

YALSA Board of Directors Meeting  
ALA Annual Conference, Las Vegas  
June 21 – July 1, 2014

**Topic:** Board Advocacy Best Practices & Policies

**Background:** At ALA Midwinter 2014, the YALSA Board committed to modeling the advocacy activities that they would like members to do. The Board directed the Board Standing Committee on Advocacy to adapt non-profit board advocacy models to help guide the board's advocacy efforts. Candice Mack and her committee have presented a proposal for the board's consideration.

**Action Required:** Action

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**Proposal**

Establish Board advocacy best practices, integrate advocacy messaging into relevant board policies, and create a checklist of advocacy activities to 1) assist board members in modeling and educating YALSA members about advocacy, lobbying and political activity with regard to teen library services and empower them to act upon this information; and 2) to ensure that all libraries have the capacity to serve all teens effectively by working for public policy that furthers the mission of our organization

**Rationale**

As mentioned in The Future of Library Services for and with Teens report, it is imperative that YALSA continue to advocate for teens and libraries. Although discussions, projects, and groups are in place to support the general membership in their roles as advocates, the Board itself has not discussed what board members, as informed individuals, can do to support YALSA's advocacy efforts.

The first goal area of the strategic plan states that "Teen and young adult library services within all libraries are highly valued as a result of YALSA's advocacy and activism efforts." As leaders of the organization, YALSA Board members are particularly suited to address the organization's advocacy efforts and to model effective advocacy to the greater membership.

They are:

- well versed in the mission and vision of the organization
- aware of national trends and issues
- well-connected in the wider youth and libraries worlds
- recognized as national library leaders in the library community and beyond

To capitalize on these skills and to support our members in moving forward with the *Call to Action*, Board Advocacy Best Practices should be established to address the organization's advocacy efforts and to model effective advocacy to the greater membership.

## **I. YALSA Board Advocacy Best Practices**

As YALSA and teen library services advocates, we want to:

- Engage on relevant public policy issues that align closely with our mission and vision
- Avoid taking positions that are largely partisan
- Be strategic and selective about the issues we work on
- Be effective, reliable leaders and partners in our coalitions

YALSA's Board will:

- Create an environment where advocacy can flourish
  - Ensure board culture is inclusive of advocacy
  - Reward staff, board, members for engaging in advocacy
    - Celebrate wins!
  - Make time for advocacy actions
  - Note advocacy efforts in fundraising activities
  - Everyone - executive director, board members, and staff - must demonstrate strong, consistent support for engaging in advocacy.
  - Recognize that advocacy is a team sport, with a role for everyone.
  - Help board members understand why advocacy is intrinsic to the organization's mission and create a legacy of organizational support for advocacy.
  - Integrate advocacy into the work of the board
    - Define the board's role in advocacy
    - Clearly articulate advocacy as a primary responsibility in board members' job descriptions
    - Include advocacy in board recruitment criteria
  - Discuss advocacy issues & include policy discussions on agendas
  - Show the link between advocacy & mission
- Provide advocacy training to board members relating to
  - Organizational capacity building
  - Advocating and lobbying effectively
    - such as calling from a board meeting to thank elected officials
  - Civic engagement & policymaking
  - Laws and regulations governing nonprofits
- Create an advocacy agenda
  - Develop the organization's advocacy agenda

- Make an advocacy plan, calendar, and budget
- Encourage board members to actively engage in advocacy

## II. Board Advocacy Checklist

### YALSA Board of Directors Advocacy Engagement Checklist

Among their duties, Board members are expected to engage at a personally meaningful level in YALSA advocacy efforts and publicly support positions taken by the YALSA Board in their role as a Board member. The activities that Board members can do include:

