

28 Days of Advocacy #1 - What's Going On Here

Posted By [Linda Braun](#) On February 1, 2009 @ 9:17 am In [Advocacy](#), [New Librarians](#) | [No Comments](#)

Welcome to the first post in a series that YALSA is sponsoring this month on the topic of advocacy. Throughout February, members of YALSA's Advocacy Task Force and Legislation Committee (along with the ALA President and President Elect, YALSA Division members, and YALSA Executive Board Members) will post daily on topics related to advocating for teens and for libraries.

Topics on the advocacy schedule for this month include:

- ALA advocacy tools
- Why advocacy is important
- Everyday advocacy in the school library

- Why advocacy should be part of a teen librarian's job description
- Creating Partnerships
- And more

We hope these posts will help readers to become better advocates in their own libraries and also help to spread the word about why advocating for teens and libraries is important.

When I started out as a teen librarian, I didn't realize at all how important advocacy was in my job and for the teens in the community. After a short period of time I understood that if I wanted to guarantee that teens had great library services, I needed to stand up for them and for the programs and services a library can provide to them. I realized, that I couldn't simply say "It will never happen" or "No one understands what I'm trying to accomplish" instead I needed to inform others about what teen services and teens are all about.

If I didn't do it, who would? If you don't do it, who will?

Taking on an advocacy role in a library or community isn't always easy. But, it is a key aspect of what teen librarians need to do. These posts should help guarantee that no matter what library you work in, or what teens you serve, you'll be able to advocate for what they need and what the library should provide.

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28 Days of Advocacy #2 - Tools to Help You Advocate

Posted By [Maureen Ambrosino](#) On February 2, 2009 @ 1:33 pm In [Advocacy](#), [Legislation](#) | [No Comments](#)

For many librarians, one of the biggest obstacles to getting out there and advocating for their teens is simply not knowing what to say. You wouldn't go out to build a house without tools, right? Right. Well, you wouldn't go out to advocate for your teens without tools either. YALSA is here to help! There are a multitude of "toolkits" available online that will get you started and equip you with the facts and statistics that will make a great impression.

["Add It Up: Libraries Make the Difference in Youth Development and Education"](#) was just released before Midwinter. This site is packed with talking points for services to patrons from birth to 18. The teen section has two separate entries, one for public libraries and one school libraries. Use these talking points, combined with stories from your own library, when communicating with elected officials to make a strong and vivid case.

["Speaking Up for Library Services to Teens"](#) is a gold mine of fantastic information that was created by the YALSA Advocacy Task Force. This document has everything you need to stand up for your teens - and help them become advocates, too. You'll find advocacy how-to's, sample materials, resources, and case studies from librarians around the country. Definitely take a look!

YALSA's own [Legislative Advocacy Guide](#) is a short and sweet document that explains why legislative advocacy is important, and how to take action on important issues. One of the most helpful parts of the guide is a step-by-step explanation of how to request an in-person meeting with a legislator and what to say when you are there.

If you're not sure who to contact, the [ALA Legislative Action Center](#) is the place to go to find contact information for your federal officials, and to find talking points on "hot" issues that require action by our members. Find it at .

[Stand Up and Speak Out for Libraries](#), an advocacy toolkit created by ALA, gives you more good information on how, why, and when to advocate for libraries.

And lastly, check out a recent [blog post from AASL](#). They've collected several excellent resources for advocacy in school libraries.

There is no better time than right now to become an advocate for teens in libraries. With economic times the way they are, there's no time to lose. I had the chance to meet my state senator and state representatives last week at a Library Legislative Breakfast. I reviewed the YALSA toolkits, and used the information from "Add It Up" on the hours between 3:00 and 6:00 pm being the most dangerous for teenagers. My legislator knew that kids head to the public library after school, but the facts I was able to share definitely made an impression about why teen services are vital in libraries. All the legislators who were present made the point that it's the loudest groups that tend to get the most attention - and that they really do listen when they get a flood of emails from their constituents. So take a look at the toolkits, craft your message, and start sharing it!

Maureen Ambrosino
Chair, YALSA Legislation

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28 Days of Advocacy #3 - What IS Advocacy?

Posted By [Paula Griffith](#) On February 3, 2009 @ 10:17 am In [Advocacy](#), [Legislation](#) | [No Comments](#)

To advocate: "speak or write in favor of; support or urge by argument; recommend publicly." Advocacy is an active process that takes place on multiple levels and for different audiences. Many of us are looking for what we can do to build support for our library services, programs, and patrons. Advocacy is relative to different levels of "community:"

- The national community: When we advocate on a national level, we "speak out" to support legislation that provides funding for our state library systems, education bills such as the SKILLS Act, or appeal for funding for professional research/grants such as provided by IMLS. We "urge" federal politicians to create and support pro library legislation face to face or with phone calls and emails.
- The state community: Many important decisions about funding that directly affects libraries are made at the state level because federal monies are often awarded in "block grants." States are allowed to allocate funds as the state legislature sees fit, so we can appear before our state Representatives and Senators to "argue" and provide evidence that our libraries provide invaluable services to our communities and schools. We can also organize political action events so that our peers and colleagues know it is time to take action.
- Local communities: Grassroots, local advocacy is critical for marketing the importance of our libraries to local patrons and stakeholders. We can advocate at city council and school board meetings and with local law enforcement and social service divisions to highlight our programs that may reach out to mothers with young children, illiterate adults, those who are learning English as a second language, and youth services. We "recommend" our services in a public forum to build awareness and form partnerships.

During this difficult economic time, it is critical that we all advocate (speak, write, argue, urge, and recommend) our library resources and programs to all important stakeholders as an integral part of all three communities.

advocate. (n.d.). Dictionary.com Unabridged (v1.1). Retrieved February 1, 2009, from

Dictionary.com Website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/advocate>

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28 Days of Advocacy #4 - It's Everybody's Business

Posted By [Camila Alire](#) On February 4, 2009 @ 10:14 am In [Advocacy](#), [YALSA Info.](#) | [No Comments](#)

Good Morning, YALSA!

I am pleased to be part of YALSA's "28 Days of Advocacy" project. I want to congratulate the YALSA leadership for this initiative.

The YALSA initiative fits right in with my passion for libraries and for library advocacy. In fact, my presidential initiative for next year is member-driven, frontline advocacy. And, by that I mean — it is **everybody's business** to advocate for libraries.

I know that many of us think that advocacy is the director's or the management team's job. But, think how more effective we would be if all teen librarians were involved in advocating for their libraries and teen services to their friends, relatives, and neighbors. Collaborating with YALSA, I want to engage you in that process and prepare you to do frontline advocacy.

Libraries are being used more now than ever before. Our teens are as important as any other user of our libraries. We need to be proactive and prepared to advocate for our libraries and to articulate their value to all of our communities.

Our services and our jobs are on the line. It's my business as ALA President-elect and your business as young adult librarians to be prepared to advocate for what you do and why your services and resources are critical to your communities.

YALSA's 28 Days to Advocacy is just the beginning. For more information on my Initiative which supports YALSA's advocacy efforts please go to:

<http://www.camilaalire.com/initiatives.html>

Again, it was my pleasure to be involved in YALSA's 28 Days to Advocacy.

I wish you all the best in this initiative and in all you advocacy efforts. And I look forward to working with YALSA in their advocacy efforts.

CAMILA ALIRE, ALA President-elect

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28 Days of Advocacy #5 - Why Get Teens Involved

Posted By [Linda Braun](#) On February 5, 2009 @ 6:55 am In [Advocacy](#), [New Librarians](#) | [2 Comments](#)

Getting teens involved in advocacy efforts can be a great way to not only gain support for the library and teen services, but also support teen development. Teens acting as advocates fits perfectly with the [40 developmental assets](#) as defined by the Search Institute. For example:

- Teens will feel **empowered** if they have a chance to help make change and garner support for their own library services. Imagine a group of teens getting together and developing a campaign for getting the word out to the community about why they need library services. Imagine how empowered they will feel by having their ideas discussed by movers and shakers where they live. And, imagine what it would feel like if their ideas and suggestions are acted on positively.
- There is no doubt that **constructive use of time** will be a part of a teen's involvement in library advocacy efforts. As a part of an advocacy campaign teens will spend time researching topics related to the programs and services for which they plan to advocate. They might need to learn about budgets and fundraising. They might need to find out about town politics and how to speak to town officials. And it's likely they will learn how to speak effectively in public. The learning opportunities and the constructive ways teens will use their time as they work on advocacy efforts are multiple and numerous.
- In the Search Institute's overview of **positive values** are the areas of integrity, honesty, caring, responsibility, and equality and social justice. Each and every one of these would be a part of a teen's participation in library advocacy efforts. Teens working as library advocates will have to be responsible for keeping their part of the project going. They will learn about the values and beliefs of others in the community and as a result that will help them to be more caring and have a better sense of equality and social justice within the community. They will honestly have to represent their position and be willing to openly listen to the positions of others. All of these activities will certainly help them to develop a set of positive values.

