

The Role of Trustee as Advocate

As a member of the Board of Trustees of libraries in Westchester County you will be called upon to take the library message to local, state and federal government legislators and agency officials – on a wide range of library-related subjects, and through a variety of communications channels – all in an effort to nurture public support for WLS and Westchester’s libraries. The staff of WLS will work closely with you to identify the issues that you feel best suited to address – matching advocacy opportunities to your professional expertise, personal interests and unique talents. WLS and member library staff will train you for advocacy activities through regularly scheduled Trustee Institutes, frequent subject updates and action alerts delivered via the Internet and, when necessary, focused briefing session before legislative visits.

Library advocacy includes

- Keeping well informed about literacy issues such as funding, censorship, Internet filtering and information literacy, and state regulations.
- Making a point of getting to know the officials with decision-making power over the library.
- Using your political savvy and connections on behalf of the library.
- Ensuring the library’s interests are well represented when it comes to non-financial issues at the local, state and federal levels that effect libraries such as zoning ordinances, labor law, copyright, workers’ compensation, telecommunication rules and environmental regulations.
- Participating in the NYLA (New York Library Association) Library Legislative day – typically the second Tuesday on March each year, and ALA’s (American Library Association) national library legislative day – typically the first Tuesday in June each year, to ensure the voice of library supporters is heard.
- Maintaining communication with key officials and their staff even when you are not seeking their support. Keep them informed of library activities and concerns.
- Holding annual recognition event(s) for library advocates, including legislators and business, campus and community leaders who have lent their support. The Westchester Library System hosts an annual Book and Author Luncheon during National Library Week in which library advocates are acknowledged for their support. Local library appreciation events are highly encouraged.

Advocacy 101: Preparation and Persuasion

As always, we are truly grateful for the support and advocacy each trustee makes on behalf of their library organization and the Westchester Library System. However, we want to make sure that before you place a call, write an e-mail, send a letter or pay a visit

to an elected official whose support an individual library or libraries overall need on a critical issue, you will need to do some homework so that you have a clear understanding of the issue, the elected official's views on that issue and the legislative process through which the bill or funding authorization will proceed. WLS and member library staff will provide information on the issue(s) at hand and on the elected official you will be contacting through postings on the WLS website and pre-meeting briefing sessions should they be necessary.