

Conversations that Connect

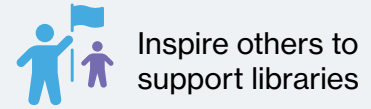
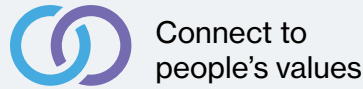
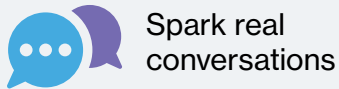
Messaging for Library Advocates

A blue-tinted photograph of three people in conversation, overlaid with a black circle containing text. The people are smiling and appear to be in a meeting or discussion.

Updated
to Meet
Current-Day
Challenges!

LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS ARE IN UNPARALLELED TIMES.

Book challenges and censorship loom, we're facing funding obstacles for library services and buildings, and there is expanded use of artificial intelligence. This conversation guide presents positive messages for librarians, library workers, and library advocates. It can be used to:



We hope you'll find the guide to be a valuable resource as you and your library think about what is important in your community and about how to develop messages that are timely, informative, trustworthy, relatable, and inspiring.

For more grassroots organizing tips, check out the Unite Against Book Bans Action Toolkit and the Resource Library at uniteagainstbookbans.org.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Inside you'll find new and reworked "message starters" that are based on 2025 focus group findings as well as conversations that our public library and school library networks have been having in their communities.

Messages focus on the vital role that libraries play in our communities. They aren't intended to be a script but are instead a set of ideas for you to consider customizing to reflect your own voice and the audiences you're trying to reach. For example:

- Messages can be tailored to a specific book that is being challenged, or used more generally to oppose book bans.
- You might adapt them for a letter to your library board, town council, state legislators, or as the basis of your public comments to elected officials during meetings.
- Messages can also be used to help you draft a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or to speak with members of the media.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- **Foundational Messages about Libraries and Librarians.** On page 3, you'll find key talking points to start conversations or to bring them back on track.
- **Message Related to Specific Topics.** On pages 4-7, you'll find the following topics covered:
 - Libraries
 - Librarians
 - Artificial Intelligence
 - Censorship
- **Anchor Messages.** Each message topic includes a key statement that you can tailor to specific discussions.
- **Supporting Messages.** Each anchor message is surrounded by potential talking points for you to select depending on your situation, setting, and audience.

Libraries and librarians matter!

FOUNDATIONAL MESSAGES ABOUT LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

Libraries are welcoming places that provide free access to collections, programs, and resources! Every community member can choose from a wide range of books, newspapers, and online learning tools. Communities can also access public computers and printers, WiFi access, homework help, job/resume assistance, children's story times, cultural events, community meeting spaces, museum passes, and CDs, DVDs and more.

Librarians are trained professionals who make sure the library has books on many different topics so people can choose what interests them.

Individuals, parents, and families – not politicians – have the right to decide what they and their children read, and removing books from library shelves takes that freedom away from other people.



TIPS FOR PERSONAL CONVERSATIONS

- 1. Consider your audience and what's important to them.**
The messages you deliver in a town council meeting about library budgeting will be different from the ones you use with a parent concerned about books on your library shelves. *Think about your audience and their perspective.*
- 2. Have a key point in mind.** The goal is to enter a discussion with your *anchor message*, then take a moment to really listen to the other person's response.
- 3. Notice their reaction.** It's a good sign when they start asking questions. Let their reaction help you decide what to talk about next. *What ideas in your anchor message did they respond to?*
- 4. Shape the conversation.** Try to move the conversation in a positive direction by incorporating some of the supporting ideas on pages 5-7. If they challenge you, be ready to explain your point of view. *Try to keep the discussion centered on what matters most to them.* They will be more likely to stay engaged, consider shifting their opinions, and even take action.
- 5. Test and Practice.** Talk about your library and book challenges with friends, family, and colleagues and see what resonates most with them.

LIBRARIES

Libraries make sure everyone has the ability to find information, discover new things, and create opportunities to succeed.

