

YALSA Advocacy Benchmarks by Activity

Introduction

What is Advocacy?

According to AASL, advocacy is “the on-going process of building partnerships so that others will act for and with you, turning passive support into educated action for the library program. It begins with a vision and a plan for the library program that is then matched to the agenda and priorities of stakeholders.” It is important to note that all advocacy is not lobbying. Lobbying is specifically when you seek to influence legislation or the outcome of an election. All nonprofits are permitted to do limited lobbying; however, there is no restriction as to the amount of advocacy activities they can do.

Why Advocate?

While it’s true that ALA and YALSA conduct advocacy activities on behalf of libraries, in order for advocacy to be effective, there also has to be grassroots action. You are best suited to connect with your local elected officials, policy makers and other stakeholders, because you have in-depth knowledge of your library, your community and the teens who live there.

YALSA’s Advocacy Benchmarks are:

- Designed to help any staff member working with teens stand up for the value of library services to adolescents.
- Organized by experience level. Whether you are a beginning advocate or one with a lot of experience you’ll find helpful information on how to stand up and speak out for teens in your community.
- Organized by type of activity:
 - **Preparing** helps you to build up information and knowledge needed for effective advocacy efforts.
 - **Doing** is all about the act of advocating.
 - **Measuring** focuses on collecting data about teens in your community to measure the impact of what the library does for teens.
 - **Showing** gives you the chance to get ideas on getting out into the community on speaking up for teens.
- Created so that you can mix and match efforts based on personal experience. For example, perhaps you have lots of experience with teen advisory groups and incorporating that work into advocacy efforts. If that’s the case you might jump to the advanced advocate level when thinking about integrating teen voices into advocacy initiatives. At the same time you might have limited experience engaging with policy makers on teen advocacy. If that’s the case you would start with the getting started level in the showing category of benchmarks.



We know that advocacy can be intimidating to those with limited experience, and a challenge to sustain when other responsibilities seem more pressing. We believe that these benchmarks will help you to do both so that you can make sure that teens in your community have the best library services possible and so that you can help improve the lives of those teens.

About the Benchmarks

These benchmarks were created by YALSA's Advocacy Benchmarks Taskforce and approved by YALSA's Board of Directors on June 28, 2014. They include three separate but related documents: Advocacy Benchmarks by Activity, Advocacy Benchmarks by Category and an Advocacy Benchmarks Infographic. YALSA would like to acknowledge the Taskforce members for their work: Linda W. Braun (chair), Heather Gruenthal, Sarah Kepple, Rachel McDonald, Mari Smith and Staci Terrell.

Additional Information

For additional advocacy resources, please visit www.ala.org/yalsa/advocacy or www.ala.org/ala/advocacy. Additionally, other Divisions of ALA, such as AASL and ALSC, provide advocacy resources tailored to specific library services or audiences.



Preparing: Build up information and knowledge for advocacy efforts.

Benchmark: **Seeks out information** on current trends in youth development, library services, and education.

| Seeks Out Information | Example |
|-----------------------|--|
| Level 1 | Reads professional library journals such as YALS; follows organizations such as YALSA and DML Research Hub on Twitter, and keeps up with the work of The Pew Internet & American Life project. |
| Level 2 | Reads an article about connected learning and looks for opportunities to incorporate what was learned into programming and talk to others about it. |
| Level 3 | Library staff from school and public libraries participated in YALSA's connected learning.tv month-long series on the future of libraries and teens. This series helped to get the word out about the value of libraries in teen lives to stakeholders and demonstrated the understandings of library staff related to teens, youth development, etc. to members of the education community. Information on the series is available at http://connectedlearning.tv/teens-and-future-libraries |

Benchmark: Identifies **specific goals** for a teen library program or service and develops a plan for reaching those goals.

| Identifies specific goals | Example |
|---------------------------|---|
| Level 1 | Decides to focus on the goal of increasing teens' access to science information and collects interesting science fiction and nonfiction, and creates displays to market the materials to teens. |
| Level 2 | Focuses on the impact of increasing teens' science knowledge and interest and plans and presents recurring "weird science" programs with experiment stations and related book displays. |
| Level 3 | The Fall 2013 issue of YALS includes an article titled <i>Bring Your Dreams to the Library</i> in which Ali Turner from the Hennepin County Library describes how working with the Learning Dreams project in Minneapolis helped the library and the project improve homework help services to adolescents. |

Preparing: Build up information and knowledge for advocacy efforts.

