

The YA Advocacy Action Plan Workbook

Adapted from the YALSA Advocacy
Preconference Institute

Young Adult Library Services Association
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Preface

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We are pleased to present this action-planning guide, adapted with permission from the ALA Advocacy Institute. Collaboration and grassroots advocacy is the key to the success of our libraries. In an increasingly complex world, with strong competition for funding, the library community must stand up and speak out for young adults America's libraries. Our voices can be made stronger if we stand up and speak out in a unified voice. Library staff, trustees and Friends must work together to make our voices heard. Once we convince community leaders and to citizens at large about the importance and necessity of service to young adults in libraries, they can begin to speak out for teen services at the state and national levels. Therefore, thank you for your interest in library advocacy.

Sincerely yours,

Ma'lis Wendt
Chair, YALSA Advocacy Task Force

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The YALSA Advocacy Action Plan Workbook

This guide is designed to help you create an action plan for library advocacy. It will help you focus on what you need to do, how you intend to get it done, and how to ensure that the timing is maximized for the best results. The types of activities and task forces listed below are only suggestions. Depending on the type of advocacy for young adults you design and what you believe will work best in your school or community, you might create other types of task forces with other types of activities. Do not worry that you'll need more volunteers than you think you can get. First of all, the Coordinating Committee will include those already involved (e.g. the library/school administration, teachers, your young adult patrons, the library trustees, the PTA or the Friends' executive committee.) The task forces will require recruitment but not all the task forces need a lot of volunteers. In some cases just two or three "worker bees" will be plenty. On the other hand, the more people you engage to be active in your advocacy efforts, the better your chances of success!

Section 2: Strategies for Developing Your Message

ACTION STEP #3: Name your key audience.

1.

2.

3.

1. Zero in on your audience.

A. What groups or individuals are currently most supportive of services to teens? What key decision-makers in your school or library would you like to have on your side? What other groups would you like to reach with your message?

B. Why are your issues this important to them?

C. List three supporting points:

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

2. Determine your key messages.

What is the most important thing you want others to know? That is your key message, one that you will repeat over and over again. This message should be something you can say in conversation, in interviews or presentations to groups. It should be easy to say and remember—no more than 15 words. It may be simple as:

“In order for teens to become well-informed citizens who contribute to the democratic process, they need free access to books, the Internet, information technologies and other library resources that reflect a wide range of topics and opinions.”

“ In order to become skilled readers and competent users of information and ideas, teens need access to library professionals who are specially trained in meeting the information needs of young adults and in understanding adolescent behavior and development.”

“The most dangerous time of the day is from 3 PM to 6 PM. Public libraries can provide teens with a constructive place to go during these hours, where teens can organize and participate in supervised recreational and educational activities.”

Your key message should be used consistently in memos to your principal or director, in talking to parents and other local organizations, in news releases, letters-to-the editor and other communications. It may also be distilled into a pithy campaign slogan.

In developing your message, think first about your audience. What do you want them to know? Feel? Do? Feelings are what motivate people to act. That feeling may be compassion, concern, anger or something else. One of your goals in delivering your message should be to spark a feeling, whether it's pride, frustration or outrage.

ACTION STEP #4: What are your key messages?

1.

2.

3.

3. Develop your talking points.

What facts support your key message? You will need at least three talking points, or examples that support your key message. Using descriptive, local examples is an effective way to get the attention of decision-makers. These may change based on the needs and interests of your audience. Examples include the following:

“According to the Public Library Data Service (PLDS) Statistical Report, published by the Public Library Association (PLA), only half of U.S. public libraries have a librarian dedicated to young adult services.”

“Since we started an after school homework help program at the library, several teachers have told the young adult librarian that they have not only seen an improvement in some students’ grades, but that they also seem to be reading more in their free time.”

“The highest achieving students come from schools with library media centers staff by professional librarians and well stocked with books and online resources.”

Tips for Telling an Effective Story*

Develop and refine the story. Effective stories:

- are simple, brief and personal
- have a beginning, middle and end
- make a specific point, or “punch line”
- do not use real names unless you have been given permission;
- are appropriate
- illustrate in real life terms how support for the library will solve a real problem or fill a significant need.

*adapted from “Tips for Telling an Effective Story” by Patricia Glass Schuman.

Control the Conversation: Bridge, Hook and Flag

These are three techniques for controlling the conversation or interview so that you are sure to get the main point or points that you want remembered across to your director or principal or other potential supporters.