- Libraries offer free internet and WiFi so that community members can participate in the digital world to:
 - build their resumes, easily apply for jobs, and access telehealth visits in places where the closest medical services are far away
 - update professional certificates, learn new technology skills, and take online classes
- Additionally, many libraries offer free access to items that people may want to borrow but can't afford to buy such as:
 - sports equipment
 - musical instruments
 - baking, gardening and farm tools
 - knitting and craft supplies

Libraries are more than just books—they are community spaces where people learn, share, create, and even connect during emergencies.

- Many modern libraries offer both quiet areas and busy, active spaces.
- Libraries serve as a lifeline for people during extreme storms, health emergencies, and wildfires by offering things like shelter, food, electricity, heat, and air conditioning.
- Today's libraries are spaces where families can participate in activities with their children, community groups can host classes and meetings, youth groups can share projects, and much more.

Libraries help people of all ages learn, think, and explore.

Libraries offer books and other materials that help young people learn and grow.

- Children and teens have their pick of arts and crafts classes, writing workshops, and makerspaces.
- Books and library resources can:
 - Help kids and teens understand their feelings—like joy, sadness, or worry.
 - Comfort them during tough times, help build their confidence and ability to care about others.
 - Teach children to build healthy relationships, and learn to make good decisions to navigate the world safely.
- Libraries exist to make space for every story and everyone's knowledge and life experiences.

School libraries provide essential tools and resources for students of all ages.

- School libraries are places where all students can learn how to navigate information safely and accurately.
- School libraries provide options to help parents oversee their children and teens' developmentally appropriate reading choices.
- Reading and having access to a variety of stories provides students with a way to see themselves, explore various views, and help them relate to the world around them.

LIBRARIANS

Librarians are trustworthy experts with extensive training.

- Librarians are responsible for making a wide selection of books available, since not everyone chooses the same books for themselves and their families.
- Librarians receive extensive professional training in selecting books for 9-month olds to 90 year olds.
- Librarians make sure that children's, young adult, and adult books are shelved in the sections created specifically for those respective groups.

Librarians agree that parents have the right to guide their children's reading.

- To meet the needs of all young people, librarians select which books are suitable for different ages and they encourage parents to be involved in their children's reading selections. It's similar to other parental decisions like:
 - **Food:** A parent who doesn't want their children to eat certain foods can't stop other parents from serving those foods to their children.
 - **Sports:** A parent who doesn't want their child playing football can't stop other parents from letting their children play football.

Librarians are trustworthy, trained professionals.

School librarians create safe and welcoming spaces.

- School librarians are trained to select books that are appropriate to the maturity level of their students.
- School librarians select books for students of all ages:
 - Elementary students just learning to read,
 - Young adults going through adolescence, and
 - High school seniors preparing for college, careers, and civic participation.

School librarians are trained literacy and information professionals.

- School librarians teach the foundational skills of internet safety and media literacy.
- School librarians are uniquely positioned through their professional training to guide students and support classroom teachers in the responsible and effective use of AI tools.
- School librarians are preparing students to succeed in the modern economy.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Librarians are trained and can be trusted to review books for appropriate content.

- AI is full of inaccurate information.
- A qualified librarian or educator would still need to review any AI output to make sure it follows the law, meets the library's rules, and is suitable for children and teens of different age groups.

AI tools have NO ability to understand context, intent, or ethics and cannot assess risk.

- AI tools don't have a moral framework, and are unqualified to make decisions about developmentally-appropriate books.

**Librarians, not AI,
are qualified to evaluate
books for inappropriate
content and to provide
personalized service to
library-goers.**

Relying solely on AI is legally risky.

- If an AI tool makes a mistake, people would be held responsible, not AI. Libraries can face serious fines and librarians can even face criminal charges if minors access restricted materials because an AI tool didn't assess it correctly.
- In the end, taxpayers would be responsible for paying the high costs of lawsuits filed against libraries because of incorrect or harmful decisions made by AI tools.