Helping teens be advocates is good for the library and good for teens. Give it a try. And, if you have experience with teen advocacy let us know in the comments section of this blog post.

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28 Days of Advocacy #6 - Creating Community Partnerships

Posted By [Krista McKenzie](#) On February 6, 2009 @ 9:39 am In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

As we go out in our communities, it is often that we hear the old adage that change begins with a single person, which for our purposes is true- but wouldn't be more conducive to our efforts to have more partners to help influence and impact our issues and agendas?

In our organizations, we all tend to lose sight of the fact that, although we seem to be fighting alone, that we aren't- that the issues and problems that we face as individuals are the same across the board. Many organizations in our communities and across the United States are advocating for the same principles, for the same values, the same beliefs. We are all advocating for the benefit of our communities, our children.

Community partnerships are key parts of advocacy. More partnerships = more people, more power, and more knowledge. They allow people from all stages, ages, and walks of life to become aware of and part of our messages. They strengthen our organizations, our campaigns, and our resolve to keep fighting for our causes. Fresh perspective and insight allow our advocacy to grow and expand and our voices to reach more and more people.

Take time to brainstorm your potential community partners! Here is a possible list that is not by any means complete. These organizations could be your partners right now:

- Teens and their families
- School administrators and teachers
- Local Management Boards
- County Commissioners
- Head Starts
- After School Programs
- Daycares
- Cooperative Extension Offices
- Local Businesses
- Health and Human Services
- Police Departments
- Youth Detention Centers
- Area Media Outlets

How Do You Form Partnerships?

- Reach out to these organizations by obtaining information from websites/brochures/talking to members of the organizations.
- Attend sponsored workshops, staff days, and committee meetings. Many of these things are open to the public or members of other organizations would be welcome to attend.
- Don't be afraid to speak up and share your message and involve others in what you are advocating for. Chances are you have the same message or are advocating for different facets of the same issues
- Lastly, be committed to your partnerships. Follow up, stay active, and above all- stay in contact! Connection and communication are key!

We can't be a member of, or involved in, every organization or committee, but just communicating with other community groups and members on a constant and consistent basis can help keep, strengthen, and even create new lasting partnerships.

Above all else, keep this thought by Margaret J. Wheatley in mind: "There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about." Don't be afraid to create partnerships and help your community discover what it cares about! Remember, you are not alone!

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28 Days of Advocacy #7 - Put it In Writing

Posted By [Cynthia Matthias](#) On February 7, 2009 @ 7:27 pm In [Advocacy](#), [Legislation](#) | [No Comments](#)

There are so many ways for library advocates to make their voices heard these days– emailing their representatives, sending action alerts via text message, blogging to raise awareness within communities, calling a senator's office–that writing a letter seems like an antiquated form of communication by comparison. However, it's still one of the most effective ways to get your message across to representatives at all levels of government.

What's good about writing a letter?

Issues that demand our attention and support are sometimes complex. They can't be fully articulated in a soundbite. Putting your thoughts into written words lets you organize your thoughts and arguments. Letter-writing can happen anytime. If you are seized by inspiration at 2:00 a.m., you can sit down and put it down right then and there. Advocates who write letters can tell their own stories to support their cause, and these stories are often the most powerful evidence there is.

So I'm ready to write. How should I do it?

Other bloggers will elaborate upon best practices for communicating with elected officials throughout the month. However, these are the key points to keep in mind if you plan to launch a letter-writing campaign:

- Use or create talking points for letter-writers to use in their own letters. Often, many people are motivated to participate, but they don't know where to start.
- Keep your letter short, sweet, and to the point.
- Tell your story. Anecdotes make a big impact.
- Ask for a response or acknowledgment of your letter.
- If you are contacting an official at the federal level, send your letter to their Washington office. The people who work on policy are in Washington, and though letter sent to local offices eventually get to Washington, they are delayed.
- Send your letter early (or fax it.) All paper mail is extensively processed for security reasons, which could cause delays.

What about email?

For many of us, reading and writing email is as easy as breathing. Sending an email to an elected official is a perfectly effective way to communicate your concerns. There are some things to keep in mind about email, however. If you are writing to a federal representative, you will have to use an online form on their website. These forms automatically discard any emails from people outside of the legislator's constituency. In addition, I spoke with several staff members in the offices of city, state and federal offices who said that they are inundated with email.

Are letters effective?

Staffers tell me that they read every single letter that they get–from their constituents. This is why its important for everyone to be involved–we need advocates in every city and every state! In some cases, letters have alerted legislators and officials to issues that they'd not known about previously. I was also told that it is useful to relate your issue to that particular official's legislative agenda, which is often found on their website. In addition, the staffers suggested that form letters are not particularly useful. Personal, personalized letters are key.

You can do it.

You can write to your city council member, your county commissioner, or your state or federal representative, and your letter can make a difference. We have tools that can help:

[Find out what's happening around the country](#) at ALA's Legislative Action Center.

[Use these toolkits to help make your case.](#)

Most state library associations also have their own advocacy toolkits for specific local issues.

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28 Days of Advocacy #8 - How a Teen Services Vision can be a Solid Advocacy Tool

Posted By [Julie Scordato](#) On February 8, 2009 @ 9:40 am In [Advocacy](#), [Teen Services](#) | [No Comments](#)

Does your organization have a teen services vision? If so, great! If not, it may be time to think about one.

A teen services vision can have a variety of applications including defining partnerships with community agencies and also solidifying teen services within your organization. If you have a teen services vision, drafted and agreed upon by teen services staff, you have a statement that can:

- Act as a guide for teen services priority and decision-making.
- Act as a clear indicator that teen services staff speak with one voice and has a vision beyond the immediate work of teen services.
- Act as a way to tell the "teen services story" to colleagues, administrators, Board of Trustees, your Friends of the Library, and the community at large.
- Act as a tool in documents and proposals for funds, partnerships and other kinds of operational support.

Drafting the statement allows teen services staff to have a substantial discussion on what the most critical elements of teen services are, and how they can be communicated. It creates opportunities to build buy-in and foster innovative thinking about teen services.

Discussing the vision statement encourages staff to evaluate the current state of teen services in the organization, what needs changed, and how a vision statement can cultivate that change by being a toll in further advocacy discussions.

Where to start:

First, talk with the appropriate administrators about drafting the statement. Make sure they understand why this will benefit the organization as a whole. You must have support from administration or the vision won't have as much punch as it could have.

Once administration knows about and is supportive of a teen services vision, start the conversation among staff. Depending on your organization, you may want to expand the conversation to children's services staff or even general staff.

Drafting a vision takes time, patience, and a lot of conversation. While it isn't a UN Peace Treaty, everyone will have ideas and issues and this task will provide an opportunity to reflect on the priorities and teen services philosophies of colleagues.

This may take weeks, or even months to iron out, depending on the frequency of meetings, number of staff, and current climate of teen services. Maybe the clear idea of what teen services means to your staff and organization is ready to be articulated, or maybe you will feel like you are starting from square one. Regardless, the investment will pay off in later negotiations and communications.

Here is Columbus Metropolitan Library's Teen Services Vision:

We will develop diverse and flexible programming, pro-active outreach, strong and adaptable collections and continuing education for our colleagues that will promote and deliver information and social literacy services to teens.

This vision has been used in a number of documents, from our initial gaming proposal to documents given to administrators to tell the teen services story. Notice the cornerstones of teen services are paired with adjectives to indicate the breadth and depth of our dedication.

I encourage you to start this conversation in your organization. Not only will you have a succinct but powerful document to share, it will inspire great conversation among teen services staff and potentially reinvigorate teen services priorities.

Julie Scordato
Teen Services Specialist
Columbus Metropolitan Library
Columbus, OH

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28 Days of Advocacy #9 - State Advocacy—Where it all Begins!

Posted By [Paula Griffith](#) On February 9, 2009 @ 11:24 am In [Advocacy](#), [Legislation](#) | [1 Comment](#)

First, and I believe most importantly, a grass roots campaign for each state district/region is critical for state advocacy. What do our state legislators care about? Their constituents! Know what is going on in your own community and state districts then establish a coalition of important stakeholders (collaborative partnerships) to discuss issues and plan strategies for promoting library goals in your area.

