

Safeguarding Libraries, Schools, and Communities from Political Threats: A Strategic Framework for Engagement, Advocacy, and Sustainable Organizing

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ABSTRACT

This white paper presents a three-step framework to counter escalating political threats to libraries, schools, and community organizations. These institutions face unprecedented challenges, including funding cuts, book bans, and censorship, all intended to undermine their mission to foster education, equity, and democracy. The reelection of President Trump and Project 2025 pose an imminent danger, threatening intellectual freedom and access to diverse perspectives.

It provides an introduction to *READY, SET, GO! Playbook for Campaigns, Candidates, and Causes*, tailored for libraries, schools, and community organizations. This playbook empowers library professionals, educators, and advocates to navigate challenges, build coalitions, and protect these vital spaces through strategic planning, compelling messaging, and proactive action. Featuring real-world success stories and practical tools, it serves as a road map for safeguarding the rights, freedoms, and opportunities that libraries and educational organizations provide.

Introduction

For centuries, libraries, schools, and community organizations have been the backbone of our communities and the foundation of our democracy. They promote education, inclusion, and the free exchange of ideas. Today, they face increasing threats, including censorship, defunding, and political interference.

Libraries play a crucial role by providing equitable access to knowledge and fostering community engagement. The history of censorship is a relentless battle, representing a continuation of challenges faced over time. This fight isn't new, and it isn't easy, but it's absolutely critical. We must stand firm and protect our right to read, write, and learn. The current political situation demands an urgent and immediate response in this moment of heightened extremism.

The second term of President Trump demands an urgent response. The shift from campaign promises to executive orders poses a direct threat to libraries, schools, and community

organizations. These actions amplify censorship, worsen funding challenges, and institutionalize policies that restrict intellectual freedom and equitable access to resources. This crisis demands swift and strategic action from advocates. The misuse of power to suppress dissent and control narratives is not new, but it has taken on alarming forms in recent years. Efforts to ban books, restrict educational content, and undermine public institutions are growing. Lawmakers have weaponized legislation and funding decisions to target libraries and schools, especially those promoting diversity, equity, and critical thinking. This escalating environment requires proactive measures to safeguard these spaces of learning and community.

Libraries and schools are more than educational spaces; they are centers of civic engagement and inclusion. They provide resources for marginalized communities, host programs that bridge divides, and offer safe spaces for dialogue. Defending these institutions is critical to ensuring every community has access to knowledge, opportunity, and empowerment.

As libraries face unprecedented challenges, it is important to stay committed. Don't give up. Narratives that frame libraries or schools as political battlegrounds must be met with strong resistance that reaffirms their importance as neutral, inclusive spaces. Community leaders, educators, and advocates must work together to counter misinformation and highlight the positive impact of these institutions.

As the author of *READY, SET, GO! Playbook for Campaigns, Candidates, and Causes*, the goal of this white paper is to share best practices, tips, and success stories from experiences from books, training, and coaching. Just as political campaigns require strategic planning, messaging, and actions, so too must advocacy efforts to protect these public resources. The *READY, SET, GO!* framework offers a practical road map.

- **READY:** Create a Strategic Plan
- **SET:** Craft a Message and Engage the Community
- **GO:** Take Action and Empower People

Situational Analysis

The reelection of President Trump and the implementation of Project 2025 are likely to significantly impact libraries and schools and contribute to increased book censorship. Project 2025 is a comprehensive policy agenda for the new administration, with several provisions directly affecting libraries and educational institutions.

- **Reduce federal funding:** Project 2025 proposes eliminating the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the primary federal agency supporting libraries. This would lead to severe budget cuts, forcing many public and school libraries to reduce services, staff, and programming.
- **Codify book bans:** The initiative seeks to implement nationwide book bans, particularly targeting materials related to critical race theory and LGBTQ+ topics. By codifying censorship into federal policy, this plan would drastically limit access to diverse perspectives and critical educational content.
- **Censor educational content:** Project 2025 advocates for removing topics such as critical race theory and gender identity from public school curricula. This form of censorship would not only impact classrooms but also affect the availability of related resources in schools and public libraries.