Bridge. This technique will allow you to move from an area in the conversation that you don't want to discuss or that has the potential to sidetrack the issue, and get the conversation back to your message. This is helpful because you will often be asked questions that don't get to the points you wish to make or that you don't wish to answer. You can use bridging to turn the question to your points. Listen for the larger issue behind the question and find the connection to your issue. Here are some examples:

"...yes, but that speaks to a bigger point...."

"... I think what you are really asking is..."

Hook. This is a technique that can lead your listener to follow-up on your first point allowing you to guide the conversation. For example, you can say, "There are two very important considerations that must be taken into account before you support this proposed policy. The first is . . .then expand on that point. It is likely that the legislator or staff person will then ask you (or allow you) to follow up with the second point. This keeps the conversational ball in your court longer and gives you the opportunity to make both (or all points)

Flag. This technique is the easiest and most people use it unconsciously all the time. Flagging alerts your listeners to what you consider most important. It's a good way to emphasize the key point or points you want the audience to remember. Flagging is simply giving your audience a verbal clue about what is important: "The most important thing to remember is . . ." or "If you remember nothing else, please remember these two points . . ."

There are a wide variety of avenues to use in getting your message out, including the following:

Library/School/PTA Newsletter: A newsletter or e-newsletter gives you the “power of the press.” Once you have come up with a message or slogan that is powerful for the library, use it often and remember to explain what’s behind the message.

Web site: Be sure to have a list of ways that teens and supporters can help. Make sure it’s present on the very front page of your site. These can include:

- Volunteer to help with a particular campaign (and give them a number to call).
- Write a letter to the editor (give the newspaper’s address along with “talking points” to help them make the case).

Web 2.0 applications: Create a MySpace or FaceBook site for library teens and supporters and invite them to join you. This allows you to easily contact many people at once and distribute timely news and information.

General Promotion Materials: Book marks, book bags, program flyers, —all of these materials are opportunities to get your message out. Try other avenues to help you more widely distribute your materials--work with local organizations serving teens, local businesses used by teens, etc.

Letters to the Editor: Everyone reads letters to the editor! So why not be sure that a pro-library letter slips in every now and then? A good way to “hook” library promotion into a letter to the editor is to respond to a big issue that the press is covering showing how libraries can make a difference.

Op-Ed pieces: It can be harder to get your local paper to print an op-ed piece. Here is what will help you get some excellent press coverage via this more in-depth citizen editorial:

- Have a young adult library user or parent write it
- Tie into a major issue facing the school/library and show how the library helps (see “Letters to the Editor above)

Section 3: Strategies to Get the Message Out

Local publications: Talk to your principal or director about including young adult library programs in the newsletter or letter to parents. Ask the PTA or other local organizations to include information about your campaign and services.

Radio: Visit your local radio station and tell them about what the library has to offer teens and why it matters to everyone in the community. Ask if your local teens can participate in local programming or if the local DJ can visit your library. Give the radio public service announcements that organizations like the American Library Association create to your local station and ask them to air it. Ask the station to develop three or four spots using your message or slogan as a tag line, or work with teen library users to create them. Finally, be sure the station is willing to air the spots.

Television coverage: Getting coverage of library events can be difficult. In general, television coverage depends on what else is going on the same day as your event. The key is to try to hook the station into covering something that will have significant visual appeal and/or special interest appeal. Talk to the station manager about what kinds of teen programs are most likely to get some air time. Another television avenue—and one that is easier—is to get time on a local noon show or on public access television. This will give you an opportunity to really get your message across whereas coverage of an event is likely to last no more than 10 seconds. Call the station manager to see about having teens from your library on a local show.

Presentations: Nothing is more effective than personal contact. That's the upside. The downside is that you can't reach as many people at once with your message. You'll need to create and train an entire cadre of teen volunteers to get the message out in person. Civic organizations such as the Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, etc. always welcome guest speakers. Many of your teens may belong to their own clubs and organizations as well. Make a list of all the opportunities there are in your community to get some "face time" and begin scheduling speaking engagements to get your message out. Remember to "know your audience." Make sure when you talk about the importance of the library and its services, you are tailoring your comments to what is of interest to your audience. If you are talking to physicians, for example, talk about the link between health and literacy and all that the library does to support literacy—beginning at birth. If you are talking to the PTA, talk about the importance of school libraries for helping their children do well in their classes.

Consider the following when deciding which strategies to use:

WHO is your audience?

WHAT is the best way to convey the information to the target audience—radio, TV, direct mail, other? What kind of image do you want to project? Will it be an effective part of your total communication effort?

WHEN is the deadline? Will your message be distributed in time to be effective?

HOW much will it cost? Is this the most effective use of available funds?

WHY is this the best strategy for this audience?

Strategies Checklist

How will you deliver your message? What public relations tools (brochures, fact sheets, etc.) will you need to help build your case?