Libraries are safe spaces where people can learn about new technology like AI and how to use it responsibly.

- Using AI responsibly includes not leaving final decisions about children's safety up to technology.
- Just as librarians helped their communities access and learn about the internet, email, and digital tools, they are here to do the same with AI.
- AI isn't always right; it can provide false or misleading information, and relying only on AI tools to make important decisions can lead to dangerous mistakes such as taking incorrect medical or mental health advice or giving children access to developmentally-inappropriate books.

CENSORSHIP

Obscene materials are not legally allowed anywhere in libraries.

- Libraries follow the law, which means they cannot knowingly house or distribute legally obscene materials to minors.
- Librarians regularly monitor the shelves throughout their libraries to ensure the selection remains lawful and age appropriate.

Banning or censoring books is a form of government control.

- In this country, we have the freedom to read what we want, or what we want our children to read. Americans lose their freedom when books are banned from public libraries.
- Book bans silence a range of viewpoints and restrict learning.
- No politician, government official, individual, or group has the right to choose what the whole community can read or limit access to books and information because they don't like them.

- Removing and banning books from public libraries takes away the right for families to choose what they want to read.

Libraries protect our freedom to read and access to ideas, even ideas we disagree with.

Librarians champion our freedom to read, our freedom of speech, and our freedom to access information and ideas – even those we might disagree with.

- Our country was founded on the principle that people are free to think for themselves. Groups that claim to protect our liberty by banning books are actually limiting our freedom.
- Librarians thoughtfully provide books for many varied interests, and today, the libraries they lead offer a wide range of digital and physical resources as well.
- When groups try to restrict which books or resources are available, librarians and libraries cannot serve the whole community.

Buying books isn't the answer.

- Some people can go online or to a bookstore to buy books, but not everyone has internet access, a credit card, or the budget to buy all the books they want to read.
- Book bans are happening in places like public libraries and schools, which people, especially kids, rely on for free access to books and information.
- When books are removed from public places where access is intended to be equal, that's not freedom. Freedom shouldn't be something that only certain people can buy.

ADDITIONAL MESSAGING TIPS

Call out the positive. Remember to celebrate wins for libraries and against censorship!

Focus on positive messaging around libraries, library workers, and censorship. Negatives can lead to hopelessness and burnout, even among passionate advocates. It's important to understand and talk about the challenges libraries face, but rather than focusing only on the negative, try to balance your messages with examples about people coming together to protect libraries and library workers, as well as the right to read.

Develop your own library story and talk from personal experience.

You might include:

- How libraries and librarians have positively impacted your own life and your community.
- How the attacks on libraries, library workers, and the right to read has harmed you or your community.
- How your library has historically helped your community.

Share specific calls to action.

Advocacy is about moving people from awareness to action. Consider taking the following specific action steps:

- **Visit** your state library association's website.
- **Check** the American Library Association website.
- **Connect** with local advocates.
- **Sign up** for the *Unite Against Book Bans* newsletter.
- **Explore** the websites of *Unite Against Book Bans* partner organizations.

THANK YOU FOR BEING A LIBRARY CHAMPION!

For more information, email uniteagainstbookbans@ala.org
or visit uniteagainstbookbans.org.

HOW THIS GUIDE WAS CREATED

In conjunction with the American Library Association (ALA), Goodwin Simon Strategic Research (GSSR) conducted a four-day, online focus group in November 2025. Focus group participants were drawn from the states of Texas, Florida, Arizona, Ohio, and Missouri and included parents and grandparents, along with a diverse mix based on gender, ethnicity, and ideology. The focus group topics and questions were guided by the experiences of library advocates in the field and legislative trends. ALA used the insights gathered to develop updated customizable messaging to assist libraries, librarians, and their supporters across the country. Additional messaging tips were gathered from ALA members and staff, library advocates, and partner organizations. Funding for this guide and supporting research was provided by donations to the ALA Unite Against Book Bans campaign and by ALA members.