- **Increase legal risks:** A growing number of state-level legislative efforts are enabling the prosecution of librarians and educators who provide access to materials deemed controversial. This fosters a climate of fear, leading to self-censorship among library professionals and reduced access to information for communities.
- **Decentralize oversight:** The plan includes proposals to reduce federal oversight and shift responsibilities to state and local levels. This decentralization risks creating inconsistencies in library services and significant disparities in access to information across the country.

The situation is urgent, with the potential for major policy changes in education, including dismantling the Department of Education. This would eliminate essential data and weaken the federal government's capacity to address key educational issues. Recently, the Trump administration has dismissed complaints related to book bans.

PEN America warns that proposals like Project 2025 could severely impact the freedom to read, learn, and teach. Free expression in public education is under threat as state legislators pass educational gag orders and facilitate book bans, weakening students' freedom to learn and read. Project 2025 proposes to replicate these efforts federally, using all available levers of federal power.

Challenges To Libraries And Schools Across The United States

Across the United States, many states are experiencing a rise in book challenges and bans, often targeting materials related to race, gender, and sexuality. As the 2025 state legislative sessions begin, EveryLibrary is tracking twenty-six prefiled bills in five states focused on banning books or criminalizing librarians, with Texas and Missouri leading the count and anticipates more bills in the coming weeks, reflecting the 120 negative bills introduced across twenty-nine states in 2024.

Florida banned the most books in the 2023–24 school year; around seven hundred titles were removed from school libraries, with PEN America estimating 4,561 removals since July 2021. Texas has also seen a significant number of book challenges, but voters in some districts have rejected candidates who ran on platforms of banning books. With the new Texas Legislative session kicking off, State Rep. Fallon has filed HB 183, a bill that would give the State Board of Education the authority to review and ban any book it deems inappropriate from school libraries statewide, further intensifying the battle over book bans in North Texas schools. Utah has a law requiring schools to remove titles deemed to contain “objective sensitive materials,” and the state has a list of fourteen banned books. South Carolina and other state education committees recommend the removal of books from school libraries, including *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *All Boys Aren't Blue*, *Flamer*, and *Push*. Arkansas has a law that would have subjected librarians and bookstore owners to criminal prosecution for making materials available to minors, which was declared unconstitutional.

Beyond book removals, libraries and schools are facing other forms of challenges. In some states, school districts are making policies that give school boards more power to block librarians from putting certain books on shelves. In Utah, students are no longer allowed to bring personal copies of banned books to school. Online censorship is also impacting education, as school internet filters frequently block access to websites needed for assignments. In Indiana, a bill has been proposed that would remove the tax levy authority of library boards, potentially impacting their funding. Additionally, some libraries are facing challenges related to displays and programs, with some seeing the removal of pride banners, displays being torn

down, or homophobic graffiti being found. A few libraries have imposed additional security and insurance fees on room bookings in anticipation of protests, which resulted in the cancellation of events.

In response to these challenges, some states are taking measures to protect libraries and intellectual freedom. New Jersey, along with other states such as California, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, and Washington, have passed legislation aimed at preventing book bans based on subject matter or the author's background. California's Freedom to Read Act requires libraries to develop policies for choosing books that do not ban books based on race, nationality, sexual orientation, or gender identity. In some areas, librarians are updating their policies to better address book challenges, and library boards and city councils are discussing and revisiting library policies. Additionally, some libraries are working to strengthen their relationships with their communities by engaging in conversations about censorship.

In Oregon, challenges to individual items reached a record high of 151, a 62 percent increase from the previous year, reflecting the national trend. These challenges often target books by or about marginalized communities, such as racial and ethnic minorities and people identifying as LGBTQ. For example, the Grants Pass School District removed *All Boys Aren't Blue*, a memoir about a Black and queer identity, and *Lucky*, a memoir about sexual assault, from their high school library. Notably, the individuals who submitted these challenges did not have children in the school district and had not even read the books. These challenges are frequently driven by conservative political beliefs.

Librarians in Oregon are under increasing pressure due to rising book challenges and attempts to restrict access to materials. In response, they are becoming more resilient by clarifying and strengthening library policies, ensuring that materials are selected, reviewed, and potentially removed based on intellectual merit, age appropriateness, and educational value rather than political or ideological pressure. They are also engaging in dialogue with community members, hosting town hall meetings and forums to hear and respond to concerns while emphasizing the importance of free access to information and intellectual freedom.