ACTION STEP #5: Strategies

Examples:

Create and distribute brochures

Work with radio station to develop Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

Mobilize a “Letter to the Editor Campaign”

Find local television and/or radio stations that will interview teen volunteers on talk shows

Write an op-ed piece

Create and use social networking tools (like YouTube or Facebook) to spread your message, seek supporters or rally people to a cause

Other ways (List here)

Section 4: Team Building

ACTION STEP #6: Name Your Network

Young Adult Patrons/Teen Advisory Group members

Teachers/Faculty Members

Community or School Leaders

School/Library Staff

Parents or grandparents

Other Local Organizations serving Teens

ACTION STEP #7: Staying Connected

Write down three things you'll do when you get home to strengthen relationships with the members of your network named above.

1.

2.

3.

Tactics for Success: Creating a Coordinating Committee

The purpose of the Coordinating Committee is to ensure that your advocacy efforts become a reality. The Coordinating Committee can keep track of the many facets of your project, assign deadlines to specific tasks, or delegate specific tasks to others. This group can create an overarching timeline for your entire project and help ensure that your deadlines are met. When creating a Coordinating Committee, think about these questions:

- What is the main goal of the committee?
- What specific tasks should the committee complete?
- Who might serve on the committee?
- Who will serve as Chair?
- Who will contact and recruit members?

In projects large in scope or long-term, you may want to create task forces or subcommittees to help complete specific tasks. If this is the case, ask yourself these questions in planning your subcommittees:

- Will you need other task forces to help achieve your goal?
- How many volunteers per task force are necessary?
- Who might be recruited?
- When should their work begin and be completed?

Types of Task Forces

There are many types of task forces, covering specific projects. Some of these are listed here:

Oversight Task Force: Essentially, the Coordinating Committee becomes the Oversight Task Force to keep the campaign going smoothly. This task force develops talking points for the campaign (with the help of library administration), sets up task forces, and calls regular meetings of the task force chairs to ensure steady progress.

Publications and Design Task Force: Creates a design for the campaign so all materials developed will have a consistent look and be readily identified with your campaign. The task force will also develop the materials you'll need for distribution and will coordinate distribution. *For downloadable artwork, visit www.ala.org/@yourlibrary*

Media Task Force: will use local media to get the word out about the campaign. To ensure a consistent message, use the talking points already developed. When developing print advertisements, use the same “look” that the Publications and Design Task Force is using. *For more information see ALA Communications Handbook, www.ala.org/ala/pio/availablepiomat/online_comm_handbook.pdf*

Presentations Task Force: will determine the various venues in your town/city that will give campaign volunteers an opportunity to share information about the campaign. This task force will also recruit and schedule a group of volunteers who are willing to go out and speak to identified civic organizations while using the talking points developed by the Media Task Force.

Finance Task Force: works with the Oversight Task Force and other task force chairs to determine what kind of funding will be needed to accomplish the campaign goals and to identify possible funding resources. Keeps track of the campaign budget.

Evaluation Task Force: works with the Oversight Task Force to monitor the campaign as it moves along and makes recommendations for modifications. This task force will also ensure that acknowledgements are sent out to volunteers, including those who provide professional services, financing or in-kind support. This group will schedule the final meeting following the outcome of the campaign to celebrate or to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the campaign, especially if the campaign needs to be continued for another year.

What are your goals?

Who is your audience?

What are your key messages?

Who comprises your team?

What committees and task forces will have to be created?

What strategies will you implement?

1. Create a timeline:

(Activity Volunteers Involved Start Date End Date)

Section 5: Putting It All Together

The following are ways you can support your library. As a member of the library staff, as a Friend, as a library trustee, faculty or administrator, every day is an opportunity to confirm and communicate how important your library is to the entire community, school, or campus. Use these tips to start you on your own advocacy plan.

Talk, talk, talk!

Look around you. There are people everywhere who could use their library, and who don't know about the valuable resources just waiting for them. At the grocery store, student union, the bank, PTA or staff meetings, the post office, in dorms, on a walk with your dog—talk to people and tell them why you love and value the library. Help them see what they could learn there, and how they can help bolster support for this cornerstone of their community, campus or school. It doesn't take much more than a friendly conversation for you to be a hero for your library!

Keep informed.

Stay up to date on state and national activity. Visit the Advocacy Resource Center at www.ala.org/issues&advocacy to view the latest resources, publications and information on library advocacy, as well as sign up for advocacy discussion lists. Contact your state association for information on important issues affecting your state. (You can link to your state chapter through the Advocacy Resource Center.)