#### In Your Community

- \_\_\_\_\_ Invite an elected official to be your guest at an event at your library or institution
- \_\_\_\_\_ Meet with an elected official or policy maker in their district office
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participate at a public hearing or town hall meeting
- \_\_\_\_\_ Promote YALSA advocacy messages and resources by sharing them with your networks
- \_\_\_\_\_ Act as the lead YALSA contact for an elected official who represents your district and develop a plan to build a relationship with him/her
- \_\_\_\_\_ Attend appropriate civic engagement events to become better educated on issues and to build relationships with elected officials and policy makers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Write a letter to the editor of your local paper about a YALSA advocacy issue
- \_\_\_\_\_ Present a workshop or state conference program using YALSA's canned advocacy presentations
- \_\_\_\_\_ Vote in local and state elections
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in YALSA activities aimed at the local level, such as District Days

#### At the National Level

- \_\_\_\_\_ Invite an elected official to attend a YALSA event
- \_\_\_\_\_ Represent the Board at events such as National Library Legislative Day
- \_\_\_\_\_ Record a brief video message that either 1) encourages members to participate in advocacy efforts or 2) relays a YALSA advocacy message to elected officials, policy makers and/or the general public
- \_\_\_\_\_ Send emails or phone calls to elected officials as part of ALA/YALSA action alerts
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in YALSA advocacy efforts implemented through social media, such as Tweet Your Senator or Thunderclaps and encourage others to do so
- \_\_\_\_\_ Stay informed on issues by reading advocacy and policy updates on ALA's District Dispatch and by signing up for ALA Legislative Action Alerts and encourage others to do so
- \_\_\_\_\_ Contribute an advocacy related blog post to the YALSAblog, or another relevant blog
- \_\_\_\_\_ Vote in federal elections
- \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in advocacy-focused training to build your skills

*Board members are asked to complete a minimum of three items above per year.*

## III. Updating Board Policies

Add the following language to the Board Member Contract: "I will use my knowledge and credibility to further the mission of YALSA by taking part in advocacy activities and work

with the board collectively to institute policies that promote and integrate advocacy throughout the organization.”

Add the following language to the list of Board Member Duties and Responsibilities:

“Advocate for public policies that help the organization achieve its mission. Advocacy may include engaging in the legislative process, writing letters to the editor, attending and speaking at public meetings and other activities that further public policy goals.

Use the advocacy checklist to determine which advocacy activities to complete for each year that you serve on the board.”

### **Recommended Board Action:**

The Board moves to adopt the Board advocacy best practices, board advocacy checklist, and updates to the board policies as outlined above and directs the Executive Director to update the YALSA Handbook to include these new and updated documents.

### **Additional Resources**

- Duties and Responsibilities of YALSA Board Members  
[www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/yalsahandbook/boardduties](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa/yalsahandbook/boardduties)
- The Future of Library Services For and With Teens: A Call to Action  
[http://www.ala.org/yaforum/sites/ala.org.yaforum/files/content/YALSA\\_nationalforum\\_final.pdf](http://www.ala.org/yaforum/sites/ala.org.yaforum/files/content/YALSA_nationalforum_final.pdf)
- The Board Advocacy Project <http://wliha.org/board-advocacy-project#2>
- BoardSource Board Advocacy Session Handouts: <https://www.boardsource.org/eweb/blf-2013/downloads/handouts/Want-a-Superior-Fundraising-Board-Handouts.pdf>
- Beyond the Cause: The Art & Science of Advocacy <http://ow.ly/qKJqb>
- Make a Difference for your Cause: Strategies for Nonprofit Engagement in Legislative Advocacy <http://ow.ly/qKJzp>
- What Makes an Effective Advocacy Organization <http://ow.ly/qKJLk> (.pdf)
- What Public Libraries Do For Teens  
[http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/Infographic2\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/Infographic2_FINAL.pdf)
- Teens Need Libraries <http://www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries>
- Board Advocacy Project Board Advocacy Checklist  
<http://wliha.org/sites/default/files/Board%20Advocacy%20Checklist.pdf>
- University of Kansas Community Toolbox: Getting an Advocacy Campaign Off the Ground <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/advocacy-principles/overview/main>
- Washington Nonprofits: Five Advocacy Tips for Nonprofit Boards  
<http://www.washingtonnonprofits.org/index.cfm?pageId=641>
- YALSA Board Member Contract <http://ow.ly/xVuAU> (.pdf)