Community groups are playing a crucial role in supporting libraries. Organizations like the Oregon chapter of Unite Against Book Bans advocate against censorship and book bans by raising awareness and mobilizing community members to take action. Local citizen groups are also actively supporting libraries, creating public outcry, circulating petitions, and encouraging community advocacy. These efforts have led to increased public engagement, with citizens attending board meetings and successfully recalling officials who attempt to undermine library policies, exemplifying the effectiveness of community action in defending the role of libraries.

The situational analysis for states and local organizations demonstrates the need for a proactive response. The first step is to create a strategic plan.

Step One: Get Ready And Create Your Plan

"By failing to plan, you are planning to fail."—Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin, born in Boston in 1706, was a man of many talents. He began as an apprentice to his brother James, a printer, which led to his success in Philadelphia. His curiosity and ingenuity made him a famous scientist, known for his experiments with electricity and inventions like the lightning rod, bifocals, and the Franklin stove.

Beyond his scientific achievements, Franklin was a civic activist at heart. In November 1731, he founded the Library Company of Philadelphia, considered by some to be the first public library in the United States. This subscription-based library allowed members to share books, making knowledge more accessible. Franklin also played a pivotal role in establishing Pennsylvania Hospital and what is now the University of Pennsylvania. He served in various leadership roles, from a clerk in the Pennsylvania Assembly to a commissioner to France during the Revolution. Notably, Franklin was a key figure in drafting and signing the Declaration of Independence, helping to shape the foundation of the United States.

Now, more than ever, we must heed these words, especially when confronting threats to our libraries and schools. This is not a time to be complacent; it's a call for bold, strategic action. Every great purpose, every movement for change, begins with a plan. This plan must not be static; it must be a living, breathing document, reviewed and adjusted as we move forward.

A plan empowers you to be creative and design a strategic approach as you navigate challenges, constraints, and conflicts. With a clear plan in hand, you can evaluate roadblocks, anticipate challenges, and consider alternate courses of action. By setting milestones and deadlines, you hold yourself accountable and can allocate resources effectively. Your plan provides a high-level view of strategies and necessary tactics, empowering you to make decisions aligned with your long-term goals.

It is also your most valuable tool for communication and collaboration. It helps provide a common understanding of your objectives and milestones, encouraging unity and engagement in your community. Clear deadlines and objectives promote effective task delegation, accountability, and teamwork. Share your plan as it evolves with your team for feedback, understanding, and collective ownership. This transparency will encourage open conversation and new ideas, leading to a better plan to achieve your goals.

Gather your people, your fellow advocates who share your passion for knowledge and freedom. Work together to forge a clear mission, a shared purpose that guides every action. Then, set goals, not with vague hopes but with sharp, clear objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Rewarding, Timely, Inclusive, and Equitable. Use power mapping to identify allies and understand those who seek to undermine our cause.

These are the steps to create your plan:

- **Define your vision and strategy:** Develop a strategy that aligns with your purpose and mission, considering your goals and available resources.
- **Engage your team:** Establish a structured organization with clear roles, community agreements, and a well-defined agenda to foster a respectful and collaborative environment.
- **Set goals:** Create goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable.
- **Identify target audience:** Determine your target audience for your campaign, candidate, or cause to help segment your audience and tailor your goals and objectives.
- **Outline tactics:** Develop a balanced mix of tactics and actions suitable for your campaign or cause plan.
- **Measure success:** As you transition from planning to implementation, set metrics for your goals and expected outcomes, reviewing them periodically to reassess your objectives.

A vision statement should answer the question: “What is the desired future state?” It should paint a picture of what the organization or community will look like in the future if the plan is successful.

- **Sample vision statement:** “To ensure libraries remain vibrant centers of learning, equity, and civic engagement, empowering every individual to access knowledge and opportunity.”

A mission statement should answer the question: “How will we achieve our vision?” It describes how the organization will achieve its vision by outlining the main activities and strategies.

- **Sample mission statement:** “The Library is a strong community partner, providing programs and services that bring people together, foster creativity, and encourage lifelong learning. We defend intellectual freedom, ensure equitable access to information and resources, and empower people through literacy, education, and open dialogue.”

