

ENGAGING WITH YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY BOARD

Why does it matter?

Local libraries are a gift to our communities, and they are **so much more than just books.**

Libraries are free “third spaces,” spaces between work and home, where people can gather. Libraries often offer services such as “tool libraries” for home repairs, “seed libraries” for gardeners, civic health services, like vital voting information, programs to help community members apply to public assistance programs, and so much more.

Libraries offer a place to cool down in the summer, and warm up in the winter, where it is entirely free to take a seat, use the bathroom, or charge your phone. Libraries are one of the last places in our cities where it is free to simply exist.

One way we protect and cherish these spaces is by engaging with **local library boards** to ensure that decisions made about our community libraries are made by and for our communities.



STRONGLY
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LETTERS



Library boards often* have the ability to make decisions about...

*The exact powers of library boards vary from city to city

- What kinds of **services** the library should and can offer.
- What kinds of **books and displays** the library should and can offer, and what to do if a book is challenged by community members.
- How much **funding** should be allocated to specific services the library offers (quick note: how much funding a library has overall is typically decided by your mayor/city council/city manager!)
- Library **policies**, and how they are implemented
- **Hiring** for the library director and other upper-administrative staff
- And more!



How to engage:

Engaging with any part of local, city government can be intimidating. Local governments are often inaccessible due to a number of reasons, such as lack of funding for outreach, meetings being scheduled during the work day, or the use of legal or financial jargon. However, engaging on the local level is the most direct way you can make an impact in your community.

You can engage with your local library board by attending and speaking at library board meetings, contacting your representatives via email or phone call, or running for an elected position* on your local library board.

***Note: Not all library boards are elected, some are appointed by the mayor or city council, depending on what city you live in. Our hometown of Omaha has an entirely appointed library board.**



Attending library board meetings:

Attending library board meetings can be incredibly impactful, especially when you consider that the majority of people who attend public meetings are there to complain.

Consider attending a library board meeting just to speak up in support of library services! To find out where and when these meetings are held, you can find the information typically on your library system's official website, on your city's website, or by asking a librarian the next time you drop by the library!

Most library board meetings have time open for public comment at every meeting. The exact protocol may differ (you can ask a librarian about this, as well), but generally you can sign up to speak during the public comment period.

Not sure what to say? Here's a basic script to build on:

Good morning/afternoon/evening,

My name is _____ and I am a community member from (neighborhood) who uses (neighborhood library). I am here to voice my opinion on _____. I support/oppose this decision/program/service because _____. This is important to me because _____. This will impact my community by _____.

Thank you for listening.

Additionally, we've seen many libraries proudly display banned, LGBTQ+, and diverse books in the face of harsh backlash. It's important to also let our librarians know that we appreciate these efforts because, most likely, they only hear from the people who are against these displays.

Here's a more specific script to build off of when you're speaking in support of these displays:

Good morning/afternoon/evening,

My name is _____ and I am a community member from (neighborhood) who uses (neighborhood library).

I am here to voice my enthusiastic support of the banned books/LGBTQ books/diverse books display in the library. I believe access to books like this are vital to my community because _____.

I oppose all bans or challenges of books because _____. I recognize that the choice to display these books in the face of backlash might not have been easy and that makes me all the more grateful to have you as our librarians.

Thank you for listening and for all you do.



Other ways to support libraries and defend books:

- Get involved in your local school boards by attending meetings, contacting representatives, or running for a seat to address book challenges in school libraries.
- Next time you stop by your local library, say thank you to the library staff, especially when you see “banned book” displays or displays featuring LGBTQ+ books.
- Check out banned books. When materials in a library are heavily circulated, this signals to library staff that they need to order more copies, and more similar materials. Vote with your library card by checking out the kinds of books you want to see in your library.
- Vote in local elections, especially school board and library board elections.
- Advocate for increased library funding by attending city council meetings, especially local budget related meetings.

STRONGLY WORDED LETTERS is an Omaha-based advocacy duo dedicated to civic education and agitation. We fight barriers to access by connecting people to their local governments as directly as possible. If you have questions about civic engagement on a city level, send us a message on social media or email us at hello@stronglywordedomaha.org

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