Who are some of the important stakeholders? The list includes: public librarians, school librarians, academic librarians, professors who teach in library programs, museums who have library partnerships, and your state ALA affiliate as well as other professional associations such as a local education or parent associations. Your state ALS affiliate can help to provide resources, training, and organize a collaborative joint effort for your entire library district. If your area does not currently have a collaborative, grass roots movement going on at this time, please take action now to begin this process because the economy shows no sign of getting better, and a group of "squeaky wheels" will get more attention than one lone voice.

Resources:

[American Library Association's Subcommittee on Grass Roots Advocacy, 2008-09](#)

[ALA's Online Project for State Affiliates](#)

Don't forget to attend your state Library Association's annual conference and/or ALA's Annual in Chicago to see sessions such as ["Coalition Building for All Libraries in a Tough Economy"](#).

ALA also provides an ["Advocacy Toolkit"](#) that can help you get started.

Once we have our partnerships and safety in numbers, we now have the "power of the people," and it is time to visit our state legislature. Plan a Legislation Day to attend, observe, and communicate with both [state Senators and Representatives](#).

Before the visit:

- Know your committee Chairs such as for the Ways and Means, Public Education, Higher Education Committees
- Prepare an itinerary of offices/legislators you want to visit
- Plan the essential "talking points" that must be communicated
- Prepare a one-page handout of those talking points you can leave with the legislator (or office assistant)
- In some states, there are procedures where constituents can call on legislators (even if they are in session) to discuss important issues. Know what those procedures are and talk to as many legislators as you have time for. These meetings are brief, so keep to the essential points.

During the visit:

- Be polite and respectful. Let them know you are concerned about their constituents back home—not that you are angry.
- Be brief and to the point. No one has time to waste, including you.

After the visit:

- Follow up with a “thank you” note including your name, contact information, and the issues you discussed with him or her.

Legislative Days are important because it places a “face” with an issue, and state legislators actually welcome contact from “back home.” Go as a group when possible because there is strength in numbers.

Grass roots communication systems are also helpful when advocating for libraries. Your grass roots collaborative can organize phone trees and email campaigns as a “call to action” to alert librarians and friends (other stakeholders) to impending bills and state discussions.

The collaborative committee should...

- Inform advocates about impending legislation
- Suggest talking points that must be communicated to legislators
- Explain time constraints so that communications can happen in a timely manner
- Describe format and protocol when addressing state legislators

Grass roots advocacy truly begins at home, gives us the power of many voices, and can boost our level of recognition among our politicians who may be misinformed or uninformed of the wonderful work we do. Be sure to cite evidence of the powerful part you all play in your community, schools, and professional association. Happy advocating!

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28 Days of Advocacy #10 - Everyday Advocacy

Posted By [Sarah Debraski](#) On February 10, 2009 @ 7:00 am In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

We're only ten days in to the 28 Days of Advocacy and already you've read many inspiring posts on how to be an advocate for libraries and teen services. I hope that many readers have emailed, phoned, or [written an elected representative](#) to seek support for libraries. However, I know that it can be intimidating to do those things. Fear not! There are other ways to be an advocate and you might already be doing them. I'm talking about everyday advocacy. What can you do in your daily life to promote and seek support for teens and libraries? In a word, TALK.

- Talk to your patrons, teachers, and parents about the work you do. Don't be afraid to pat yourself on the back and state clearly how important the work you do is. Believe me, you are not going to overstate the importance of libraries.
- Do you know who your town's elected officials are? Do they have library cards and use the library? Greet them when they come in. Give them a spontaneous tour of your teen area. Show them and tell them about what your library offers the town's youth.
- Invite your local paper's photographer to library events so that pictures and articles about what you do can be more widely seen. You probably already use your local paper to promote upcoming events, ask the paper to follow up by covering those events!
- Be an advocate among your own staff. Is the whole staff on board with idea of equitable services for teens, or are there complaints and rumblings about it? Don't stand for it! Make sure everyone on staff is respectful and courteous to all library patrons, which includes teens.

These steps might seem simple, but remember that it is not only important to promote the value of libraries to our elected officials, but also to *voters*. So you might start small, but just start speaking up!

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28 Days of Advocacy #11 - Advocacy Should Be At the Top of Your Job Description

Posted By [Lorraine Squires](#) On February 11, 2009 @ 2:22 pm In [Advocacy](#), [Prof. Development](#) | [No Comments](#)

I'm glad I'm following Julie Scordato's [excellent post on creating a Teen Services Vision Statement](#), since the task of shaping Teen Services staffs' job descriptions should be the next step after creating and sharing that Vision Statement.

Anyone looking to create a mission/vision statement or job description should take a look at [Peter Drucker's Managing the Non-Profit Organization](#), which looks very dry, but is actually stuffed with great anecdotes and common sense. In a discussion of how to manage staff, he writes (emphasis mine):

People require clear assignments. ... They need to know what the institution expects of them. But the responsibility for developing the work plan, the job description and the assignment should always be on the people who do the work.

...

*Everyone in the non-profit institution, whether chief executive or volunteer foot soldier, needs first to think through his or her own assignment. **What should this institution hold me accountable for?** The next responsibility is to make sure that the people with whom you work and on whom you depend understand what you intend to concentrate on, and what you should be held accountable for.*

If TEEN ADVOCACY is at the top of your job description, then you're answering that key question: What should the library hold me accountable for? Answer: I should be accountable as a teen advocate, speaking out for the role of the library in each community teen's life and ensuring equal library access and opportunity to all of the community's teens.

That's your big picture. The rest of your job description: X amount of hours on the desk, Y amount of programs per month, Z visits to schools and community centers, is used to shore up your role as a teen advocate.

This can be especially valuable when you've gotten too comfortable - you have a group of regulars, a cozy schedule of programs that suit your interests, and a well-worn path to your best booktalk books. That can look and feel like success, until you ask yourself: **am I acting as a teen advocate?**

That question should force you to look at the big picture: am I aware of the demographics, educational outcomes, and recreational activities of all of the teens in my community? What percentage of the teens in the community use the library? What languages are spoken by the community, and are there materials and programs that reflect that? Are the teens who "only come in to use MySpace" treated as full members of the library community? What about the kids skateboarding outside? What about the teens in the correctional facility down the way?

Teen advocates need to ensure that they are asking and answering all of those questions and more. No, you can't serve every single teen in your community with the same level of service, but if you are being held accountable to the goal of Teen Advocacy, you are at the very least looking around to see who else you should serve, and how, and how you can guarantee free and equal access to the library by each teen.

True confession: as the relatively new head of a teen department, I am just beginning to look down

this road. When I offered to blog about library advocacy for teens, this subject was nearest to my heart - not because we've already done it, but because we need to. This year will be spent working with the Teen Services staff and the teens of the community to craft our department vision and job descriptions. But I already know for sure that the first line of each job description will read: TEEN ADVOCACY. The conversation about how to hold ourselves accountable to that description will be one with a lot of twists and turns - but at least we'll be on the path.

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28 Days of Advocacy #12 - Recruiting for Results

Posted By [Paula Brehm Heeger](#) On February 12, 2009 @ 2:22 pm In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

Like many of you, I've been thrilled to see the amazing amount of positive attention libraries of all types have been receiving in the media recently. Librarians across the country are using this media attention as a springboard for advocating and spreading the word about what an asset libraries and librarians are to their communities. And it seems so much easier to step into the role of advocate, particularly with legislators and decision-makers, when you've got a recent newspaper or TV report featuring lots of people proclaiming their love of libraries in your hands! But what about translating these statements of support and appreciation from the people we serve into action? What about recruiting individuals outside of the Library community to advocate with us and for us?

You don't have to look far for an example of how powerful it can be when community members step up and take ownership of Library advocacy. Not too long ago a group of [Spokane Moms](#) proved that a focused and dedicated group of community members can make a huge impact. Efforts on behalf of libraries undertaken by non-library staff can take advocacy efforts to a higher level - a level that grabs the attention of politicians and community leaders. So how do you recruit for results when it comes to advocacy?

Simple ways Recruit Advocates:

- Make a list of possible target audiences. What individuals or groups come to your library on a regular basis? Who do you have a long standing relationship with among your customer base? Youth services librarians are often in a particularly unique position when it comes to knowing customers on a personal basis.
- Think about how to "build a foundation" for advocacy for your customers. How much do your dedicated customers really know about your situation and the services you provide? How can you educate them? Start by always emphasizing the great services you offer that are well-known or that a particular customer uses and then mention other helpful services in order to raise awareness of all the Library is providing to the community.
- Be honest with customers. Right now a lot of customers, particularly those that know and care about staff members, are asking, things like, "gosh, how is the Library doing in these tough times?" Be ready with an answer and don't necessarily sugarcoat it! No reason to alarm anyone but be honest that the Library relies on public support to make sure we have the resources we need to do our work.
- Have a 30 second "advocacy update" ready to deliver whenever the opportunity presents itself. Consider starting a program, particularly if you are working with teachers, adults or regular teen customers like a Teen Advisory Council, with a brief statement letting everyone know the state of the Library's funding or any new service you are offering.