□ **Get to know your representatives (and their staffs).**

You've elected them; but how can you get them to help your cause? Get to know them—and their staffs—first. Visit your representatives' Web sites to learn their issues and priorities. Invite them to your libraries and let them see, firsthand, how valuable your library is to the community and to academic excellence. Let them know you want them to support all types of libraries, and library-friendly policies and give them specific ways they can get involved. You can schedule an appointment by calling your legislator's office, or even better, invite your representatives to visit the library for a special event you've planned. Let them see how their constituents are using the valuable services provided by the library, and you'll gain an important ally.

□ **Work on your library's print or online newsletter.**

Many libraries now have a regular newsletter for patrons, students and faculty. Volunteer to write an advocacy column for the newsletter, highlighting ways that patrons and advocates can help the library, whether that is through a letter writing campaign, volunteering at events, calling their legislators, or other means. Collecting all the valuable information in one place helps interested parties pick and choose among the many ways to help.

Section 6: Checklist for Library Advocates

□ **Develop and distribute information.**

Important information about the library, its services, and needs can be distributed in as brochures or online for people to read later or pass on to others. If you have desktop publishing skills or basic web knowledge, or know someone who does, work to build materials that can be passed along to others. These can include the library's hours and services, a "wish list" of things the library needs, information about an upcoming event, or any other pertinent library information. ALA provides materials to help you get started through @ your library®, the Campaign for America's Libraries. Visit www.ala.org/@yourlibrary and click on PR Tools & Resources.

□ **Plan a library event.**

Any event during the year is an opportunity to showcase your library. Create an event or promotion that will get your Friends, trustees or other volunteers involved. You can host the event at the library or a local mall, county fair, park, or any campus venue and invite the media to attend. Visit www.ala.org/pio and click on "initiatives" for information on initiatives celebrated nationwide, including Banned Books Weeks, Library Card Sign-up Month and National Library Week. Always invite elected officials to your events!

□ **You have your own built-in army of advocates. Use it!**

Many who work in libraries forget that they have a built-in army: the library staff.

From library director to student volunteers/pages and custodian, no one knows—and appreciates—the inner workings of your library like they do. Teach them the basics on library advocacy—share the resources ALA has to offer and keep them abreast of current events.

□ **Inform and Engage Elected Officials.**

Attend state library legislative days—and the ALA National Legislative Day, if possible. Bring Friends, trustees and other supporters. To learn about federal issues, visit the ALA Advocacy Resource Center at www.ala.org/issues&advocacy. Click on “Take Action” to contact your legislator. To learn about state issues, visit the Web site of your state library association.

□ **Offer Internet tours.**

For those without a computer at home, the library is the number one point of Internet access. Your library can be the window to the Internet for many people in your community. Offer to show patrons how to use it, and walk them through your library’s Internet policies. You can even invite local politicians and community leaders to a community-wide Internet orientation event, and show them how the library offers everyone equal access to technology.

□ **Get press.**

Speaking publicly about the specific value in your library. Are you good at public speaking? Call your local or campus radio talk show or TV news show. Like to write? Write a letter to the editor or an op/ed piece for your local paper, or ask students and faculty to write editorials for the campus paper. However you get in touch with the local or campus press, make sure you’ve developed your key messages and anticipated tough questions ahead of time, and be ready with statistics and information you can rattle off on the spot. To build your skills visit: www.ala.org/issues&advocacy and click on “Tools & Publications.”

□ **Be your library’s ambassador to the public or academic community.**

Go out into your community and do public appearances to advocate for your library. Visit your local Lions, Elks, or Rotary Club, student and faculty meetings, parent meetings at neighborhood schools, union meetings, and neighborhood watch groups—wherever people gather. Offer to speak about the things your library offers, and how many people are served there. Paint a picture of your school and community without this wonderful resource—and then enlist the help of these powerful groups in supporting the people and buildings behind it!

□ **Build your network.**

You are a powerful agent for change on your own, but involving more people makes your message even stronger. Developing a network of library advocates in your community or on campus is a great way to add voices to the chorus of support. When you find people who are willing and able to help, keep track of their contact information and availability. Start a phone tree or an e-mail list to keep in touch with everyone so that when an issue arises, you’ll know just who to

contact to get the word out.

□ **Add your idea here.**

They say that necessity is the mother of invention. As you move forward in your advocacy endeavors, please let ALA know about your successes and new ideas. Send an e-mail to advocacy@ala.org to share your experiences or tips. Your input—fresh ideas and energy—will keep library advocacy moving forward!

For further information

For more information about advocating for teen library services, visit <http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php> and click on the various resources under the “Advocacy” heading.

Notes