



# Advocacy How-To Guide

## Alberta Provincial Election 2023



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## PROVINCIAL ELECTION

The seven library systems in Alberta wish to raise awareness about library funding issues in advance of the spring Provincial election. While most funding comes directly from municipalities, Provincial library funding is critically important, and has not increased substantially since 2009. There was a \$0.10 per capita increase that came into effect in 2015.

Additionally, population figures have not been updated in recent years, meaning libraries are serving greater populations than for which they are being funded. This in addition to the current inflation crisis, means all libraries are struggling financially.

## OBJECTIVES

To create to raise awareness of the value of libraries to people in Alberta

To seek a commitment from Provincial candidates to support libraries through increased funding

## AUDIENCE

### Primary Targets

- All candidates running in the provincial election
- Current ministers and MLAs

### Primary Partners

Primary partners will play an active role in our provincial advocacy effort.



Partner	Role & Responsibilities
Library System Board Members	Make contact with candidates and current MLAs with meetings and letters.
Library Board Members	Meet with MLAs to request support.
Municipal Councils	Voice support for an increase in funding to Provincial Government
Library System Directors	Distribute materials to member libraries and boards, meet with Municipal CAOs, and provide support to board members and councils.

**Secondary Partners**

- LAA & ALTA
- Out-of-System Node Libraries
- Large Urban Libraries
- TAL

**Secondary Targets**

- Residents within the seven library systems
- Media

**ADVOCACY APPROACH PRINCIPLES**

**Messaging**

- Messages will focus on the value of libraries
- Messages will demonstrate how libraries can help meet various political goals as identified by each party (e.g. job creation, skills upgrading, economic development)

**Peer-to-Peer**

- Library board members will contact candidates and elected officials
- Library administrators will support their board members and liaise with municipal administrators

**All Candidates**

- All candidates will receive the same information

**Peak at the Right Time**

- Timeliness is critical to making an impact

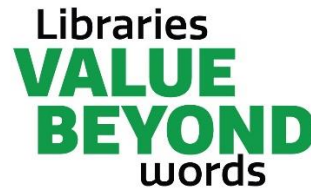


- Environmental scanning will be needed to monitor key opportunities for outreach
- Ramp up mid-way through the election campaign

**Seek public support**

- People will be encouraged to ask candidates about their support for libraries

**AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TAGLINE AND LOGO**



**Libraries Value Beyond Words** is the tagline for the provincial awareness campaign about the value of libraries to people in Alberta.

This is a play on words, taken from the expression about something that is indescribable. Something that’s “beyond words” is so amazing, so beautiful, so incredible that there are not sufficient words to describe it.

**Libraries Value Beyond Words** is not about the literal interpretation (i.e. text or books), but rather, the conceptual interpretation that libraries deliver so much value that there are not sufficient words to describe it.

Of course, the fact that libraries deal with words is the double meaning.

**KNOW YOUR MESSAGES**

It is crucial to ensure government agencies continue to support and fund these valuable community institutions. To that end, it’s important that all candidates in the election are aware of the value that libraries bring to the people of Alberta.



Sustainable funding is critical to ensuring public libraries continue to empower Albertans and strengthen communities. More than ever, libraries have a far-reaching impact on their users and communities. In areas such as:

- Early Literacy
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Social Integration
- Adult Learning
- Participation in the Digital Economy
- Support for immigrants
- Partnerships with Indigenous communities
- Access to Technology

Alberta libraries are busy. Despite misconceptions that libraries are becoming increasingly irrelevant in an era of the Internet, libraries have experienced continuous growth in circulation, programming, library visits, cardholders and community partnerships.

**Tell Your Story**

Rather than presenting a long list of services, introduce your politicians to your library staff and mention how they contribute to making a difference in your community. Using anecdotes will likely resonate more with your candidate and leave a lasting impression. For example, Dee-Ann at the Strathmore Municipal Library started a sign language program that allowed her to communicate with those around her and helped the community become more inclusive to people with hearing disabilities.

**Don't Endorse Candidates**

Do not endorse any candidates, regardless of their positions on libraries. This can be a huge risk if the candidate is not elected, or is not a part of the party that forms the government. Avoid getting political and remain focused on positive messaging regarding the value of libraries.



## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

### Meeting with MLAs and Candidates

Meeting with candidates and campaign staff before and during the election period is a great way to build a relationship and to educate on the positive impacts of libraries and issues confronting the sector. Candidates want to get to know the important stakeholders in their communities – that’s you – and will appreciate your local perspective and the opportunity to learn more.

Engaging with local candidates and campaign staff will:

- Give you the chance to have more in-depth, targeted conversations with a local perspective.
- Evaluate candidates' understanding of the issues facing affecting libraries, and respond to any questions they may have.
- Create long-lasting connections with candidates, can help to create advocates for provincial support of libraries.

### *Preparation is Key*

Stay up-to-date on your candidates and their platforms. Gather information on their backgrounds and interests to establish a personal connection.

- Inquire about the candidates' knowledge of and vision for public libraries and your public library, in particular.
- Educate yourself on the government’s previous commitments. The Alberta government has contributed nearly \$30 million in total provincial grants to Alberta’s 222 municipal library boards and seven regional library systems.
- Library trustees on 229 library boards provide the strategic direction and play an important role in ensuring that our library meets its financial, legal and community obligations.