We know our customers love the Library and that, especially for teens, Library staff can be some of the most important, reliable people in our customers lives. Don't miss the opportunity to provide these customers the tools they need to support something they love. You owe it to them and to the Library!

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28 Days of Advocacy #13 - How To Get Past Discouragement

Posted By [Krista McKenzie](#) On February 13, 2009 @ 10:14 am In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

"No." It is one of the first words we hear as human beings. And, in turn, as I have learned from my one year old and her friends, it is one of the first words we learn to say.

So how do we deal with this heavily loaded word when we hear it as a response to our library advocacy and the issues within it? How do we continue in our pursuit of our goals when this blow is dealt to us?

Well, we could handle it in the same manner we deal with it with toddlers-by smiling and expressing our understanding of their refusal, but then returning to the pursuit of our issue with increased emphasis and the knowledge that WE WILL WIN the battle. This is all well and good; however, when someone rejects the unbelievable effort and passion that we have into our work, it is extremely hard to get back up. But, it is something we HAVE TO DO! In the words of F. Scott Fitzgerald, we must "Never confuse a single defeat with a final defeat."

Here are some tips to help us get past the discouragement we often face in advocacy.

1. First, we must look at who we are advocating for-our communities are worth our efforts! Their needs can be the encouragement that we need to get back up and dust ourselves off.
2. Call a meeting and get to the bottom of the word. What I mean by this, is that we need to have an understanding of why we were rejected or turned down. Is the "no" simply a reply to the whole issue or part of the issue? Is it because of an extenuating circumstance? Or, can compromise happen? Can the hurdle that issued the "no" be overcome? It is imperative to find out the narrative behind the "no."
3. Re-examine your message. Is it clear? Does it make sense to differing stakeholders? Is there another way to frame the message or is there more information needed to get it past the "no" phase?
4. Look for other partnerships. Just because one person or organization rejects your ideas or suggestions, it doesn't mean that all of them will. Don't be afraid to approach others about the issue.
5. Be inspired by many of our great leaders who never gave up! Think about what the impact would be if we gave up-who would it impact? What would the final result be?

Lastly, remember the words of Henry Ford, a man who certainly knows what is to like to try and fail, "One who fears failure limits his activities. Failure is only the opportunity to more intelligently begin again."

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28 Days of Advocacy #14 - Advocacy by Any Other Name

Posted By [mk Eagle](#) On February 14, 2009 @ 12:35 pm In [Advocacy](#) | [4 Comments](#)

In a profession filled with acronyms and specialized taxonomy, sometimes it's easy to forget that not everyone knows what we mean.

Just one example: When a couple of my colleagues thought I should write a post for 28 Days of Advocacy, my first response was, "Um, I don't think I know anything about advocacy."

They laughed.

The reality, of course, is that I advocate every day—but I never would have called it that. I may have thought of it more as *outreach*, or *communicating*, or maybe *doing my job*.

In a school library, just as in a public library, outreach and communication are at the heart of young adult services. And it's not all the Big A Advocacy, as I like to call it—things like reaching out to community organizations, supporting legislation, pushing for funding or space or resources. Those are all crucial, of course. But we can't forget little a advocacy: reaching out to the folks you see every day.

Administrators. Whether your boss is in the district offices or the room next door, it's important to let that person know what you do and how you do it. There are formal channels for this—like program proposals, progress reports, purchase orders—and there are informal channels.

Just the other day I kept the library open late as students feverishly put their finishing touches on science fair displays, and the headmaster was one of the other adults staying late in the building as we tried to shoo the kids out at 5:30. Seeing me in the halls told her that the library responds to the needs of the students, and that I was putting in the extra time.

Teachers. Some teachers will be in the library every day, and some would go all year without introducing themselves if you let them. You don't have to harangue the ones who tend to stay in their classrooms, but do keep them on your email list whenever you're letting the faculty know about programs and resources. Go to meetings. Get coffee in the teachers' lounge. Eavesdrop on conversations and mention that you've got a really great book if that's what it takes—but make sure every teacher in that building knows your name.

It's also important to not take those Every Day Teachers for granted. They may know you can put together book carts and give library lessons, but do they know you hand-deliver magazines and professional journals to faculty boxes? Do they know you can troubleshoot the sound quality on a laptop hooked up to the library's projector? Have they seen your mad Guitar Hero skills? Every positive interaction with a teacher is improving your reputation—and the chances that the hermit teachers might just hear how great you are.

Students. We tend to think of reaching out *for* teens, but we can't forget how important it is to reach out *to* teens. Students who don't know what the library has to offer, have had bad experiences with other librarians, or just don't think the library is the place for them won't come to you. And if you only ever interact with them when they're forced to be in the library with a class, they have no reason to come on their own.

I try to connect with my students in as many ways as possible. I run regular gaming events, I've been to basketball games, I'll give lessons in classrooms if the library is booked—you name it, I'll try to be there. And, of course, I try to have one-on-one conversations. Whether it's getting a book from another library, futzing around with the color printer, or chatting about topics from manga to

hurricane relief, I want my students to know that I'm always there for them.

So, what's *your* favorite form of little a advocacy?

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28 Days of Advocacy #15- Advocacy is Only as Strong as Your Allies

Posted By [Julie Scordato](#) On February 15, 2009 @ 12:18 pm In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

When we talk about gaining support for teen services, we often look through a lens of direct supervisors, administrators, and board members. Sometimes the lens changes to those of our youth services colleagues who may not be gung ho about teen services. The teen services advocate however, should never underestimate the potential of support from all levels and departments of staff. Building allies, even in the more unlikely areas of your organization can reap enormous and surprising benefits.

Part of advocating for the teen services story is telling everyone the story. Share your programs, experience with teens, and upcoming plans with everyone from the shelving crew to the circulation staff to the reference librarians. Always ask about other staff projects. By showing a sincere interest in what other staff members are doing, you are encouraging them to get to know you and be interested in teen services activities. Also, by knowing what's going on, you can connect teens (as volunteers, as customers interested in the service) with the staff and break through the tightly held beliefs that only teen services staff work with teens. You can also discover talents, interests, or potential partners for your teen services by getting to know other staff. It's a small world after all, maybe that part-time reference librarian has a cousin who runs a comic shop who could help with programming or finding comic/manga authors for programs.

Beyond this, you can glean some interesting insights into advocacy through advice. I was talking to a colleague who worked in our Genealogy, History and Travel department about someone I was going to meet on a project and I didn't know very much about their personality. This colleague surprised me by having a close relationship with the person I was a little nervous about meeting and gave me some great insights that helped me have a productive meeting.

Be open to staff who can be allies that you would not normally think of as such. You can cultivate your own serendipitous connections simply by being outgoing, friendly, energetic, and genuinely interested in getting to know everyone in your organization.

Don't allow yourself to be stymied by heresy like, "Oh that so and so, she thinks having lock-ins are ridiculous." The key to creating a rich network of allies is to be willing to both ask for help and insight while also taking it upon yourself to get to know people and make your own conclusions.

The bottom line is, reach out to everyone to maximize your advocacy potential. You are an ambassador for teens services, in the community, in the schools, and in your own break room.

Julie Scordato
Teen Services Specialist
Columbus Metropolitan Library
Columbus, OH

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28 Days of Advocacy #16 - How to Get Teens Involved

Posted By [Jesse Vieau](#) On February 16, 2009 @ 12:54 pm In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

In order to get money for teen services in the library, the library as a whole must first secure adequate funding from its source. The library's budget is often decided by a board of community leaders who must consider many other public services in which to allocate taxpayer dollars.

Finding a way to leave a lasting impression on the budgetary committee is a hard fought and widely attempted task, and utilizing the library's teen population in your attempt may help the library stand out from the other groups and make your case that much stronger. If you need help convincing your administration that this is a worthwhile program explain how civic responsibility and engagement, which are integral foundations of our society, will serve as both a learning tool for the teens and an advocacy tool for the library.

Teens Rally for Library Funding

If you already have a Teen Advisory Group or just a few dedicated regulars, you are set. If not, there are other ways to recruit a few teens for the cause. Who hasn't had the conversation with a disappointed teen in which you try to explain why you can't afford to buy more than two copies of the newest books or do not have the funds to refurbish the old couch in the teen section that was a hand-me-down in the first place.

As you use this time to explain your budgetary constraints, why not give them the opportunity to help? Pull out some markers, a paint stir stick, and two pieces of poster board and ask them to create a sign that expresses their desire for adequate library funding and invite them to attend the next budget hearing with you. Also invite the parents, your coworkers, and other known library advocates to join you in this event.

