



TEEN PROGRAMMING GUIDELINES

yalsa
Young Adult Library
Services Association
www.ala.org/yalsa

FOREWORD

These guidelines were created in 2014 -2015 by a task force of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) with feedback from the library community achieved through a public comment period in December 2014. Members of the task force were Hayden Bass (chair), Kelly Czarnecki, Angela Frederick, Rachel McDonald, Matthew McLain, and Sara Ryan. YALSA's Board of Directors adopted the guidelines on March 5, 2015.

REVIEW PROCESS

In order to finalize the guidelines, the task force presented a draft document to YALSA'S Board of Directors in fall 2014. At this meeting, the task force solicited feedback on the draft. The feedback was carefully considered by the task force; additions and revisions have been made accordingly. This draft document was approved for dissemination via a call for public comments period in December 2014. After the public comment period closed, the task force reviewed the feedback received and refined the draft guidelines as appropriate. The Teen Programming Guidelines Task Force wishes to thank the library community for their contributions to this document. It is intended that the National Teen Programming Guidelines will be reviewed for revisions every three - five years.

ABOUT YALSA

The mission of the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) is to expand and strengthen library services for teens. Through its member-driven advocacy, research, and professional development initiatives, YALSA builds the capacity of libraries and librarians to engage, serve, and empower teens and young adults. YALSA is a subspecialty of the American Library Association, the world's largest and oldest library organization, and a financially stable 501(c)3 not-for-profit.

To learn more about YALSA or to access other national guidelines relating to library services to teens, go to **www.ala.org/yalsa**.

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines are intended to guide library staff who design, host, and evaluate library programs with and for teens. They were developed in alignment with YALSA's report, *The Future of Library Services For and With Teens: a Call to Action*. They are intended to help library staff leverage skills and resources to provide relevant, outcomes-based programs to better the lives of all teens in the community. While not every program will meet every guideline, library staff should strive to address most of these guidelines in order to be better positioned to support teens in their education, skills, interests and relationship to their community. Accompanying the guidelines is a glossary and a list of selected resources to provide library staff with a path to further exploration of teen programming best practices.

Traditionally, many teens have accessed the library primarily for academic support. While these connections are important, it is crucial that youth also experience informal learning in their libraries so that they may have opportunities to build the skills they need for 21st century careers. To meet their needs, libraries must provide connected learning¹ activities through programs that are driven by teen interests and incorporate thoughtful, forward-thinking use of technology while building personal, academic, or workplace skills. Programs should promote print, digital, and media literacies, as well as soft skills such as leadership, collaboration, innovation, persistence, independence, and critical thinking. Library programs should strategically focus on filling gaps in the community by concentrating on providing the types of learning opportunities that are not already being offered by other parts of the community.

Library staff are in a unique position to serve as connectors, bringing teens together with resources that inform and expand their interests, both inside library buildings and in the community beyond. As teens undergo physical, social, and emotional developmental changes and build their identities, they require experiences that bridge different spheres of learning. Effective teen programs foster peer-to-peer learning and positive developmental relationships, leverage community resources, and enable the acquisition of twenty-first century workforce skills.

GUIDELINES FOR TEEN PROGRAMMING

1.0 Create programming that reflects the needs and identities of all teens in the community.

In order to ensure that library programming meets the needs of all members of the community and does not duplicate services provided elsewhere, library staff should have a thorough understanding of the communities they serve. Library staff must continually analyze their communities so that they have current knowledge about who the teens in their community are. They must also develop relationships with community organizations already working with youth. Library staff play a crucial role in connecting teens to the community agencies and individuals that can best meet their needs.

1.1 Identify any demographic information that has already been gathered by library staff.

¹ See glossary on page 18 for a definition

- 1.2 Regularly collect available demographic information from the census, public schools data, departments of neighborhoods, etc.
- 1.3 Continually identify segments of the community that are underserved by library programming.
- 1.4 Continually identify other agencies and organizations that are already serving teens and families.
- 1.5 Determine which teen needs are being met by programming and services at other organizations.
- 1.6 Build strong relationships with community leaders at these organizations and refer teens as appropriate.
- 1.7 Advocate within the library to ensure that the library's budget adequately and equitably supports teen programming.
- 1.8 Direct the library's limited resources appropriately to provide needed programming that is relevant to local teens, reflective of their identities and interests, and not already offered elsewhere.
- 1.9 Connect with teens and other libraries nationwide to expand connections and influence even further.

2.0 Align programs with community and library priorities.

Before defining a teen programming plan, engage with the rest of your library and community. When teen programming relates to broader community-defined needs and goals, there is a greater likelihood of general community support and increased opportunities for funding and partnerships.