Goal statements should answer the question: “What specific, measurable steps will we take to achieve our mission and progress toward our vision?”

- **Sample goal statement:** Increase Community Engagement
 - Specific: Increase library program attendance and participation in community engagement activities.
 - Measurable: Achieve a 30 percent increase in attendance at library-sponsored events and a 20 percent increase in participation in community outreach programs within the next year.
 - Achievable: This goal can be reached by actively partnering with local schools, community organizations, and leaders, as well as offering diverse and relevant programs that appeal to various community interests.
 - Rewarding: This goal is rewarding because it fosters a sense of community and ensures that the library is a hub of activity and a valuable resource for people.
 - Timely: This is a goal to be achieved within one year of implementation.
 - Inclusive and equitable: Ensure programs are accessible and welcoming to all members of the community, including marginalized and underserved groups, by offering programs at various times and locations and providing accommodations as needed.

The plan should include a calendar with quarterly tactics to accomplish your goals.

- **Q1: Legislative Advocacy**
 - Launch grassroots campaigns to engage legislators.
 - Host library tours for policymakers to showcase services and programs.
 - Advocate at school board and city council meetings.
- **Q2: Community Engagement**
 - Organize National Library Week events to highlight the library’s role.
 - Conduct workshops on fighting censorship and promoting intellectual freedom.

- Apply for grants to support community programs and library enhancements.
- **Q3: Volunteer Training, Digital Advocacy, and Summer Reading Program**
 - Implement a summer reading program to engage students and promote literacy during school breaks.
 - Advocate for bond measures and secure funding for school and library improvements.
 - Plan educational events for Banned Books Week
- **Q4: Elections and Public Mobilization**
 - Register voters and provide information on candidates' stances on library funding.
 - Host candidate forums and distribute voter guides.
 - Continue advocacy efforts at school board and city council meetings to influence policy decisions.

Success Story: Philadelphia Free Library System Strategic Plan

In 2024, the Philadelphia Free Library system launched *Charting our Future Together*, a strategic plan funded by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The purpose of the plan is to combat censorship and secure sustainable funding through active stakeholder engagement and community input. The library gathered input through town hall meetings, surveys, and forums, ensuring the plan reflected community needs. The strategic plan included rebranding, communication, implementation, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plans, and a business plan. By fostering collaboration and focusing on transparency and accountability, the library successfully addressed censorship and funding challenges, serving as a model for libraries nationwide.

Success Story: Lake Oswego Library Strategic Plan

The Lake Oswego Library's strategic plan illustrates the power of community-focused planning. By expanding services, creating modern spaces, increasing awareness, and prioritizing staff development, the library has become a hub for civic engagement. The Lake Oswego Public Library embarked on a visioning project to ensure its services met the evolving needs of its residents. Through a comprehensive community engagement process, they collected extensive input via interviews, surveys, focus groups, and community forums, resulting in significant participation, including one hundred key informant interviews and nearly 2,800 survey responses. This community engagement provided valuable insights into the needs and aspirations of Lake Oswego residents. It highlighted the library's crucial role in addressing challenges like affordability and infrastructure struggles while serving as an educational and cultural hub. The feedback shaped a new visioning framework, defining the library's core values and roles within the community and ensuring it remains an inclusive, adaptable, and accessible resource.

Checklist: Create Your Plan

1. **Collaborate with your team:** Define clear roles and share best practices among library staff, school educators, and community organization members.

2. **Align strategy with purpose:** Ensure your strategy aligns with the mission and purpose of promoting intellectual freedom in libraries, schools, and communities.
3. **Set goals:** Establish goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Rewarding, Timely, Inclusive, and Equitable, focusing on protecting the right to read, write, and learn.
4. **Apply power mapping and theory of change:** Understand the power structures and dynamics affecting your library, school, or community organization's issue or goal.
5. **Outline tactics:** Identify tactics that will help libraries, schools, and community organizations achieve their outcomes, such as hosting awareness events or creating educational materials.
6. **Measure success and track progress:** Use data and evidence to measure success and track progress in advocating for intellectual freedom.
7. **Gather community feedback:** Test your plan and gather feedback from your community, including library patrons, students, parents, and community supporters, through listening sessions, surveys, polls, and market research.