Ask all those taking part to meet at the hearing 30-60 minutes before the hearing is scheduled to take place. Use this time to prep everyone for what is to take place before, during, and after the meeting. Before the meeting, you may consider holding a demonstration out on the sidewalk. If the weather isn't permitting, peacefully display your signs in the lobby. Understand that many teens have never been a part of a "protest" and will look to the adults for guidance. But keep in mind this is a great chance for them to find their own voices and an opportunity to lead the pack.

Whether you sit as a group or spread out to cover all corners of the audience, once you enter the meeting room hold your signs high and proud, quietly and respectfully. Your presence will be known and felt while the budgetary decisions are being discussed and may just give you an edge on the competition. Find out beforehand whether there will be a chance for a representative to speak on behalf of the library. If you have a teen who would like to be that representative, and your administration approves, work with the teen and your Teen Advisory Board to craft the speech in the weeks prior to the meeting.

Be sure to bring your camera to capture these highly visible tactics. The pictures can then be used to publicize your efforts on the library's website, blog, or newsletter. And if the meeting is being covered by the local media, they will have a hard time not focusing their cameras on your group.

Do not overlook the task of arranging a way for all interested teens to get to and from the meeting. Suggestions for transportation include:

- Parent drop off/pick up
- Walking from the library if the site of the meeting is close enough

- Purchasing a few bus passes with your program budget
- Offer van rides if you have access to a municipal vehicle
- Offer rides in your own personal vehicle if permitted by your managers

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28 Days of Advocacy #17 - Not Your Grandma's Library

Posted By [Rachel Murphy](#) On February 17, 2009 @ 11:18 pm In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

iPods synching the 'Best of YouTube' podcasts with earbuds around necks and hanging out of shirts collars. Bodies lounging on "poosh" pillows while texting with one hand. Email, VoiceThreads, and Flickr on computer screens. Conversation! Comfy chairs filled with engrossed readers on digital devices...

Library of the future? No, this could (and should) be the library media center of today!

School libraries in the 21st century should no longer be a place filled only with print materials. They should be evolving into interactive media centers filled with high speed Internet connections capable of reaching global audiences. They should have a full range of technology tools (such as iTouch's, Flipcam's, document cameras, digital cameras, etc.) available for teacher checkout. They should feature new titles and current information resources – both online and in print. And most important, they should contain active and interested students before, after and during school hours. However, many school library media centers lack the support needed to create the type of center that will reach today's teens; that will emphasize the impact a 21st century school library media center can have on learning. In a time of budget cuts and increased NCLB pressures school library media specialists must work extra hard to promote their library media programs. If you don't speak up for your library media center – who will?

Promote your library. Promote your services. Promote, promote, promote!

- Get input! Ask your teens to share the services they would like to see offered. Ask parents, community council members, teachers, and administration, everyone for feedback. Implement suggestions.
- Learn! Stay current with technology trends. Embrace your changing role. Share at faculty meetings, community council meetings, or even at lunch in the faculty room, the ways in which your media center can support school activities.
- Go online! Promote your library by maintaining a library website with online research links, book highlights, community services (such as public libraries), technology tutorials, and professional development information for teachers.
- Form collaborative partnerships - with everyone! Include and invite your administration to participate in your media center programs. Invite department heads and teachers to help you determine collection needs and plan collaborative projects. Include technology in those projects. Co-teach those projects; you as the Media Specialist, the teachers as the curriculum specialist.
- Keep bulletin boards detailing how the media center resources can support curriculum initiatives.
- Let your legislature know how important school library funding and educational technology funding is to the success of your programs. Share the ways in which your Library Media Center helps students to succeed!

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28 Days of Advocacy #18: Creating Partnerships

Posted By [Paula Griffith](#) On February 18, 2009 @ 12:37 pm In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

Forming partnerships is much like beginning a friendship. Oftentimes, we do not even think about how we create new friendships...so how does it happen? We smile at someone we may not know, say hello, and look for common ground to talk about. When we discover people who share common interests, we plan activities around those interests. Most importantly, we share work, laughter, and accomplishments in ways that help us to understand our friends, ourselves, and the world we live in. We form partnerships in much the same way. First, we look about to find people who share our mission and goals. More than likely, we will have to approach them first, and much like making friends, a smile and a handshake can go a long way to get us started.

Who might we want to partner with?

- schools, both public and private
- public libraries
- community organizations
- museums
- corporate businesses
- nonprofit organizations
- professional associations (local, state, and national)
- universities/colleges
- vocational schools
- social services
- local, state, and national government officials
- Head start programs
- daycare centers
- senior citizen associations
- hospitals and healthcare systems

We want to form partnerships with as many diverse associations and groups as we can to broaden our community base so that our library services become a critical, integral part of our communities in every state in this nation. The only barriers we face are those we create from lack of vision. Some of the partnerships we choose to engage come about because we have asked the question: "What do our patrons need?" Once we have a partner with whom we share common interests and goals, it is up to us to keep that relationship viable by providing the programs, services, and resources that support our partnerships. Just like friends, partnerships should be forever.

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28 Days of Advocacy #19- Overcoming the Fear

Posted By [Krista McKenzie](#) On February 19, 2009 @ 12:55 pm In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

Your palms sweat; your throat becomes dry and scratchy. Your knees knock together and every time you try to speak, all that comes out is a slow hoarse whisper.

Often this is what happens when you go to speak in front of a group of people or in front of people in powerful positions. Our fears can be very gripping and can prevent us from being the best possible advocates that we can be. In order to get our voices heard, though, we must get past our fears of speaking out. The following are three central "Fear Issues" that we have all faced at one point in time or another and pointers to help overcome them.

Fear Issue #1 "I don't know what to say!": When presenting your case in front of a group of legislators, it can seem like a daunting task. But, all it takes is a little preparation.

1. Talk to community and staff members and come to a consensus about some talking points. It is important to construct the message that you want to deliver and that everyone you are representing is on the same page with you.
2. Research the positions of those you are talking to. It is important to know where they stand on an issue in order to have positive discourse on the given subject.
3. Write out some notes and practice talking to others about what you are going to talk about. Practicing a sample sit-down helps to iron out any issues that you have with the delivery of and the message itself.

Fear Issue #2 "I get nervous when face to face with the person/people I am talking to."

1. First, take a deep breath and gather your thoughts. If you are a person who gets nervous in these situations, it might help to take someone with you until you can regain your thought process. Or, it might also help to go with a veteran speaker/take them as back up the first time around to see how the process goes
2. Remember that your elected officials are people just like you.
3. Remember your passion for the issues you are communicating. You wouldn't be there advocating for the issue at hand if you didn't think it was absolutely detrimental.
4. Issues need to be advocated for, and libraries need every advocate they can get! Without you, think of how many voices would go unheard.
5. Practice makes perfect. It may be rough the first few times you step into that public spotlight, but after awhile, you will be a pro!

Fear Issue #3 "What if I Fail?" Many times, we will be turned down. Many times, we will hear the word "no." But, we owe it to ourselves and the teens that we are advocating for to keep trying until we hear "Yes!"

Overall, think about the words of Ambrose Redmoon "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgement that something else is more important than fear."

Library and teen advocacy is so important, don't let your fears be your downfall. Turn them around and use them as your stepping board to advocacy!

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28 Days of Advocacy #20- Creating Clear, Concise Communication

Posted By [Krista McKenzie](#) On February 20, 2009 @ 9:00 am In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

As advocates, we all have important messages that we are dying to present. Give us just 5 minutes of your time and we'll have you singing the praises of our teen issues. Often times, we are only given 5 minutes (or even less than that) to present ourselves. When we have only 1-5 minutes to present all of our points on an issue and to convince another person of action, it is absolutely essential to have a clear, concise position to communicate. Here are some ways you can go about creating such a message, whether it be verbal or written.

1. Brainstorm all the possible points of an issue or things that you can think about when articulating it.
2. Organize the thoughts into categories. It is important to do this so that the message is conjoined.
3. Rank your categories in the order of importance. For such a brief talk or letter, you should probably stick with only three categories or main ideas.
4. Go through each of the three categories and make sure that you have researched and have accurate support for each of your assertions. Up to date and relevant statistics and information are always great helps and go a long way in showing that you really took time on your message and that you know what you are talking about.
5. Keep each assertion and its support clear, brief, and directly to the point. Cut out any flowery or ambiguous language.
6. Add transitions to make sure your message flows smoothly.
7. Make sure that your position ends with what you hope to influence the person you are talking to do. For example, if you talk about how library services numbers are up, how much your budget cuts are, and how they are impacting your library system, you need to be able to tell your lawmaker at the end of your presentation what you would like them to do about the situation- whether it be more funding from the stimulus bill or decreasing budget cuts to libraries. You need to be prepared to offer suggestions for solutions.
8. Write it all down word for word in a hand-out with your contact information if you are presenting verbally. Sometimes people need time to flesh out your points, think about them, and get back to you with questions.
9. Refine, refine, refine and practice, practice, practice. Refine your written communication by keeping it updated with any new information and allowing others to proofread. For verbal messages, practice by yourself; practice telling a friend. Presenting your messages in written or verbal form to a friend can help you determine any flaws, incoherencies, or confusion in your message.
10. Try to be respectful and use appropriate formality, speech, language, (eye contact, voice and breath control in verbal communications) when delivering your messages.

