

Tips and tricks for talking to elected officials and decision makers

How to get and stay in touch

Due to the special election, this is actually a great time to find and talk to mayoral candidates, along with any seated councilmembers attending their events.

Even if it's not your "assigned" councilmember, please introduce yourself to any councilmembers you come across at events, etc., even if it's not "budget season". This is a good time to get to know them and find out what's important to them. You can help strengthen ties between legislators and the library commission as a whole.

You can get contact information from the Oakland City Council website (<https://www.oaklandca.gov/departments/oakland-city-council>), by asking other commissioners, or by asking Kere.

Once you've gotten in touch, keep the conversation going. Email, call, text, whatever. Even if they stop responding, it's helpful to stay on their radar (this usually just means they have a full inbox/mailbox/etc.). Keep doing this until you have a meeting, either with the CM or their Chief of Staff. There's a chance this meeting will get cancelled last-minute. If this happens, you should keep contacting them until a new meeting is scheduled.

If this is your first time doing this, it may be surprisingly difficult to get a formal meeting at first. It's important to remember that this is rarely due to a lack of support or interest, but due to a cacophony of competing advocates with differing priorities.

How to build relationships

If talking to a CM in an informal setting (library mixer, campaign event), focus on getting to know them as a person and understanding their priorities as a legislator. You can use this to tailor your message later, but it's also a good way to build relationships and networks of support for our libraries.

How to make the most of a formal meeting

You will eventually get a meeting with the councilmember, mayor, or their chief of staff. Start by asking questions. Ask about their budget priorities, why they favor certain programs,

what their considerations are, how they weigh input from advocates and constituents, whether they feel there are specific needs within their districts that need priority, etc. It's helpful to understand the context and political realities they're operating in. Keep an eye on the time and remember that *you are managing the meeting*.

In promoting the library, be direct and concise, and target your message to what you've just learned of their priorities. Don't ramble, and don't couch or sugarcoat anything. End with the specific list of **asks** from the LC talking points. Then ask them to make a commitment on each of the specific asks.

If they hesitate or give a non-answer, be persistent in getting them to give you a **yes**. If they don't have an answer today, ask when they will have one, and then plan to follow up.

If they give an unequivocal "no," ask why not, and counter their arguments with our contextual library talking points. For example, if they say crime is their top priority, point out that libraries play a role in reducing crime. Use data when you can.

If they give an unequivocal answer (yes or no), make sure you write this down in front of them. If they say they'll answer later, follow up with them via email so that if they do give a response it's in writing.

During this time, be respectful, but don't back down, either. It's always helpful to remember these people are paid by taxpayers and it's their job to listen and respond.

It can be helpful to flatter them before, during and after you make your case. Thank them for their leadership and vision, tell them how thankful you are, etc., but this must be *sincere* and *informed*.

Regardless of how the meeting goes, thank them for their time, and tell them you look forward to continuing the discussion (if they haven't made a commitment yet).