Step Two: Get Set And Craft Your Message

"I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."—Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a minister, activist, and a preeminent advocate of nonviolence. His legacy as a leader in the civil rights movement is a demonstration of the power of a clear, compelling message. Born in Atlanta, Georgia, King followed his father and grandfather into the ministry, earning a doctorate from Boston University. Inspired by his Christian faith, the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, and the influence of Howard Thurman, King led a nonviolent movement in the late 1950s and 1960s to achieve legal equality for African Americans in the United States.

King's principles of nonviolence and civil disobedience were the foundation of his movement. He led the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955, a peaceful protest against racial segregation on public buses that lasted over a year, ending with a Supreme Court ruling that made segregation on buses illegal. His influence extended beyond this landmark event. In 1963, King and various civil rights groups rallied over 250,000 people in Washington, D.C., to advocate for the rights of Black Americans. His "I Have a Dream" speech on the Lincoln Memorial steps amplified the civil rights movement's message to a broader audience.

Despite facing arrests and threats, King's commitment to nonviolent resistance won him the Nobel Peace Prize. Though his life ended abruptly when he was assassinated in 1968, his legacy continues to inspire equality and justice movements worldwide.

This next step is about turning your dream into reality, your ideas into words, and your plan into action. It guides you to craft your key messages, build a platform that caters to your

community's needs, and effectively communicate your message through important channels and events.

- **Define a clear and compelling message and story:** The message should be clear and compelling. It should resonate with your community's values and interests. It is the story to articulate the vision, mission, and goals of the plan.
- **Develop a platform:** A platform, processes, and digital strategy is needed to deliver relevant and impactful messages to reach your community.
- **Communicate your message effectively:** Follow best practices and tips to communicate your message effectively through various channels and events, both in-person, online, and in virtual hybrid formats.

Define A Clear And Compelling Message

When discussing the issue of censorship in libraries, it's crucial to communicate clearly and concisely about the importance of different ideas and access to diverse perspectives. Develop a clear and compelling message that emphasizes the critical role of libraries and schools in fostering democracy and opportunity. This message should frame libraries as neutral, inclusive spaces and counter misinformation that frames libraries as political battlegrounds.

Begin by framing the issue of censorship in terms that resonate with the values of your community. For example, rather than using jargon or complex legal terms, emphasize that the role of libraries is to foster curiosity and critical thinking. Your message can reflect the core belief that "libraries are for everyone" and that everyone—regardless of age, background, or belief—should have access to information that allows them to form their own opinions. Use concrete examples of how banning or restricting access to books and resources limits the ability of students, teachers, and library patrons to engage in meaningful, independent learning. Focus on the idea that when certain viewpoints or ideas are silenced, the entire community loses access to the richness of diverse thought.

Political framing is about shaping the way people perceive and understand issues. Lakoff emphasizes that effective framing involves connecting with people's values and emotions rather than relying solely on facts and logic. By framing your message in a way that aligns with the community's core values, you can create a more compelling and persuasive argument against censorship.

A clear, concise message might be, "Censorship silences voices, restricts learning, and limits the freedom of expression that libraries are meant to protect." This type of message helps demystify the issue and allows people to relate it to their everyday experiences. Whether it's a banned book that might open new perspectives for a student or a library program that offers access to important ideas, this message should emphasize the central role libraries play in a free society. Ensure your message speaks directly to parents, educators, and library supporters about the positive impact of having diverse resources in libraries, framing it as a commitment to fostering free thought and open inquiry.

In addition to clarity, your message should reflect the broader implications of censorship. When crafting the message, remember to emphasize that censorship isn't just about limiting specific books—it's a broader issue that impacts the very foundation of democratic societies. A strong message could also frame censorship as a danger to democracy itself, reinforcing the idea that when people are not free to read, learn, or think for themselves, they lose their autonomy and the ability to contribute meaningfully to society. Use language that

frames censorship as a harmful force that undermines the freedom and diversity of thought that libraries stand for.

Develop A Platform

Once you've crafted a compelling message, the next step is to develop a platform that actively resists censorship and protects our freedoms. This platform should clearly articulate the library's role as a space for unrestricted access to diverse ideas and viewpoints. In building this platform, engage with your community—particularly parents, educators, students, and local leaders—to ensure that the library's position on censorship aligns with their values and concerns. Hosting informational sessions, open forums, and collaborative meetings will create opportunities for the community to better understand the importance of keeping libraries free from external censorship and build support for maintaining a diverse and inclusive collection.