Presenting our messages is an essential part of advocacy. Why not make it the best message that you could possibly give/send in 5 minutes?

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28 Days of Advocacy #21- Advocacy Apples and Dialing Advocacy 911

Posted By [Deb Logan](#) On February 21, 2009 @ 3:17 am In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

An apple a day...
A stitch in time...
An ounce of prevention...

Are there strategies for preserving library services for students? What do you do if your students are on the verge of losing significant parts of their library program or library services altogether? Is there an Advocacy Emergency Plan?

The first 20 Days of Advocacy have focused on topics like what advocacy is, crafting messages, and forging partnerships. Now, it is time to pull together these advocacy strategies, skills, and resources to actively protect and preserve library programs for young people. This winter, AASL has introduced two new advocacy toolkits. Being proactive is the focus of the [School Library Program Health and Wellness Toolkit](#), while pulling together an orchestrated response during an advocacy emergency is the focus of the [AASL Crisis Toolkit](#).

Preventive Medicine

In this time of shrinking and even disappearing budgets, the best time to prevent cuts to library services and programs is before they are even discussed. The planning section of AASL's [School Library Program Health and Wellness Toolkit](#) guides advocates through a process that begins with designing and promoting programs that are aligned with stakeholder priorities. The toolkit also emphasizes the gathering and use of data to improve services and programs. Data is then also used to build stakeholder understanding of how the library helps to meet educational goals. Sharing data is also about making sure that when decision makers are faced with difficult decisions, they can make informed decisions. The Resource section of the [School Library Program Health and Wellness Toolkit](#) provides recommended lists of materials on topics such as advocacy, school library program research statistics, 21st Century Skills, and Evidence Based Practice.

Call the Squad

When budgets fall short, school districts are faced with difficult decisions that they do not want to make. Unfortunately, school library programs are often at the top of budget cut lists. How librarians respond and who they involve in that response, need to be immediate, accurate, positive, coordinated, consistent and clear. Most important, is that all responses must be child-centered. The [AASL Crisis Toolkit](#) quickly walks school librarians through a detailed process for involving and organizing stakeholders in an advocacy intervention. In addition to the crisis planning resources, the Toolkit includes a resource section that connects users to background, statistical, and strategic information. Links to sample resources and other crisis toolkits are also provided.

Keeps the Dr. Away

It is always a good idea to be familiar with your emergency supplies, but now is the time to dig into the nice juicy advocacy apple and to think *prevention*.

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28 Days of Advocacy #22: Grant Writing

Posted By [Paula Griffith](#) On February 22, 2009 @ 4:43 pm In [Legislation](#), [YALSA Info.](#) | [No Comments](#)

Grants allow libraries and their patrons to benefit from extra funds that provide additional services and programs. Preplanning and needs assessments are both important to grant writing because the written narrative and budget will focus on “need” rather than “want.” The grant writer will have to justify need based on some evidence, which may include surveys, interviews, and/or questionnaires. Once a need has been identified, the grant writer/researcher will then identify sources of possible monies such as the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#).

Critical to writing any grant is that the need is described and justified based on evidence and each part of the grant supports that need. The grant writer will need to provide information about his or her library such as demographics of the patrons and community, situational circumstances (such as natural disasters), and information about why the current library budget will not cover this request. The grant evaluator needs to understand your mission, why the money is needed, and why they should trust you to use the money efficiently and effectively. Don’t make assumptions—explain and describe in both factual and human terms. For example, many of the libraries in my area suffered great loss during Hurricane Ike, but as I travel about the country, many do not realize the extent of loss that occurred. Do not make assumptions—describe each factor that affects your library funding.

Be specific. In the narrative give details about how the money will be used and be as specific as possible. State the specific objectives and give a step by step account of how each objective will be accomplished. Include who is the audience, the activities they will be engaged in, who is going to do the work and their credentials. Explain any planning or research that may have already been done as well as when and where the project will take place and the duration. Include a description of the impact or outcomes of this project and create a detailed budget that is specific to the costs that will incur by offering the project.

The key concept to writing any grant is to stay focused on the tasks and be as detailed as possible describing what you want to do and how you will do it. There are many online resources that will help get you started:

- [Minnesota Council on Foundations](#)
- [Non-profit Guides](#)
- [Show Me the Money](#)

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28 Days of Advocacy #23 - An Advocacy Success Story

Posted By [M'alis Wendt](#) On February 23, 2009 @ 11:43 am In [Advocacy](#) | [2 Comments](#)

Advocacy successes don't always come quickly or easily, but reading about other libraries' successes can give us all inspiration and hope in our efforts.

As the ALA [Add It Up site](#) points out, "The most dangerous time of the day is from 3 PM to 6 PM. Public libraries provide teens with a constructive place to go during these hours, where teens can organize and participate in supervised recreational and educational activities."

The Maplewood Memorial Library in New Jersey experienced this problem in a most extreme fashion with 50 or more teens coming into the library every afternoon to just hang out, as you can see by the following account from the YALSA Toolkit: [Speaking Up for Library Services to Teens: A Guide to Advocacy.](#)

From the Front When Words Aren't Enough

The Maplewood (N.J.) Memorial Library made national news when its board voted to close the library between the hours of 2:45 and 5.

The reason: An escalating pattern of disruptive-and sometimes destructive-behavior by students from a nearby middle school who inundated the library each day after school.

The board made its decision after the library had made extensive efforts to improve its programs and services for young adults and after some 10 years of discussion with community officials failed to yield a solution.

In reality, the library never did close. The mayor called an emergency meeting, and resources were found to establish a recreation center at the middle school, to hire a full-time young adult librarian and explore a better space with more computers for teens at the library. With these concessions on the table, the board agreed to rescind its decision to close the library.

Library Director Jane Kennedy offers the following insights:

Why do you think your local officials were unresponsive for so long?

Nobody knew what to do. It was a problem with no easy solution. It was easier to blow it off.

What kind of reaction did you get from the Township Council after the board's decision?

The mayor seemed quite taken aback. He shouldn't have been. We had told him numerous times that it was a possibility. I don't think he thought the board had the gumption to do it. Finally, after the bad publicity, he called an emergency meeting of the library board.

What kind of response did you get from the community?

We got a lot of support from other librarians and the public. But we also got our share of intense criticism. It was an emotional issue. People said the parents are responsible, but you can't legislate good parenting. Twenty years ago, you called a parent and they'd come bring the kid home. Now there's no parent at home. Parents are working two and three jobs. We got the least support from the parents of the kids involved. They said we were picking on their children.

What was the library's message?

The message was "This is for the kids and the library. The library needs to function as a library for the entire community. The kids need a place to go. They need other activities after school." The board felt it was a community issue and the community needed to solve it.

Did anything surprise you?

The board (and I) anticipated that there would be press about the decision and that it would most likely be negative. We discussed that at length, but decided that our need to address the situation was more important than what the press may or may not say. What was surprising was the intensity. We are very close to New York City and have a number of news media professionals living here. Knowing it and experiencing it are two different things. The newspapers sensationalized it. The news crews from TV and radio were intrusive when they came to the library. They were also relentless in their pursuit of a good story. They did not always get the facts straight.

Do you have any tips for dealing with the media?

The only tip I have is to have one spokesperson and refer all reporters etc. to him/her. Also, we tried to stick to the message in the board statement. That is not easy because they will try to get you to go off message and into another direction. Eventually you are knocked off the front page by something else and things go back to normal.

What advice would you give other libraries about advocacy in general?

Don't make a threat you don't intend to carry out. Other than that, keep talking, keep meeting. We only had one card. That was changing our hours, and we played it. Some people thought the board was "crying wolf" just to get attention, but we were fully prepared to carry out the closing. It would have forced people who were using the library as day care to find other solutions, and it would have broken the sheer habit the kids had of just going to the library because there was nowhere else to go.

How would you describe the library's relationship with the Township Council now?

All things considered, it's pretty good. I think the mayor realized he should have been talking (and listening) to the board more. He's now coming to board meetings. There were some hard feelings but no finger pointing. The council and mayor did realize the library had been trying to tell them for years how bad it was. I think there might even be some respect for the board that they made this controversial and difficult decision for what they thought was the "greater good".

