



Library Visit Packet
For ALA Members

Top Ten Ideas for Library Visits 3
Checklist for Setting up a Library Visit..... 4
Frequently Asked Questions About Library Visits 6
Sample Library Visit Agendas 7
Draft Invitation Letter For Member Of Congress 8
Draft Invitation Letter For Staff 9

Elected officials and their staff spend a great deal of time in the districts they represent. Library visits are, quite simply, the single best way to help elected officials and their staff understand the connections between DC policy issues and what’s happening in their district. And they don’t have to be an arduous undertaking – especially with ALA’s Government Relations team standing ready to help! In fact, there are just five steps to putting together a successful event:

Step One: E-mail the ALA Washington office at alawash@alawash.org to let the Government Relations team know that you are willing to conduct a library visit. They are eager to help in any way – from brainstorming ideas to drafting materials to helping you work with the Congressional offices.

Step Two: Develop a plan. What would you like to show the elected official and/or staff person? Who should attend? What issues are important to your library’s ability to provide service to your community?

Step Three: Issue the invitation. Provide the details of your proposed visit in a short letter of invitation which you can fax or e-mail to the district office. Follow-up with a phone call and get the planning process underway!

Step Four: Conduct the visit: Once everything’s arranged, conducting the visit is almost the easiest part. You’ll need to remain somewhat flexible, however, in case of unforeseen scheduling conflicts or other problems.

Step Five: Follow-Up: Let the Government Relations team know how the visit went and whether the elected official and/or staff person raised any questions that need a response. We can also assist with additional follow-up ideas to help build a lasting relationship with the office.

We have included in this e-packet all the materials you’ll need for an effective visit. Your participation in this effort could make all the difference in our goal to increase support for libraries in the US Congress. Please do consider putting together a brief visit – and let us help!

CONTENTS

Top Ten Ideas for Library Visits.....	3
Checklist for Setting up a Library Visit	4
Frequently Asked Questions About Library Visits	6
Sample Library Visit Agendas.....	7
Draft Invitation Letter For Member Of Congress	8
Draft Invitation Letter For Staff.....	9

Top Ten Ideas for Library Visits

1. Bring an elected official and/or staff person for a general overview visit to your library to learn more about all you do at the library, beyond just providing books! Tell your library's story and how it serves their constituents. Let them know the needs of the library.
2. Invite an elected official and/or staff person to meet with any well known local authors or others who may conduct a reading at your library.
3. Introduce elected officials and their staff to your trustees and friends groups to have them deliver the library message.
4. Ask your elected officials and their staff to join any already scheduled events, including summer reading events, programs for children or community outreach efforts.
5. Invite an elected official and/or staff person to participate in a book sale at the library.
6. Partner with groups in your community that you support, such as schools, and develop a visit that shows elected officials and/or staff people the benefits you provide to the community.
7. Ask your elected officials what their favorite books are: then, put together a book dedication ceremony highlighting those books to which you'll invite the relevant elected officials. You can even pair this with an invitation for them to pose for a "Reading" poster.
8. Have your elected officials join you on a Book Mobile tour of the district. It's a great way for them to talk to their constituents, and it will raise your visibility as well.
9. Have an elected official and/or staff person follow the library manager around for a "day-in-the-life" to get a better sense of the day-to-day operations of the library.
10. Have an elected official and/or staff person spend some time in the backend of your office learning about sales, marketing and promotion efforts.

Checklist for Setting up a Library Visit

Step One: Pre-Planning

Check in the ALA Washington Office to let them know of your willingness to conduct a visit – and get their support!

Step Two: Planning the Visit

Who will you invite to the visit? Consider these options

- Member of Congress
- DC Staff person
- District Staff
- Member of Congress first and then staff person if the Member is unavailable
- Local or state officials

What will you show them? (*hint: see 10 ideas for great library visits*). How does what you're showing them relate to policy issues? (e.g., LSTA appropriations). Did you know that many Members of Congress do not understand that their local libraries do more than simply provide books? Many of them do not know of the many different kinds of libraries (school, public, academic, specialty). In addition, they may not be aware of the work you do in the community or the detailed assistance you provide to library patrons.

