

# Talking to Elected Officials & Decision Makers

*Tips and Tricks for Effective Library Advocacy*

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

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The April 2025 special election creates a timely opportunity to connect with mayoral and city council candidates, as well as seated council members.

### Year-round engagement matters:

- Introduce yourself at events throughout the year *not only during budget season*.
- Use these moments to learn about their priorities and build familiarity.
- This helps strengthen relationships between legislators and the Library Commission as a whole.

### When connecting across districts:

- It's always good to advocate for our libraries even when you meet a councilmember not assigned to you. Just let the assigned commissioner know about it.
- Offer to make an introduction between them if helpful.

### In informal settings

At library mixers, campaign events, or community gatherings: focus on relationship-building. Learn about their interests, values, and district priorities. This context will help you tailor future advocacy.

## SCHEDULING YOUR FIRST BUDGET MEETING

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### Getting in the door:

- You can get contact information for councilmembers from your fellow commissioners, from Kere, or from the Oakland City Council website.
- Once you make contact, follow up consistently via email or phone.
- Consider requesting confirmation of receipt when you email.
- Continue following up until a meeting is scheduled with either the councilmember or their chief of staff.

#### TIP

*Expect delays. Scheduling often takes time due to competing priorities, not lack of interest. Persistence pays off.*

## MAKING THE MOST OF A BUDGET MEETING

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### If time allows (30 minutes or more), open with questions:

- What are your budget priorities this cycle?
- How do you weigh input from constituents and advocates?
- What are the top priorities in your district?

Understanding their context will sharpen your advocacy.

### Build rapport:

- If appropriate, acknowledge something you respect about their work to establish common ground.
- Manage your time carefully. Be clear, focused, and intentional so your key points land.

### When presenting library priorities:

- Select a few key talking points that align with their stated priorities.
- Use clear, concise language—avoid jargon.
- Anchor your case in local examples or community stories.
- End with specific, concrete asks.

### Securing commitment:

- Ask directly for commitment on each request.
- If support is vague, seek clarification.

### E X A M P L E

*"To confirm—are you committing to appropriating \$14.5 million annually to OPL?"*

### Handling hesitation or competing priorities:

- If there is hesitation, ask what their concerns are and respond with data and examples.
- If competing priorities come up, connect library funding to those priorities (e.g., public safety, youth services, economic mobility).

### Before you leave:

- Document their response: yes, likely yes, unsure, or no.
- If needed, request a follow-up commitment timeline tied to the mayor's budget release.
- Always remain respectful and professional. Thank them and express genuine interest in continued engagement.

## FOLLOW-UP

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- Send a thank-you email within a few days of the meeting.
- Restate any outstanding asks clearly.
- Include additional supporting information or data if helpful.

## KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING

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Advocacy doesn't end after budget season. Consistent, year-round communication keeps libraries visible in decision-making spaces.

### Recommended touchpoints:

- Monthly updates to councilmembers in your district.
- Share local branch events, system-wide programs, and community opportunities.
- Offer to help answer constituent questions related to library services.

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*Don't wait until there's a big campaign to reach out. Consistency matters more than anything. Regular communication reinforces the value of libraries and builds you as a trusted resource.*