Benchmark: Collects and uses information about the community.

| Collects & Uses Info | Example |
|----------------------|--|
| Level 1 | Gathers existing community data and collects feedback from teens to envision programs and services. |
| Level 2 | Meets with a variety of stakeholders in the community - from community based organizations, nonprofits serving teens, schools and/or cultural institutions to learn about the needs of teens from the perspective of these groups. |
| Level 3 | Cuyahoga County Public Library refreshed its Strategic Plan by considering feedback of 36 focus groups composed of teens, parents, teachers, and other community members. Concurrently, over 8,000 community members participated in an online survey. After an initial draft was completed, a telephone survey of 400 registered voters was used to validate the new strategic plan. http://www.cuyahogalibrary.org/About-Us/Strategic-Plan.aspx |

Doing: Get out and advocate.

Benchmark: Implements change by **working with administration and colleagues.**

| Works with colleagues | Example |
|-----------------------|--|
| Level 1 | Recognizes the increasingly social nature of teens' reading and learning, and works with administrators to create an "unquiet" reading room for teens, educating colleagues and community members about the research supporting this work along the way. |
| Level 2 | Notices that teens are reading and engaging with the library more than many adults think that they are and strive to change perceptions by helping teens create booktrailers and READ posters, and share images and anecdotes from teen programs at staff meetings and community presentations. |
| Level 3 | California Library Association's (CLA) California Summer Reading Outcomes Initiative, which helps libraries measure and explain the impact of summer reading, was developed through collaboration of the organization, public librarians and administrators in nine library systems, partners, Illinois Library Association's iRead program, and, of course, the public. Preliminary results were shared publicly, so that everyone is informed. http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2013/05/outcomes/ |

Benchmark: **Builds relationships** with teens, teen serving adults and community members.

| Builds relationships | Example |
|----------------------|---|
| Level 1 | Meets with extracurricular activity facilitators in local schools to talk about the best ways to serve teens in the community. |
| Level 2 | After meeting with extracurricular instructors the library, teens, and the instructors hold an extracurricular showcase demonstrating the work of the groups, how the library supports the groups, and the contributions teens make to the community. |
| Level 3 | The Randolph Public Library in Massachusetts has a program in which the teen librarian works with the football coach in order to develop technology training for adults in the community. The football players work with library staff to provide the training and have noted that they have gained a variety of skills. The librarian working on the project also notes that members of the community see the teens in a new light after working with them in the library. See the summer 2013 issue of YALS for more information. |

Doing: Get out and advocate.

Benchmark: Works with colleagues, administration, and stakeholders to **overcome barriers**.

| Overcomes barriers | Example |
|--------------------|--|
| Level 1 | To improve teens' access to technology works with administration on a mini-grant to get a few netbooks, and in the short term, partners with colleagues to guarantee terminals closest to the teen area are available for use by teens when they most use the library. |
| Level 2 | Works to add a media creation technology to the teen area and would overcome the obstacle of low funding and administrative support by collaborating with teens create simple commercials (using freeware), that articulate the rationale and potential for increased tech equipment, and show them to the board and funders. |
| Level 3 | On her website, The Digital Librarian, Media Specialist Laurie Conley details the path to overcoming obstacles to integrate technology by creating a clear technology plan that is supported by research, encouraging buy-in through highlighting shared goals, demonstrating with concrete examples and connecting subject content. https://sites.google.com/site/thedigitallibrarian/overcoming-obstacles |

Measuring: Collect data about teens in your community.

