11)

Advocacy is never finished. Libraries succeed because **we do more, we try new things**, we reach outside of our buildings. We collaborate with others. David Guetta said it best, “We are making it, because we are making moves.” 😊 We need others to know what we are doing. We need others to know that libraries are more than a collection of books or a cute storytime photo op.

5) How: Tools of Advocacy and Where to find them (Slide 12)

There are two types of Advocacy—I am going to call them Capital A-Advocacy and Lowercase A-advocacy. The ways one goes about doing each of these things are quite different, but **both are equally important for promoting the value of libraries**.

Capital A-Advocacy, can be described as the **concerted effort** that a board or other advocacy group will undertake in order to achieve a specific goal. There are a lot of supports out there available to help guide your efforts, so I am not going to spend a great deal of time digging into that. My intention with this presentation has been **to impress upon you the power of advocacy**—with either a Capital or lowercase A, and to hope that when you walk out of here, **this kind of work seems achievable, relevant, and directly connect to the wellbeing of your community**. But, I don't want to simply gesture vaguely at the supports that exist to support library Advocacy so we will take a **quick peek at some of these resources**.

The Library Association of Alberta offers some support for getting started with advocacy work, as does ALTA, and beyond them, the Canadian Federation of Library Associations also takes a leading role in advocacy for issues that impact libraries across the nation. The Ontario Library Association (OLA) is also a leader when it comes to tools for Advocacy that will help you **support and protect libraries in Alberta**. I will provide the links to each of these organizations. But let's take a quick look at a couple of them.

<https://www.laa.ca/page/advocacy.aspx>

<https://librarytrustees.ab.ca/advocacy-fundraising/>

<http://cfla-fcab.ca/en/advocacy/>

<https://accessola.com/advocacy-toolkit/>

Lowercase a-advocacy (Slide13)

This is a big part of what we have been talking about so far today. Lowercase advocacy work is about **being an ambassador for your cause**, building community, sharing stories, and bringing people together. You can do this on short notice, without a lot of formal preparation—by simply keeping abreast of what’s going on at your library, and in libraryland in general, and **putting yourself out there to relate to others**.

Here are a few things you can do to be an ambassador/ advocate for libraries:

1. **Start by understanding** your library (its environment, resources, value).
2. **Stay current** on issues that affect your library.
3. **Consider participating in training** that will allow you to channel your knowledge about your library and its issues into advocacy actions.
4. **Work within your comfort zone**, but think, too, about stepping outside it just a little bit.
5. **Share your efforts** to be an effective frontline advocate with others.

Elections Advocacy (Slide 14)

With the upcoming Provincial Election you might be wondering how you can ensure that Libraries are on the map for the candidates in your area. There are a few things that you can do to support libraries:

1. **Meet with Candidates** or Campaign Staff
 - a. Don’t just meet with your chosen candidate—try to broach the subject with all of the candidates in your area!
2. **Write or email** a letter to local Candidates
3. **Engage through social media**
4. **Ask key questions** at town hall meetings, all-candidates debates/ meet and greet events

6) Target Practice

Warm up

Small Groups:

Demographic Identity Cue Cards / Worksheet



Elevator Speech ideas

Practice

Head-to-head—what would you say about libraries to someone who....

This is a sharing activity, not a competition.