Who else will you have at the event? Elected officials and their staff like to meet "real people" – i.e., employees, beneficiaries and the like.

- Employees
- Trustees
- Friends
- Other beneficiaries (e.g. local universities (if applicable), local arts or music groups or other community partners)

Consider inviting the media (but only in coordination with the elected officials' office)

Put the plan in writing (see samples below)

Schedule a meeting / phone call with internal personnel who will be involved with the visit to ensure the plan – and any related advocacy messages – are clear.

Step Three: Invitation

E-mail the ALA Government Relations team or check

<http://capwiz.com/ALA/home/> to identify your specific elected officials and those your library covers.

Use our template to develop an invitation letter for your Member of Congress or a staff person

Use <http://capwiz.com/ALA/home/> to find the district office phone number for your elected officials. For those with multiple offices, choose the closest one to where you plan to hold the library visit.

For invitations for MEMBERS ONLY: Call the office and ask for the district scheduler. Tell him/her you would like to send an invitation and ask the best way to send it (some offices prefer fax, others e-mail)

For invitations for DISTRICT STAFF: Call the district office and ask for the staff person who handles library issues. Speak with them directly and follow-up with an e-mailed invitation, if necessary.

For invitations for DC STAFF (who often visit the Congressional district or state during the district work periods): Call the DC office and ask for the staff person who handles library issues. Speak with them directly and follow-up with an e-mailed invitation, if necessary.

For invitations for Local and State Officials: Contact the relevant office and ask them about their procedure for scheduling visits. These will vary widely.

Follow-up on all invitations sent with additional phone calls / e-mails until the visit is scheduled.

Step Four: Conduct the Visit

Coordinate with internal staff the day before the visit

Prepare a one page document telling your library's story and being sure to include basic facts such as patronage, funding, local programs and services, partnerships in the community, etc.

Review the talking points provided by the ALA Washington Office to prepare you to discuss important library issues with your elected officials.

Review the plan to ensure all timeframes are reasonable and to develop contingency plans (if necessary)

Have back-up plans in case of bad weather, transportation breakdowns or other snafus

Assign an internal staff person the task of taking pictures during the visit as well as to take notes about what the elected official or staff person expressed the most interest in

Step Five: Follow-Up

Send a "Thank You" letter to the elected official's office

Send pictures from the visit to the elected official's office

Follow-up on any questions raised with additional information

Follow-up on any potential media inquiries (after working with the elected official's office)

Consider asking the elected official to submit a statement for the Congressional Record about the visit

Report back to the ALA Washington Office about how the visit went

Maintain regular contact with the member and their staff

Frequently Asked Questions about Library Visits

What's a library visit?

A "library visit" is an in-person visit by an elected official or member of his or her staff to the local library in their district or state. These visits are invaluable to helping an elected official understand the impact of proposed library policies and federal funding issues on libraries in their district.

When's the best time to schedule a visit?

Members of the U.S. House and Senate spend a considerable amount of time "at home" during what's known as "district work periods" or "recess." You can access the schedule for the House [here](#) and for the Senate [here](#). The Spring work period (March 17th – 31st) is one of the few extended breaks they have during the year, and is often a focus for in-district activity. This upcoming recess is also important because Congress is expected to take further action on library appropriation issues shortly after the recess.

Another important timeframe for scheduling meetings is before, after or during "Virtual Library Legislative Day," scheduled for May 13th and 14th. If you are unable to join us in DC for visits with elected officials, please try to schedule something in the district with a relevant staff person. The combination of DC and in-district activities will amplify our voice ten-fold!

If your member is not available at these times, try to schedule a meeting at any other point throughout the year.

Do only elected officials do library visits?

Actually, it can be very effective to have a district or DC Congressional staff person take a library visit before you ask his or her boss. That way, assuming you make the visit as interesting as possible, you can turn the staff person into an advocate for future visits. Elected officials often make decisions about where they might spend their time based on a positive experience their staff person may have had. In addition, the staff people are very influential in terms of the policy decisions made in the office – getting them up to speed is always a good idea.

How do I set up a library visit?

All the information you need for setting up a library visit, including a checklist, sample agendas and template invitation letters, can be found in this packet.