- 2.1 Align teen programming with the library's mission, priorities, and strategic plan.
- 2.2 When planning teen programming, consider and identify the ways in which teen programming outcomes contribute to the library's overall strategic goals.
- 2.3 Keep up to date on priorities and projects related to youth success in your city, county, state and/or region. (For example, a mayor's office or state board of education may announce goals related to improving graduation rates, increasing the percentage of youth who continue to postsecondary education, etc.)
- 2.4 Provide an appropriate means for teens to communicate directly with the library's staff, administration, board of trustees, Friends groups, volunteers, and other stakeholders about the goals of teen programming, its relevance to the library's larger mission, and its positive outcomes for youth.
- 2.5 Continually advocate the importance and relevance of teen programs with coworkers and key stakeholders.
- 2.6 When developing programs for larger libraries, involve cross-divisional teams and key stakeholders among library staff in order to benefit from numerous perspectives and build buy-in.

3.0 Facilitate teen-led programs.

When teens take the lead on all aspects of library programming, they grow as leaders and decision-makers, becoming more proactive, confident, and independent. This in turn adds value to the overall library program, because the library can demonstrate a role in helping teens develop key soft skills needed to be successful in school and the workplace.

- 3.1 Consider a youth-adult partnership approach in your work with teens. The ‘ladder of youth participation’² is a useful tool to assess your library’s current level of youth participation and envision ways to increase youth involvement in your library’s decision-making.
- 3.2 Engage teens via ongoing outreach to schools, youth-focused organizations, places of worship, government agencies, etc.
- 3.3 Strive for diverse program attendance by targeting underserved teens including but not limited to youth who are low income, immigrant, LGBTQ, or of varied abilities and inviting them to be active collaborators and participants.
- 3.4 Involve teens in every step of the programming process, including design, marketing, hosting, and evaluation.
- 3.5 Use a flexible participatory design model³ to allow teens to modify and adapt programs to better meet their needs.
- 3.6 Facilitate programs, rather than act as leader and expert.
- 3.7 Enable teens to engage in peer-to-peer learning activities.
- 3.8 Create a welcoming, inclusive environment in which teens can collaborate and network with peers outside their own cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic groups.
- 3.9 Balance the needs and skills of all youth program participants

4.0 Develop interest-based, developmentally appropriate programs that support connected learning.

Each teen in the community should be able to find something in the library’s menu of programs that connects with their needs, identity and interests. Programs should be driven by teens’ needs and interests and designed to help them explore and shape their identity and skill sets, both personal and professional.

- 4.1 Develop programs that address the unique emotional, intellectual, and social needs of teens.
- 4.2 Enable teens to gain social and workforce development skills, including creativity, innovation, communication, and collaboration.
- 4.3 Enable teens to explore career pathways.

² See glossary on page 18 for a definition

³ See glossary on page 18 for a definition

- 4.4 Enable teens to develop learning and innovation skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving, media literacy, digital literacy, and information and communication technologies literacy.
- 4.5 Enable teens to develop emotional skills, such as self-regulation, self-management, persistence, independence, and organization.
- 4.6 Incorporate technology and social media intelligently and organically.
- 4.7 Connect youth with mentors, guides, and other adult role models and educators.
- 4.8 Connect youth with opportunities to become civically engaged.
- 4.9 Incorporate a variety of types of interaction, such as one-on-one engagement, small group discussion or activities, and large events.
- 4.10 Enable teens to demonstrate proficiency in non-traditional media and platforms.
- 4.11 Enable teens to engage in self-expression and meaningful content creation.

5.0 Develop rich, mutually beneficial community partnerships.

Library staff must develop programming in partnership with other organizations in order to maximize resources and effectively serve all teens in the community. By working with partners, libraries reach new audiences, create robust and relevant programs that truly reflect the community, and leverage a host of resources to meet the needs of youth and families. A partnership can begin many ways -- an email, a phone call, a visit, or an introduction by another community partner.

- 5.1 Regularly assess existing community contacts and library partnerships to consider how they may be maintained, expanded or redirected.
- 5.2 Regularly seek out new community partners (government agencies, community organizations, vocational programs, etc.) who target a teen audience the library would like to reach (e.g., homeless or low income youth) and/or have skills or access to resources that would benefit teens.
- 5.3 During initial conversations or meetings, listen carefully to the community group's goals, objectives, and areas of need.
- 5.4 Establish a mutually beneficial relationship in which the library and the community organization participate as equals.
- 5.5 Create a written agreement or memorandum of understanding that explicitly states what each partner is contributing, how each will benefit from the relationship, and how success will be measured.
- 5.6 Develop programming that best utilizes partner and library resources to meet the needs of teens and achieve shared goals.

- 5.7 Establish an ongoing dialog between partners, budgeting time to debrief, celebrate success, learn from failure, and otherwise maintain the overall health of the partnership.
- 5.8 As appropriate, host programs in partner locations (e.g., youth homeless shelters, community centers, classrooms, etc.) in order to serve teens where they are and increase the visibility of the library.
- 5.9 Work collaboratively with community partners to develop and administer an outcomes-based evaluation⁴.
- 5.10 Continue to refine jointly offered programs based on evaluations and feedback.

