

Advocacy! @ your library[®]

MUNICIPAL ELECTION STRATEGIES: EVERYONE IS AN ADVOCATE

**Monday,
October 21, 2013
is Municipal
Election Day in
Alberta**

Take this opportunity to advocate for your library, and public libraries in general. You can increase awareness of the important services and value that libraries bring to their community.

Tailor your information and your “asks” to your community – how your library can strengthen your community.

Be neutral and include all candidates.

What to Do

- Collect and share stories that will resonate with candidates and demonstrate the value of the library to residents and to strengthening the community.
- Provide candidates with current information on your library and success stories. Use statistics that tell the story, such as the number of new cardholders and percentage increase in cardholders compared to the previous year.
- Share information about the value of public libraries (see below).
- Inquire about the candidates’ knowledge of and vision for public libraries and for your public library in particular.
- Be prepared to answer questions from the candidates and to share your excitement about libraries.
- Acknowledge and say thanks for Council’s past commitment and contributions to your library.
- Research the candidates; gather information on their backgrounds and interests to establish a personal connection.

What to Ask

Sample questions for the candidates:

- What library services do you personally find useful and/or enjoyable?
- Do you have a favourite library memory or story to share?
- How do you think your public library makes a difference in your community?
- Do you see the public library as a focal point in the community, a community gathering place?
- Would you be willing to attend, give a greeting and/or present a story to a group of children when we hold a library function for the public?
- Do you know about Marigold Library System and how it collaborates with your library to enrich library service in your community?
- Have you heard of the RISE project and what a difference that has made to your community?
- Would you support investment in library infrastructure to meet the future needs of residents?

- Would you be willing to support (depending on the community's situation):
 - increase in operating funds to support the ongoing library services, programs, open hours and staffing?
 - investment in the facility to provide space for programs, technology and for people to meet and share ideas?
 - investment in technology to connect people and ideas globally and to allow everyone in the community to participate?
 - investment in special projects, such as pre-school literacy, to equip residents to succeed in the future?

How to Do It (ideas to build upon)

- Create questions for candidates, and have board members present them at various all-candidates meetings; then report back to the board.
- Host your own candidates' meeting at the library; this can be formal or more informal ('meet the candidates'); invite the media.
- Invite the candidates to a regular or special board meeting.
- Send a letter or e-mail to the candidates, asking for their responses to specific questions. For example: *This letter is being sent to all candidates in the upcoming municipal election. In order to understand your views on public libraries, we are asking that you take a moment to respond to the questions below...* View a sample letter at: <http://www.bclta.ca/advocacy/election-strategies>
- Start an election forum. Red Deer Public Library used technology to create 'digital democracy' for the last election. Voters interacted with the candidates on the website/forum.
- Collect stories from library patrons of all ages to share with the candidates.
- Invite candidates to do a noon hour or after dinner talk on a relevant (politics or libraries) topic.
- Invite candidates to do a story time program, or help with another program.
- Have your teens (the future voters) stage a mock political debate (perhaps invite candidates to watch).
- Have your teen / young adult patrons vote for their favourite book character as a politician in a mock election.

How Libraries Give Value to Their Communities (ideas to stimulate discussion)

- Equitable access to information and ideas through resource sharing
- Community gathering place
- Lifelong learning & skills development, academic achievement
- Literacy and early years education; school readiness
- Digital inclusion: free access to technology and the Internet; hands on technology training
- Preserve cultural identity and local history
- Health and personal well-being
- Recreation
- Business support and innovation

- Citizenship
- Career help
- Volunteer and employment opportunities
- Support for people in need
- Opportunities to interact with others to build a sense of community and purpose

What are Libraries Really For?

- Personal growth and wellness
- Economic impact
- Equity
- Student performance
- Competitive advantage
- Community gathering place
- Social glue
- Mental stimulation and wellness
- School readiness and student achievement performance
- Language development and literacies

Are Libraries Still Needed?

If someone asks you if libraries are still needed when so much information is available on the Internet, a suggested reply is:

“Public libraries are more relevant and heavily used today than ever before, and public libraries are one of the better uses of taxpayers’ dollars...”

Share some meaningful library statistics, such as the number of library cardholders, annual circulation and program attendance, along with a short, impactful library story about a local library patron whose life changed as a result of using your library. You could finish by commenting on the value of your library in the community.

“The Internet is marvelous, but to claim, as some now do, that it’s making libraries obsolete is as silly as saying shoes have made feet unnecessary.” Mark Y. Herring, American Libraries, April 2001..