Sample Library Visit Agendas

SAMPLE LIBRARY VISIT PLAN (Facility Tour)

1.5 hour visit

10:00am - 10:15am Greet Congressperson / Staff at front office

10:15am - 10:45am Library tour (including stacks, reading rooms, computer rooms, conference rooms, etc.)

10:45am - 11:15am Meeting in conference room with employees for informal remarks and Q&A (with snacks!)

11:15am - 11:30am Wrap-up / final questions and comments from elected official

SAMPLE LIBRARY VISIT PLAN (Board / Supporters Meeting)

1.5 hour visit

10:00am - 10:15am Greet Congressperson / Staff at front office

10:15am - 11:15am Meeting in conference room with trustees and/or local friends groups. Develop an agenda that allows them to highlight the value of library in the community.

11:15am - 11:30am Wrap-up / final questions and comments

SAMPLE LIBRARY VISIT PLAN (Partner Tour)

1.5 hour visit

10:00am - 10:30am Greet Congressperson / Staff at front office. Brief library tour.

10:30am - 11:15am Load trucks / carts and drive to partner facilities (schools, local arts or music centers, corporate supporters). Coordinate with partners on the library message.

11:15am - 11:30am Reconvene at office for refreshments and Q&A with employees

SAMPLE LIBRARY VISIT PLAN (Program Tour)

1.5 hour visit

10:00am - 10:15am Greet Congressperson / Staff at front office

10:15am - 10:45am Allow Congressperson / staff to join a scheduled program such as reading to the blind, a summer reading program or a personal development, training or health program being held at your library.

10:45am - 11:00am Q&A from program participants

11:00am - 11:30am Brief tour of remaining library facilities and discussion with library staff

Draft Invitation Letter For Member Of Congress

[Date]

The Honorable [Full Name of Representative Here]
Address
Washington, DC [Zipcode]

Dear Representative / Senator [Last Name]:

As a representative of library interests in your district, I write today to invite you to visit [name of library], which is located in [City, State]. Specifically, we hope that you might be available [the week of / specific date] for a brief [tour / meeting with employees]. By way of background, our library serves [information on number of patrons] in the community. Our mission is to [fill in mission here, if applicable].

We are eager to show you our work in [boosting literacy, providing news and information for local residents, helping students, providing valuable research and expertise] for our area. In particular, we would like to [fill in details of visit here – i.e., “show you our library, where we conduct XX reading and personal development programs per week” or “have you join us for an all employee meeting”].

As you know, the federal government is an important partner in our efforts to provide quality programs and services to our community. [Fill in here on any specific benefits you’ve been able to provide with the assistance of federal funds: E-rate, LSTA, School library funding, etc.]

Upcoming debates in Congress on library funding and policy issues will have a dramatic impact on our library. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these potential impacts further – and provide needed background and resources for your office on these important issues.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. To set up a visit, or if you have any questions, please contact [contact information].

Sincerely,

Draft Invitation Letter For Staff

[Date]

Name

Title

Address

Washington, DC [Zipcode]

Dear [Name]:

As a representative of library interests in your district, I write today to invite you to visit [name of library], which is located in [City, State]. Specifically, we hope that you might be available [the week of / specific date] for a brief [tour / meeting with employees]. By way of background, our library serves [information on number of patrons] in the community. Our mission is to [fill in mission here, if applicable].

We are eager to show you our work in [boosting literacy, providing news and information for local residents, helping students, providing valuable research and expertise] for our area. In particular, we would like to [fill in details of visit here – i.e., “show you our library, where we conduct XX reading and personal development programs per week” or “have you join us for an all employee meeting”].

Knowing of your role in advising [Representative / Senator XX] on library issues, we believe the visit might provide needed insights into the impacts of certain federal policies on the library community in your district / state.

As you know, the federal government is an important partner in our efforts to provide quality programs and services to our community. [Fill in here on any specific benefits you’ve been able to provide with the assistance of federal funds: E-rate, LSTA, School library funding, etc.]

Upcoming debates in Congress on library funding and policy issues will have a dramatic impact on our library. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these potential impacts further – and provide needed background and resources for your office on these important issues.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. To set up a visit, or if you have any questions, please contact [contact information].

Sincerely,