Benchmark: Collects data to aid in envisioning teen services.

| Collects data | Example |
|----------------|---|
| Level 1 | Surveys teens throughout the community about desired programs and services and tailors plans to align with findings. |
| Level 2 | In order to improve the library's teen homework center measures its effectiveness through surveys and observations and uses information to improve future homework support. |
| Level 3 | In her YALS article, Getting Out from Under the Radar: Using YALSA's Teen Services Evaluation Tool in the Fall 2013 issue of YALS, Sara Ryan describes how Multnomah County Library formed a Teen Action Team to evaluate services across the system, then shared the information with administration and colleagues, making recommendations based on the library's rankings, and suggesting several concrete related activities for the library to focus on. |

Benchmark: Yearly sets goals for teen services that support the library's mission statement, strategic plan, etc.

| Yearly sets goals | Example |
|-------------------|--|
| Level 1 | Meets with other staff in the library (administration, youth services, and other service department counterparts) at least once a year to discuss ongoing programs and services for teens over the next year as well as set priorities for new initiatives. |
| Level 2 | Meets with TAB to evaluate programs and set yearly goals. Compiles an annual report of teen services with program and collection statistics, along with anecdotal support of how goals were met throughout the year. Presents this to library director, board, and local community partners. |
| Level 3 | Cuyahoga County Public Library identified development of 40 Developmental Assets, 21st Century Skills and STEM Skills as desired impact for youth attending programming, and backwards designed the Robotix Blox program to achieve these goals. http://www.yalsa.ala.org/yals/journal-archive/ |

Measuring: Collect data about teens in your community.

Benchmark: Observes policy makers in action and becomes familiar with current procedures and viewpoints and communication styles.

| Observes policy makers | Example |
|------------------------|--|
| Level 1 | Attends library board meetings, school board meetings and other community policy making venues. |
| Level 2 | Attends a local, state, regional, or national library legislative day. |
| Level 3 | The Branches of Opportunity report, published in 2012 by the Center for an Urban Future, looks at areas of interest to legislators and funders such as workforce and community development and demonstrates through data how libraries have an impact on improving the lives of community members. Learn more at http://nycfuture.org/research/publications/branches-of-opportunity |

Showing: Get out into the community and speak up for teens.

Benchmark: **Speaks up** about teen issues in formal and informal settings.

| Speaks up for teens | Example |
|---------------------|--|
| Level 1 | Shares anecdotes of positive teen library use (such as use of tech, volunteering, teen advisory groups, materials, etc.) with co-workers, community members and administrators. |
| Level 2 | Presents about the importance of serving teens at local, state, or regional meetings such as parent teacher groups and community based organizations. |
| Level 3 | In 2005/06, Halifax Public Libraries developed a report describing current research into youth development and how it pertains to libraries, challenges for public libraries serving teens, and benefits of library involvement to youth, libraries, and communities. See the full report at http://www.halifaxpubliclibraries.ca/assets/files/reports/teen_services_report_2005-06.pdf |

Benchmark: Builds programs and services that regularly **provide opportunities for teens to be heard**.

| Provide opportunities for teens to be heard | Example |
|---|--|
| Level 1 | Surveys teens on their interests (arts, technology, etc.) and develops programs accordingly. |
| Level 2 | Forms a Teen Advisory Group that provides feedback that influences library programming, services, policies and procedures. An article on this topic is available in the spring 2014 issue of YALS. |
| Level 3 | As a part of their MacArthur Foundation funded Learning Labs project the Free Library of Philadelphia worked closely with teens using participatory learning and action research techniques to plan and implement new spaces in city libraries. Read more at http://youmedia.org/locations/learning-labs/philadelphia-pa-free-library-philadelphia-foundation |