6.0 Staff programs sufficiently and appropriately.

Programs should be adequately staffed to ensure the safety and enjoyment of participants. Consideration should be given to the size of the space, expected attendance, and the complexity of the program. Staffing can be a mix of library personnel and others, such as volunteers.

- 6.1 Ensure that staffing levels are adequate to creating a secure and welcoming environment.
- 6.2 Ensure that staff/patron ratios are adequate to allow for successful programs.
- 6.3 Consider which tasks are best suited to librarians and which are more suited to paraprofessionals, community partners and mentors, adult volunteers or Friends of the Library, and teen volunteers and participants.
- 6.4 Consider the needs of teen participants (language, culture, ability, etc.) and staff programs accordingly.
- 6.5 When hosting programs led by outside presenters, consider ways to ensure that teens also develop positive relationships with library workers.

7.0 Participate in targeted and ongoing training to build skills and knowledge relating to programming.

Library staff who plan and host programming for teens should adopt YALSA's Competencies for Librarians Serving Youth, particularly those related to Client Knowledge and Services. Areas of focus are outlined below. Staff training should be regular and ongoing.

- 7.1 Build knowledge and skills in facilitation and power sharing, including working with teens to set and manage behavior expectations.
- 7.2 Build knowledge and skills in cross-cultural functioning and communication to effectively serve teens of all backgrounds, abilities, orientations, and identities.

⁴ See glossary on page 18 for a definition

- 7.3 Build knowledge and skills in public speaking, collaboration, partnership-building, supervision, outcome measurement, advocacy, and project management.
- 7.4 Build knowledge and skills in the effective use of technology.
- 7.5 Build knowledge and skills around key models that foster adolescent development and learning, such as the 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents⁵, and the CCRS Organizer⁶.
- 7.6 Build knowledge and skills to increase understanding of the levels of teen engagement through HOMAGO⁷ (“hanging out”, “messaging around” and “geeking out”)
- 7.7 Continuously share training and professional development resources among all library staff and volunteers to ensure positive and meaningful interactions with teens, both during and after programs.

8.0 Host programs in spaces that support the engagement, growth, and achievement of teens.

Teen programs should be held in spaces that are comfortable, inviting, and meet the purposes of each program.

- 8.1 When hosting programs inside the library building and/or as part of the library’s online presence, consult YALSA’s Teen Space Guidelines.
- 8.2 In advance alert colleagues who are not directly involved with programming when programs are scheduled and what they will involve (equipment, noise levels, food/drink, etc.).
- 8.3 When programs are hosted outside the library in a community partner’s space, have conversations in advance to create shared expectations and goals. (See section 4.0 for more on partnerships.)
- 8.4 For programs hosted in a partner’s space, take steps to highlight the collaboration and the library’s role in the program. These steps might include but are not limited to:
 - 8.4.a Having the community partner and library representative jointly announce that the program is a collaboration, with each partner highlighting the other’s contribution.
 - 8.4.b Posting co-branded signage.
 - 8.4.c Checking out materials or showcasing library resources onsite.
 - 8.4.d Creating new library accounts onsite.
 - 8.4.e Documenting the program via photos, audio and/or video for the online and social media presence of the library and partner.

⁵ See glossary on page 17 for a definition

⁶ See glossary on page 17 for a definition

⁷ See glossary on page 18 for a definition

9.0 Develop appropriate and welcoming policies.

Library staff must ensure that teens of all abilities, income levels, sexual orientations, gender identities, ethnic and religious groups, and other underrepresented groups feel safe and welcome at library programs.

- 9.1 Facilitate a conversation with teens to allow them to create behavior expectations that foster a safe environment for discussing personal or controversial topics, as appropriate.
- 9.2 Clearly state the intended audience for programs, and ensure that discussions and activities are age-appropriate.
- 9.3 Advocate for, establish, and adhere to general library policies that support developmentally appropriate teen behavior at programs and in the library.

10.0 Engage in youth-driven, evidence-based evaluation and outcome measurement.

Attendance must be not be the only measure of a program's success. Instead, evaluations must be designed by youth participants to measure their own desired positive outcomes. Programming should be fluid and flexible, undertaken with the expectation that there will be some failure, adjustments will be made, and evaluation will be ongoing. According to ACT for Youth Center of Excellence, "youth participation in community evaluation research is conceived as a democratic process that seeks to equalize power between youth and adults, recognizes their respective roles and responsibilities, and places special emphasis on involving those youth that are traditionally underrepresented."