It's important to be proactive in addressing concerns about specific materials, whether books, media, or other resources. Develop policies and procedures for addressing book challenges in a fair, transparent, and inclusive manner. Establish clear guidelines that demonstrate the library's commitment to evaluating materials based on intellectual merit, age-appropriateness, and educational value rather than on political or ideological pressure. Educate your community about how these materials are selected and the role of the library in fostering diverse perspectives and viewpoints.

An important element of this platform is education. Host workshops and public discussions about freedom of ideas and censorship to help raise awareness of the issue. Libraries can offer resources about the history of book banning, the dangers of censorship, and the importance of defending freedom of expression in both public libraries and schools. Schools and libraries can work together to create joint initiatives aimed at preserving access to educational resources, highlighting how important it is for students to engage with a wide variety of viewpoints to develop critical thinking skills.

Engage authentically with the community by listening to concerns, understanding needs, and responding respectfully. Town hall meetings or forums where community members can discuss concerns about specific books or resources can also be beneficial. Libraries should also foster a sense of shared responsibility by encouraging families to engage with library collections and programming. Engaging authentically means inviting community members—parents, teachers, students, and other stakeholders—into a dialogue about the importance of different perspectives.

A great place for engagement is town hall meetings and forums where individuals can discuss their concerns about specific books or resources while also hearing from librarians, educators, and experts on intellectual freedom. These conversations should emphasize respect for diverse opinions while reinforcing the value of free access to information. Use these forums to educate the community about the long-standing role of libraries in supporting freedoms and the history of book banning as a practice that has historically been used to suppress marginalized voices.

By creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue, you allow for the clarification of misunderstandings and the opportunity to address concerns directly. For example, if there are concerns about a particular book or resource, explain why it was chosen for the library and how it fits into the broader context of educational materials. Ensure that the community

knows that there are clear processes in place for addressing book challenges and that every effort will be made to ensure that all perspectives are heard in the process.

It is also important to foster a sense of shared responsibility for defending intellectual freedom. This doesn't just involve librarians, educators, and school administrators but the entire community. Encourage families to engage with library collections and programming and to become advocates for open access to information. Partner with local organizations, such as parent groups or civic associations, to advocate for the library's role in fostering critical thinking and independent inquiry.

Communicate Your Message Effectively

Use a range of communication channels to reach as many community members as possible. In today's digital world, social media, email newsletters, local media, and virtual community meetings all provide unique opportunities to spread the message and engage different segments of the community.

Use social media, community events, and public forums to share success stories and mobilize support. For example, libraries can use social media to share information about the dangers of censorship, promote events, and highlight books that are important to intellectual freedom. Email newsletters can provide in-depth information, and community meetings allow for in-depth discussions. Traditional media, such as local newspapers and radio programs, can be used to spread the message about censorship.

Email newsletters are a valuable tool for community engagement and in-depth information about the library's position on censorship and intellectual freedom. Newsletters can be used to outline the library's policies, provide updates on book challenges, and offer educational resources on the history of censorship. These emails should be crafted to be informative yet accessible, encouraging parents, educators, and community members to stay informed and involved.

Community events are critical for engaging people in a face-to-face setting. These meetings, whether in person or virtual, allow for more in-depth discussions and the building of relationships between library staff and community members. Whether you're hosting a lecture about censorship or a book discussion group, these meetings are a great way to emphasize the role libraries play in supporting open access to information and diverse ideas. Additionally, consider collaborating with local schools to host joint programs and discussions on the importance of freedom of expression in education.

Traditional media, such as local newspapers and radio programs, can also be used to spread the message about censorship. Opinion pieces, letters to the editor, and interviews with library staff can help raise awareness and provide a platform for library advocates to share their viewpoints on the importance of maintaining freedoms in libraries and schools.

Libraries have a unique and essential role in facilitating open discussion about censorship and the right to read, write, and learn. They are safe spaces where people can access a wide range of materials and engage in discussions about challenging topics. Libraries should embrace this role by hosting events, book clubs, and discussion groups that focus on the impact of censorship on education, free thought, and democracy.

