

Michael J. McLane

## ACRL and advocacy

### Join the ACRL Legislative Advocates Program

**E**rika Linke, 2008–09 ACRL president, has chosen advocacy as the focus for her presidential year. In her words, ACRL should be focused on “purposeful advocacy, specifically in the ways that librarians can best use their voices, personally and collectively, to influence the issues that matter to academic and research librarians, be they professional, governmental, national or local.”<sup>1</sup>

This presidential focus on advocacy is most welcome to many members of ACRL, particularly to past and present members of ACRL’s Governmental Relations Committee, who have dedicated many hours developing the ACRL Legislative Agenda,<sup>2</sup> which the committee updates annually. In addition, each ACRL chapter across the country has a legislative liaison whose purpose is to keep current on legislative issues and actions of importance to academic and research librarians, and to encourage the members of each chapter to be informed and to participate in library advocacy activities in a variety of ways.

Within the past 18 months, however, the ACRL Leadership and the Government Relations Committee felt strongly that ACRL needed to take an even more proactive stance in the area of advocacy on library issues, particularly on the federal level. Increasingly, many issues of great importance to academic and research librarians were the focus of government interest, action, and/or legislation.

Among these issues were access to government information, censorship, copyright issues in the digital age, and privacy of library patron information. These issues are, of course, of interest to all librarians, but many of them directly affect academic and research libraries and librarians.

The result of this concern was the creation of the ACRL Legislative Advocates Program. The intent of this program is to recruit, educate, and empower a group of academic and research librarians who will actively, knowledgeably, and consistently work with their institutional leaders and with state and federal legislators to promote government actions and legislation that will support the goals expressed in the ACRL Legislative Agenda.

The ACRL Legislative Advocates Program is overseen by the ACRL Government Relations Committee, whose current chair is Jonathan Miller (Rollins College). The Legislative Advocates are directly supported by Kara Malenfant, (ACRL scholarly communications and government relations specialist) and Michael McLane (ACRL visiting program officer for the legislative advocates program).

Any ACRL member interested in working with his or her campus leaders and state and federal legislators regarding issues affecting libraries is encouraged to apply to become an ACRL legislative advocate. However, selection is not automatic: those qualified will serve their profession for a two-year term, which may be renewed upon review by the Government Relations Committee. Legislative advocates will be recognized and honored on the ACRL Web site, annually in *C&RL News*, and during ALA National Library Legislative Day activities.

The qualifications and responsibilities of the ACRL Legislative Advocates Program are as follows:

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Michael J. McLane is ACRL visiting program officer for legislative advocacy, e-mail: [acrladvocates@ala.org](mailto:acrladvocates@ala.org)

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To qualify as an ACRL legislative advocate, each person will agree to take on a set of responsibilities that further ACRL's legislative advocacy goals. Specifically each advocate is expected to:

1. Become familiar with major legislative issues of importance to ACRL, as outlined in the ACRL legislative agenda, which is updated annually.

2. Establish relationships with the staff of the two senators from his or her state, as well as the staff of his or her local representative.

3. Visit the in-state offices and, as possible, the Washington, D.C., offices of his or her senators and legislator.

4. Communicate by e-mail, phone, or written communication with senators and local representative on selected issues of importance (three or four per year) that are identified by the ACRL government relations specialist.

5. Develop relationships with president, provost, members of the faculty, and other members of the academy who may be advocates for library issues.

6. As needed, attend an advocacy training workshop, one time, either virtual or face-to-face, at either the ALA Midwinter Meeting or ALA Annual Conference.

7. Attend an annual briefing on legislative issues that will be held in conjunction with either the ALA Midwinter Meeting or ALA Annual Conference or provided virtually.

8. Be available for consultation with the ACRL office and/or the ALA Washington Office on issues important to higher education and academic libraries.

9. Work with the chapter legislative coordinator for the local ACRL chapter on advocacy issues.

10. Complete semi-annual and annual reports to ACRL on advocacy activities.

11. Maintain membership in ALA and ACRL.

I would like to emphasize that while it is a requirement that an ACRL legislative advocate be a member of ALA and ACRL, it is not a requirement that an advocate attend in person the ALA Midwinter Meeting or ALA Annual Conferences or National Library Legis-

lative Day in Washington (although we would certainly welcome you!). ACRL is planning a number of virtual events that will allow legislative advocates and others to participate more fully in library advocacy activities.

If you are interested in becoming an ACRL legislative advocate, you may apply online at [cs.ala.org/acrl/legadvocates/xxindex.cfm](http://cs.ala.org/acrl/legadvocates/xxindex.cfm).

If you have questions or suggestions regarding the program, please contact Michael McLane, the ACRL visiting program officer for legislative advocacy at [acrladvocates@ala.org](mailto:acrladvocates@ala.org).

ALA has a proud history of effective advocacy on behalf of libraries and library issues. The ALA Washington Office and its Web site ([www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/wo/index.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/wo/index.cfm)) offer a wealth of information on important legislative issues and their current status, as well as information and recommendations on many other issues facing librarians.

It seems to me that, historically, the public library and the school library communities have been much more effectively involved in the area of library advocacy than has the academic and research library community. It is past time for us to take our place alongside our colleagues in this most important activity. Please consider becoming an ACRL legislative advocate and make your (our) voices heard! In the words of President Erika Linke, effective advocacy "will enable ACRL members to exert greater influence on the higher education and research environment."<sup>3</sup>

And in these days of change on the national governmental scene, it may well be that we can have more influence than ever in moving our agenda forward.

## Notes

1. Erika Linke, "Message from the Vice President," *C&RL News*, December 2008, 706.

2. ACRL Legislative Agenda is at [www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/washingtonwatch/washingtonwatch.cfm#agenda](http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/issues/washingtonwatch/washingtonwatch.cfm#agenda).

3. Linke, "Message from the vice president." ¶¶