The Story Behind the Story

What the public didn't hear as explained by Library Director Jane Kennedy:

The board made its decision after some 10 years of discussion with community officials failed to find a solution, and after the library had exhausted all other options within its means.

A Teen Advisory Group was started four years ago. A children's librarian was designated a part-time young adult librarian; afterschool monitors were hired, and afterschool programming begun. Behavior policies and procedures were carefully crafted. Staff was given special training both in adolescent behavior and security measures.

Two years ago, the library hired a consultant to conduct focus groups with teens. The results, reported to township officials, were not surprising, says Kennedy. "The kids wanted a recreation center, a place to hang out with their friends, relax, have fun. We were getting kids who didn't particularly want to be here but there was no place for them go. We were the de facto recreation center."

Library staff worked with school, township, police and recreation officials to explore solutions, but were stymied by a lack of resources. The mayor appointed a youth task force, but after a year there was little progress. Meanwhile, the situation at the library continued to worsen, generating

complaints both from patrons and staff.

In reality, the library never did close. An emergency meeting was held and resources were found to establish a recreation center at the middle school. The mayor also agreed to provide the library with additional support, including funds for 10 computers. With these concessions on the table, the board agreed to rescind its decision to close the library.

The library now has security guards instead of monitors and a full-time young adult librarian. It has hired a consultant to make recommendations about a separate YA area. The staff had a refresher session on how to deal with kids. Some 120 kids have signed up to go to the Hub, the new afterschool program at the middle school) and on any given day, about 60 kids attend.

Says Kennedy: "These are the same kids that were wondering aimlessly in the library. We had said all along they need a place to go after school. The community solved the problem, but it took a rather drastic step to get them to come up with the resources to do so."

Ma'lis Wendt
Chair, Young Adult Advocacy Task Force

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28 Days of Advocacy #24 - Radical Trust

Posted By [Jesse Vieau](#) On February 24, 2009 @ 7:08 pm In [Advocacy](#), [Teen Services](#), [YALSA Info.](#), [Youth Participation](#) | [No Comments](#)

Once you are able to find support, funding, spaces, community connections, etc for teen services in your library's structure you might now look for ways for teens to be involved in the everyday decisions and workload. We can talk about supporting the wants and needs of teenagers forever, but the next step is actually using them as a resource (a very valuable resource) in the day-to-day functions of the library, beyond shelving books and preparing crafts.

Asking for their help with some of your bigger duties will require that you trust the teens will do the right thing. Before that trust is given, you must make sure your expectations are clearly relayed as you can't expect them to pull your expectations out of thin air, right? With so many ways for things to go wrong (in your head) this type of trust is known as Radical Trust. This idea of Radical Trust can be as simple as dropping the requirement of parental permission slips for content contribution, or it can be as complicated as asking a group of teens to actively participate in all stages of your collection management process, and you follow their lead.

I've learned first hand what Radical Trust can encompass while working and studying under Michele Gorman, Teen Services Coordinator for the Public Library of Charlotte & Mecklenburg County in Charlotte, NC. Michele has shown some crazy radical trust in Charlotte's teenage population by allowing them to plan and carry out programs, involving them in the development of the library's policies and procedures that will directly impact their age group, and even has groups of teens involved in the interviewing of Teen Librarians.

Just think back to when you were a teenager and an adult put some trust in you. It is an important step in development, not to mention a great way to give some ownership to the teens. We are transferring the power from us to them, where it belongs according to developmental needs. Yes, failure is a possibility. Yet failure and the opportunity to fail are such important tools in building character.

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28 Days of Advocacy #25-The Other Side

Posted By [Yolanda Hood](#) On February 25, 2009 @ 11:22 am In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

You mean there's another side? Well, of course there is! We are so eager to get our point across and convince the "enemy" that we need that new teen space or to budget for another school librarian that we forget that there are often legitimate reasons for why those things haven't happened yet. I would suggest that before any advocacy/lobbying take place, you sit for a moment and seriously ponder what the other side may be experiencing and the challenges that the other side may be facing. Once you have examined the other side of the fence, your enemy may no longer be an enemy but a potential collaborator in your cause. Consider these ideas:

I'm Sorry, Who Are You?

By the time you actually get to that meeting with your principal, superintendent, town/city council you have already done a lot of footwork. You catch flies with honey, suga,' being proactive is key. The assumption is that the key figures in your community know who you are. You want them to have a sense of who you are and what you represent before you step foot in the door of the meeting. This means that over time you have invited the "key" figures of your community to any/all library events; you have e/mailed copies of all good press that your library and events receive; and you have sent thank you notes to them for their participation, no matter how small. The key figures should feel vested in the library and the services that it offers.

Aren't I Too Old for Homework?

Never! You're never too old for homework. You've made innumerable PR contacts with the key figures of your community. Now, it's time to set foot in the door. You've tried to imagine the situations, circumstances, and challenges that your key figure is facing. But, don't stop there. Actually do some legwork. Look at city council meeting minutes to get a feel for the major concerns of the council at the moment. Find out which major issues each council member supported; and, if possible, why. Find numbers, facts, and figures that your council member may be dealing with on a daily basis. Research it thoroughly because those are probably the issues that are pressing on that member's mind at the moment, and they could be the issues that are keeping you from that new teen space.

My Time is Valuable

Let them know that you are about business. Always know what your library's key message is and state it at least twice in your conversation. Try to have a new personal story or example to support your key message every time you talk to the key figures in your community. This let's them know that the library and its services actually do have a huge impact on the communities that they serve. Then make your request very specifically. Don't say, "We need your support in finding a way to provide a teen space in our library." Say, "We want the council to support a bond for one million dollars to build a phenomenal teen space." Then sit back and...

Shut Up Already!

If there is one thing that Oprah has taught us it's that everyone has a "sob story." And, we can take another lesson from Oprah—listen to that sob story! She's rich; she's famous; she's powerful—right? She got there by listening and *using* what she hears. Actually listening (not waiting to interrupt) to the other side's argument can actually be the best clue about how to proceed with your request. Remember, you want your teen space, but you also want to create partnerships and collaborations. Listening is a good way to make all of that happen.

Don't Forget to Consider the Alternative–Negotiate

You have a key message, you have supporting examples, hooks, and the big ask. But, make sure that you have also considered the alternative possibility. What will your organization do if you're told "no"? What will your organization do if you're told "maybe but done differently"? If you can't have *exactly* what you want, what *would* work? If your council member is adamantly against your library's request, be prepared to put negotiations on the table. Your request is for the good of young adults and the community, but for the other side it might only be about the bottom line. That doesn't make the other side a monster. It just means that you have to use multiple strategies.

Keep at it and don't lose hope!

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28 Days of Advocacy #26 - Educating Your Staff

Posted By [Joni Bodart](#) On February 26, 2009 @ 8:45 pm In [Advocacy](#) | [No Comments](#)

Teens walk into the library with friends and attitude. They ignore the rules, they want to do things their own way, and they want adults to leave them alone. Library staff respond with hostility, superiority, and a demand to follow rules that are not necessarily enforced for other age groups. How to change that? Educate your staff about the psychology of adolescence, help them see that the behavior they are objecting to is perfectly normal for adolescents. In addition, educate your staff about applying rules equally across age ranges. If teens have to work quietly, then so do the man with the cell phone who yells at the person he's talking to, the senior citizens who forgot their hearing aids, and the mother with the screaming, hysterical infant or toddler. It's important to remember that those who expect trouble will get it. But those who expect no trouble will not have to deal with any. The same act can be defined as trouble by one person, and no problem by another.

Taking a look at the milestones of adolescence will help staff members understand that teens are exhibiting normal behavior when they do things that might seem troublesome. From 11-13, teens are increasingly worried about what they look like, begin to assert their independence from their parents, display rebellious and defiant behavior, value their friends over their family, so that the peer group dominates their opinion on all issues. Teens at these ages might look or act different, want to do things with their friends—including using the library computers. They are quick to take offense, and give adults major attitude. However they will respond to adults who treat them with respect. Even a smile will go a long way toward connecting with a younger teen or tween. So will asking for their cooperation rather than ordering them to change their behavior.

From 14-16, teens become less self absorbed, begin to make decisions on their own, experiment with self image and appearance, take risks and seeks new experiences without seeing the danger they are putting themselves in, develop a sense of morality or ethics, begin to make lasting relationships, become sexually aware, become intellectually aware, and their skills/interests become more mature. At this age, teens' brains have not yet been hardwired, and many old connections are being pruned out and new connections are being formed or strengthened. They have not begun to enter Piaget's formal operational stage, and don't have the ability to think about experiences from a hypothetical perspective, to say "What if?" They deal with the immediate, rather than the future. Teens are also social animals, and move in groups. Librarians tend to think that a group of teens is "getting into trouble" when all they are doing is working on a joint project together, or trying to figure out how to do their homework, or maybe just socializing. Why don't they ask the librarian for help? She's glaring at them, and making it very clear that she'd rather they just leave, and the sooner the better.