One effective strategy for using the library as a platform for dialogue is to host book discussions around commonly challenged books. These discussions can provide an opportunity to understand the themes of the books, examine the reasons behind the challenges, and discuss the importance of maintaining access to such books. By framing these discussions

around the broader context of intellectual freedom, you allow the community to engage in a constructive, informed conversation about why access to diverse viewpoints matters.

Additionally, libraries can support the development of critical thinking skills by offering workshops on media literacy and information evaluation. These programs can help students, teachers, and parents understand the importance of considering multiple viewpoints and developing the skills to critically analyze information. Libraries can also provide resources that allow individuals to explore a wide variety of topics, offering access to materials that might not otherwise be available in mainstream media or educational settings.

Finally, libraries must be seen as champions of free expression, working tirelessly to protect the right of every individual to access the information they need. Whether it's protecting access to books, advocating for the right to read, or engaging the community in discussions about censorship, libraries are on the front lines of defending intellectual freedom. Through thoughtful messaging, active engagement, and a commitment to preserving the diversity of ideas, librarians can ensure that their communities continue to enjoy the rich, unfiltered access to knowledge that libraries are meant to provide.

Checklist: Craft Your Message

1. **Craft a clear, concise, and compelling message:** Ensure your message resonates with your target audience and articulates the vision, mission, and goals of your campaign to protect the rights to read, write, and learn in libraries, schools, and communities.
2. **Engage authentically with your audience:** Listen to the concerns of library patrons, educators, students, and community members. Understand their needs and respond empathetically and respectfully, maintaining transparency and accountability.
3. **Utilize effective communication channels:** Reach your target audience through social media platforms, email newsletters, community meetings, and public events, emphasizing the importance of intellectual freedom and access to information.
4. **Address important community issues:** Your message and platform should highlight the critical issues impacting libraries, schools, and educators. Propose solutions to protect the freedom to read, write, and learn.
5. **Inspire unity and forward movement:** Communicate your message through various channels and events, both in-person and online, in a way that inspires unity and forward movement within the community.

Step Three: Go! And Organize A Movement

“When you see something that is not just, not fair, or not right, you have to do something. You have to say something. Make a little noise. It's time for us to get into good trouble, necessary trouble.”—John Lewis

John Robert Lewis, the son of Alabama sharecroppers, was an American politician and civil rights activist who served in the US House of Representatives for Georgia's 5th congressional district from 1987 until his death in 2020. Inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Lewis became a central figure in the civil rights movement, participating in sit-in protests, the

Freedom Rides, and leading the Selma to Montgomery marches. His dedication and courage, exemplified during events like Bloody Sunday, continue to inspire people today.

Lewis's life offers invaluable lessons on organizing communities and building movements. His journey teaches us that building power with people is critical for a sustainable movement. Relationships are the foundation of change, and leaders like Lewis, driven by a deep commitment to justice and equality, can inspire others and sustain a movement. By hosting events, engaging the community, and building alliances, you can mobilize support and foster resilience in the face of setbacks. Following these principles, you can effectively organize your community, build a movement, and create lasting change.

You've created your plan and crafted your message and story. Now it's time to recruit, onboard, train, and scale your base of supporters and volunteer leaders to organize your community and build your people-powered movement.

- **Build power with people:** Relationships are fundamental to creating a lasting movement. Community organizing principles emphasize the power of connecting with individuals, listening to their concerns, and building trust.
- **Train and organize:** Provide opportunities, both in-person and online, to engage, onboard, and train people in the community.
- **Build alliances:** Identify key stakeholders and build relationships with them, including educators, librarians, parents, and community leaders. Form coalitions with diverse groups, such as parents, teachers, students, and local leaders. Collaborate to ensure diverse perspectives are included.
- **Mobilize support:** Mobilize volunteers and community members to advocate for policies that protect libraries and schools. Train advocates in public speaking, digital organizing, and grassroots outreach to amplify their impact. Share stories of communities and campaigns that have effectively protected their libraries and served their communities.
- **Scale with digital tools:** Utilize digital tools to track legislation, engage stakeholders, and coordinate advocacy efforts.
- **Be resilient in the face of setbacks:** It is important to anticipate challenges and be ready to adjust strategies. Public narratives that frame libraries or schools as political battlegrounds must be met with strong advocacy. Stay committed and continue to move forward, even when facing setbacks.