- 10.1 Work with youth to design tools to measure the effectiveness of the program, both in the moment and in the longer term. For example, ask participants what they hope to gain from a program, and have them help design a survey to measure whether their goals were met. Then have them help define long-term goals and how success should be measured.
- 10.2 Use evaluations that predict and measure an improvement or expansion of knowledge, skills, confidence, attitude, or behavior. Leverage pre- and post-surveys to determine whether participants have gained confidence in their skills or expanded their knowledge.
- 10.3 Create evaluations that predict and measure impact on the community. For example, a program may change a participant's thinking about an issue or group of people.
- 10.4 Conduct evaluations often, and recalibrate programming as needed.
- 10.5 In partnership with youth, continually assess the evaluation tools themselves to make sure they are adequately measuring desired outcomes. Redesign tools as needed.
- 10.6 Use evaluation findings to guide future planning and budget-making.

- 10.7 Use evaluation findings to communicate success to key stakeholders in the library and in the community. Advocate for the ongoing need for high quality teen programming within the library and to policy makers.

SELECTED RESOURCES

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GLOSSARY

40 Developmental Assets of Adolescents

The Assets represent the building blocks of healthy developments that help adolescents (ages 12 – 18) grow up healthy, caring, and responsible. The Assets were developed by the Search Institute, <http://www.search-institute.org/>.

CCRS Organizer

The CCRS Organizer provides a visual, consolidated overview of the many key elements that impact a student's ability to succeed in college and careers. The organizer contains four central strands: goals and expectations; outcomes and measures; pathways and supports; and resources and structures. It was created by the College and Career Readiness and Success Center, www.ccrscenter.org.

Connected Learning/Interest-Based Learning

An educational approach designed to make learning relevant by focusing on the interests of the learner and connecting those interests with academics via inspiring adult and peer facilitators, coaches or mentors. Connected learning seamlessly incorporates relevant technology, encourages experimentation, and is hands-on and entrepreneurial in orientation. (What Is Connected Learning? MacArthur Research Network on Connected Learning. Accessed January 23, 2015)

Flexible Participatory Design/Action Research

In this model, “teens provide both on-the-fly and long term feedback for the library staff. Teen participation is not limited to formally organized groups, but instead participation includes informal digital interactions as well as face-to-face activities aimed at individuals or groups. An emphasis is placed on encouraging all teens, not just those who are regular visitors to the physical library, to participate in the development, implementation, and evaluation of library programs and services.” (The Future of Library Services for and with Teens: A Call to Action, YALSA, p. 16. Accessed January 23, 2015)

Hart’s Ladder of Youth Participation

A tool that assesses levels of youth participation and encourages maximum participation. Value is placed on youth and adults working together as equal partners. In the highest quality model, youth produce ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join them as decision-makers during the planning process. (Hart’s Ladder of Youth Participation: <http://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/engagement/harts-ladder.pdf>, Accessed January 27, 2015. “Moving From ‘Youth Voice’ to Youth Impact: Youth-Adult Partnership As A Strategy for Organizational and Community Change: <http://www.schoolsoutwashington.org/UserFiles/File/B12PetrokubiMFPPT.pdf> Accessed January 27, 2015.)

HOMAGO

HOMAGO (Hanging Out, Messing Around & Geeking Out) is an experiential learning theory based on research by Mimi Ito on how youth learn in new and social media environments. Hanging out, messing around and geeking out each represent a learner’s level of engagement, beginning at the initial level of hanging out and progressing up to geeking out. The original report outlining the principles behind HOMAGO was published in 2009 and is accessible at <http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/hanging-out-messing-around-and-geeking-out>.

Outcome-Based Evaluation

IMLS defines outcomes as “benefits to people: specifically, achievements or changes in skill, knowledge, attitude, behavior, condition, or life status for program participants.” Therefore, outcomes-based evaluations measure the change in skill, attitude, behavior, or status that occurs for participants as a result of a program. (Library and (Institute of Museum Services. “Outcome Based Evaluation.” <http://www.imls.gov/applicants/basics.aspx> Accessed January 23, 2015.)

All Teens Deserve a Bright Future: *Libraries can Give them One*

Last year, experts and practitioners from across the U.S. discussed the future of teens and libraries. The result? Some straightforward and achievable recommendations for engaging and empowering teens. This report captures findings from the 2013 meeting about how libraries can connect with youth-serving groups and community organizations to help the nation's teens succeed in school and prepare for careers.

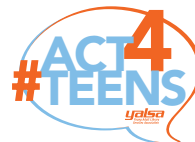
The report is available for free at [**www.ala.org/yaforum**](http://www.ala.org/yaforum)

Read the report to find out how your library can change teens' lives for the better and join the discussion on Twitter with **#act4teens**.

*Find other resources or connect with the Young Adult Library Services Association at [**www.ala.org/yalsa**](http://www.ala.org/yalsa)*



The Future of Library Services
for and with Teens: A Call to Action



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