- Library staff are leaders in delivering quality services in the community.
- Talk about memberships and attendance for programs and events at your local library.
- Mention that your patrons can use their library cards in public libraries throughout the province and return their borrowed materials to any library.
- Mention that public libraries provide free computers and internet access to anyone who needs it.
- Get candidates involved by inviting them to take part in a program, such as an all-candidate meeting at the library or reading at Story Time.
- Remember to remain politically impartial.

### Requesting and Scheduling a Meeting

- Make yourself available to meet with the MLA or candidate for as long as they have time. Be as accommodating as possible.
- Candidates and MLAs receive lots of invitations. If you haven't heard back about your invitation within a few days or haven't been given a specific meeting date, you should follow up on it.
- Determine speaking responsibilities in advance if more than one team member will be participating in the meeting.
- Prepare a relevant, local story to illustrate your point.
- Leave a copy of the **takeaway document** for the MLA or candidate so they have something to refer to after you go. Offer to answer any questions, or meet again, at any time.

### Conducting a meeting

- Focus on your key messages and be concise.
- Be passionate and respectful.
- Make note of the candidate's/MLA's comments and questions. Follow up with additional information if appropriate.
- Be sure to leave time for questions.





## Following up

Send a thank you email to the MLA or candidate, along with any answers to questions they asked, and a digital copy of the takeaway document.

## Informal Meetings or Encounters

Although informal encounters are less frequent, there may be other ways for you to get in touch with your local candidates or MLAs. Be sure to capitalize on the opportunity to interact with and inform candidates about the services that libraries provide if you run into them at the library or a community event. Informal interactions are a great way to develop a good rapport with someone who could end up becoming your next Member of the Legislative Assembly.

## Letter Writing

If you are unable to arrange a meeting, you can write a letter instead, detailing the key messages and including the takeaway document. Be sure to ask about the individual's position on various library issues. This will give you a better idea of where candidates stand on matters that are important to libraries, and will be very helpful should the candidate be elected.

Email may be more convenient, but a handwritten letter can make a bigger impression on the candidate.

## Media Interviews

Gaining public support for libraries will be an important aspect of our advocacy efforts. Media interviews can be a great way to get exposure and reach the general public. You can initiate an interview with the local paper, or respond to a reporter's request.

Remember, you do not have to answer a request for an interview right away. You can ask the interviewer to tell you



what they are going to ask, and reach out to them after you have had some time to put together your answers.

## Social Media

Take the conversation online to help promote Alberta's libraries this election. You can use a tweet or a Facebook post to promote the value of libraries, show your support for them, or spread awareness of the problems facing libraries in Alberta.

Be sure social media posts focus on the value of libraries. Ask people to show their support for libraries by reposting/liking/retweeting your posts. This can be a great way to engage with people across the province.

## Asking Questions at Election Forums and Debates

Throughout the election, candidates will take part in several local engagements where voters may have the chance to ask them questions. Another possibility is that you'll run into a candidate by accident or at an event you've planned.

You and other library supporters should take advantage of these contacts, whether they take place in person or online, to learn more about the candidates' positions on the issues that concern libraries.

An example of how to word a question in a setting where it would be asked publicly:

The pandemic demonstrated how critical it is for individuals, students and families across Alberta to access online resources through public libraries.

How do you plan to support libraries in Alberta?

## Additional Resources



## The Value of Libraries Messaging

During each election, there are several common topics around which all the political parties build their platforms. We will link to these topics to demonstrate the value of libraries in delivering on important issues for Albertans.

### Economic Development

Businesses locate in communities with libraries. They value libraries as an essential quality-of-life amenity for their employees and families. Libraries support economic development by providing resources for people to start a business, upgrade skills, or learn about career options.

### Education

Libraries encourage literacy for people of all ages, help newcomers who have English as a second language and connect people and the world. Free internet access is a critical educational support for families and people living in poverty.

### Environment

Libraries help reduce waste and over-consumption by lending books, movies, materials and resources time and time again. This is the 'original' recycling program! Library circulation gets the longest life out of each material by enabling as many people to use it as possible.

### Health

Libraries bring people together, which is a significant factor in mental well-being. For example, moms and toddlers can enjoy story time, providing socialization and literacy support. Isolated seniors can play cards; teens can make friends during game night. The library is a safe, enjoyable community hub that supports mental health through social connection.

Libraries can also provide peer-reviewed, evidence-based resources on health matters, making access to reliable information easy for everyone.

### Credible Information

Librarians are available to help people find evidence-based resources. credible and reliable. In times of misinformation,



falsehoods and conjecture, Libraries can be a force for objectivity and truth.

### **Take Away Document**

A take away document has been created to leave behind after meetings with MLA's, Candidates, and anyone else that might benefit.

### **Web Content**

Web content has been created to go on each library system's website to provide information and resources.

Organic social media posts will link back to respective library system websites for more information.

### **MLA Contact Information**

Current MLAs:

<https://www.assembly.ab.ca/members/members-of-the-legislative-assembly>