Success Story Profile: Marshall Ganz

Marshall Ganz, a respected community organizer and scholar, highlights the need to form strong relationships with people in communities for successful and sustainable organizing. Ganz created a social action framework focusing on the heart (story), the head (strategy), and the hands (action). This approach, translating values into action, building relationships, collaborative leadership, strategic thinking, and turning commitments into results, has played a key role in many successful campaigns. According to Ganz, success goes beyond immediate goals; it involves people and uplifts communities. This highlights the essence of grassroots organizing—building relationships, fostering community engagement, and empowering individuals for change. Each campaign contributes to a broader movement by strengthening networks, promoting active participation, and nurturing a shared sense of purpose.

Advocacy And Political Action

- **Launch grassroots campaigns:** Engage legislators, submit funding proposals and impact reports, and organize “lobby days” to demonstrate how libraries, schools, and community organizations serve their communities.
- **Share stories with decision-makers:** Encourage supporters to share their personal stories directly with Congress to influence policy changes impacting libraries and education.
- **Advocate against harmful policies:** Oppose policies that undermine intellectual freedom, equitable access to resources, and the rights of marginalized communities.
- **Support legislation and candidates:** Advocate against book bans, support protective legislation, track relevant policies, and back candidates who promote intellectual freedom and equitable access.

Community Organizing And Engagement

- **Create diverse coalitions:** Form inclusive groups with educators, librarians, parents, community leaders, and students. Define roles, develop an inclusive strategy, and ensure a respectful space for collaboration.
- **Empower community members:** Build relationships, raise awareness, and inspire collective action by encouraging community members to take ownership of initiatives.
- **Build volunteer networks:** Train volunteers in effective advocacy techniques, empower them to lead initiatives, and build alliances with key stakeholders using both digital and in-person methods.
- **Host engaging events:** Organize town hall meetings, forums, and workshops to address community concerns and educate about intellectual freedom and the history of book banning. Collaborate with local schools and nonprofits for workshops on fighting censorship.

Libraries, Schools, And Community Groups

- **Create book sanctuaries:** Establish policies that foster intellectual freedom, such as book sanctuary resolutions and declarations of democracy, to preserve libraries’ role as spaces of open inquiry and diverse ideas.
- **Protect students:** Protect LGBTQ+ students with safe and inclusive learning environments and provide resources for activities that support LGBTQ+ students. They should also protect students’ access to resources that affirm their identities.
- **Support undocumented students:** Take steps to protect undocumented students from changes in immigration policy that could impact their education. Ensure that schools remain safe havens for immigrant families.
- **Support local nonprofits:** Become a volunteer, donor, or board member for local nonprofits that align with your mission and purpose.

- **Film documentaries and host watch parties:** Organizations can use film screenings and watch parties as an effective action to educate and motivate people. Film events can serve as a platform for discussion and community engagement; for example, the documentary *The Librarians* follows librarians who have resisted book bans.

A multifaceted plan is critical to effectively organize and mobilize a people movement for libraries, schools, and communities in response to attacks on the freedom to read, write, and learn. Combining digital and in-person advocacy tactics can create a robust defense against censorship and empower communities to uphold their right to access diverse information.

Checklist: Organizing A Movement

1. **Empower your community:** Put people at the heart of your efforts, transforming libraries, schools, and community organizations into constituencies committed to a common purpose.
2. **Practice organizing strategies:** Implement strategies such as public narrative, relationship building, team structuring, strategizing, and action, which are critical for building a movement.
3. **Engage supporters:** Discover and engage supporters by funneling them through engagement phases and training leadership to high levels of power.
4. **Mobilize action:** Focus on power dynamics and use digital tools to mobilize your people both in person and online, building scale and power over time.
5. **Sustain your movement:** Understand the importance of long-term effort, as real change can take years or even decades to achieve.

Conclusion: Call To Action

Libraries, schools, and educational spaces are more than just places to read—they are community hubs that inspire learning and connection. Every great movement begins with a single step. By following the READY, SET, GO! framework, you can engage, energize, and empower your community to protect and sustain these critical resources.

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