From 17-18, teens view the world idealistically, become involved in the world outside of their home/school/community, set and work to achieve goals, stabilize long term relationships, see adults as equals, and establish independence from home and family. These older teens resent being treated like children, and want to establish their identity as adults. They see themselves as more mature than the adults around them do, and this can cause conflict. Again respect is the key—treat them with respect, and they will respond. The more you can treat them as adults, the more they will interact positively with you.

There are many articles and books examining the adolescent brain and personality, that explain why they act the way they do, and what they want from the adults in their lives. A training session on adolescent psychology could include information from these titles, and a display promoting them would be of interest not only for the staff, but for customers as well.

It is difficult to like someone you don't understand or are afraid of. Today's library staffs need the information and education that can bring insight, understanding, and even empathy. Growing up today is a far cry from what it was like when the parents of today's teens were teens themselves. Teens today have far more to deal with than their parents' and grandparents' generations. They don't want to be coddled or protected, because they want to confront the problems in their daily lives, and find ways to solve them. And if you are ready to treat them as almost-adults, and give them the respect they demand, they will give you respect in return.

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28 Days of Advocacy #27 - Librarian DNA: We Are More Alike Than Different

Posted By [Jim Rettig](#) On February 27, 2009 @ 6:56 pm In [Advocacy](#), [Legislation](#) | [No Comments](#)

There are a number of issues that seem to be “type of library” issues. But when given more than a cursory glance, it turns out that they are simply library issues. One example is the SKILLS Act introduced in the last Congress. Its purpose was to assure that every K-12 school would have a library with a state-certified school library media specialist. Or to put that another way, that every school would provide its students with the vital educational resources that research has shown contribute to student achievement. Isn't that what No Child Left Behind was supposed to do—promote and cultivate student achievement?

How is the Skills ACT something more than a school library issue? Year after year during my 30-plus years as an academic librarian I have seen students enter college having had minimal library experience. They need a good deal of remedial help from their college's librarians. Without that help they just aren't able to meet their professor's expectations that students identify, retrieve, use, and cite relevant information sources.

In our knowledge economy everyone should be concerned about student achievement at every level. The SKILLS Act is important to K-12 librarians, teachers, principals, school board members, academic librarians, college professors, employers—to everyone. This is a library issue and more; it is an issue that matters to the intellectual and economic advancement of American society.

Recently Rep. John Conyers of Michigan has introduced H.R. 801, a bill that would prohibit the current practice of making available to the public one year after they are published all research reports emanating from [projects funded by the National Institutes of Health](#). That sounds like an issue for academic health sciences libraries, right? It is, but it is also an issue for every American. Physicians affiliated with large teaching hospitals and medical school faculties have access to a wealth of journal literature reporting the newest medical research findings. Other physicians have access to that literature, but not as easily. Don't you want your doctors to have access that NIH-sponsored research if it will help them treat an ailment that befalls you or a member of your family? This is a library issue and more; it is an issue that matters to the health and health care of everyone in the United States and beyond.

I dream about mapping the library genome. I imagine it includes genes related to describing and organizing information sources, intellectual freedom, literacy of various types, and more. There may be a public library gene and a school library gene, and a law library gene, and so on. But that genetic map would demonstrate that our different types of libraries are not fundamentally different. Every type of library has the same fundamental mission but carries it out for different communities, each with distinctive needs. Our libraries collectively comprise the only agency in American society that provides universally accessible lifelong learning opportunities.

They form an integrated info-ecosystem. When one part of an ecosystem is threatened or harmed, the whole is threatened or harmed. When one type of library is threatened or harmed, our library ecosystem is threatened or harmed. When we advocate for an issue that principally affects one type of library, we are advocating for the entire library ecosystem. If all of us take this to heart, we will be much more effective in capturing the attention of policy makers, decision makers, and funders. And we will be much more effective in persuading them that they should promote and protect the libraries their decisions affect.

Jim Rettig

President, the American Library Association

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28 Days of Advocacy - #28: A Newbie's Reflections on Legislative Day

Posted By [Kit Pilgrim](#) On February 28, 2009 @ 11:52 am In [Advocacy](#) | [2 Comments](#)

Let me begin my blog on Legislative Day, but saying that two months ago, I had no intention of attending Legislative Day. I just learned what it was a couple of months before that. For those of you who don't know, library Legislative Day is when delegates (librarians, library staff, and library supporters) from all over a given state travel to the state capital to meet with state senators and representatives to discuss issues affecting libraries. Often, delegates advocate for certain funding or policy initiatives that they hope the legislators will support. I knew there were tons of reason that I should go, like the fact that I really believe in championing the cause of libraries or that I conveniently live in the state capital, but the whole idea seemed too overwhelming. I haven't even graduated library school — what was I going to say to a state senator?

Flash forward and I find my local library facing major cuts and budget issues. Everywhere you go, all you hear is "Recession. Recession. Recession." If there was any time to quit being a wimp and speak up about library issues, the time was now. It was time to take the plunge. Flash forward again to the end of Legislative Day and I am so happy that I went. As a first timer, I was nervous and unsure, but I got a lot out of the experience and I did what I know I should keep doing: speaking up for our libraries. So, here is the quick and dirty "What I Learned from my First (but not last) Legislative Day. Maybe it will help convince some of you other first timers to get involved in your Legislative Day, or maybe it will just be my own crazy musings, but here are my top 5 to consider. Special thanks to my fellow delegate Morgan for lending me some of her insights as well.

1. Yes, they do need you. When thinking of excuses for why I didn't need to go, I kept thinking, "Oh, they'll have plenty of folks. They won't need me." Yes, some delegations had twelve people, but the one I ended up in only had one other person. Due to my school schedule, I was not able to meet with the legislators in my district, but the organizers jumped at the chance to have me attend meetings with legislators in districts without many delegates. Since some of the districts further from our capital didn't have the turnout that closer districts had, it was nevertheless important to have a strong showing of people fighting the cause. So, even if you think they'll be lots of folks out there, there is *always* room for more people showing their support.

2. Don't worry if you haven't memorized all the talking points. Some of the things that will make the most impact are the personal stories. The delegate leader I was with shared stories of his own library and how it makes a difference in his (and the senator's!) community. I could tell that this was what was getting across to the senator — real stories of the impact of libraries and library programs on his constituents. So you don't remember all the statistics and talking points you were briefed on — it doesn't matter. Know the basics and relate the real life experiences you have that will really speak to the issues.

3. Remember that the legislators and aids that you talk to will not know as much about the library world that you do. Some might even be under the crazy misconception some seem to have about the library's obsolescence in the digital age. One legislator we talked to had the "brilliant idea" for a library program that I know tons of libraries already have. A fellow delegate relayed to me that halfway through one of her meetings, she realized the legislative aide they were talking to had no idea what the program they discussing even was. Don't get wrapped up in the jargon that legislators might not know. Remember that these legislators listen to people from all sorts of different organizations and causes all day long. Get your point across in simple terms and describe everything you are advocating for.

4. Don't get discouraged if the person you are talking to is a 23-year-old legislative aide. While people may expect quality "senator time", that just might not be a reality. But, this doesn't

have to be a bad things. These aides often specialize in certain issues, so making an impact on them, might be a fast way to get your message across to the senator. And, if you show your disappointment to the aide, they might not be as likely to relate your cause to the senator. Be passionate no matter whom you speak to.

5. It's not nearly as scary as you might think. In fact, it's kind of fun. It's the State Capitol — this is where all the wheeling and dealing happens and it's exciting to be in the middle of it all. And, if you're reluctant to speak, don't sweat it. I let my delegate leader know that it was my first time and that I was a little bit nervous, and he put me right at ease. He took the reins on the whole meeting, but made sure to introduce me and engage me in the conversation. The legislators for most of the delegations were sympathetic to libraries, so it's not as if the legislators will laugh in your face and throw you out. These are professionals who listen to people's pleas all day. They will listen to what you have to say and speak to you appropriately.

So, get out there! If a newbie like me can do it, so can you. Reading over all the 28 Days of Advocacy blogs this past month, has really been an inspiration to me to get involved and be an advocate for YA services. Realizing how easy it was to be involved in Legislative Day makes me realize how easy it would be to try out some of the other advocacy methods listed in these blog entries. As I embark on my career as a young adult librarian, I plan to take these entries to heart and to continue to speak up for libraries.

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