

**YALSA Board of Directors Meeting  
ALA Midwinter Meeting, Seattle  
January 19-24, 2007**

**Topic:** Proposed Guidelines for White Papers

**Background:** At the 2006 Annual Meeting the Board directed the Executive Committee to create guidelines for YALSA white papers. A white paper typically argues a specific position or solution to a problem. They can be powerful advocacy tools which are used to help key decision-makers and influencers justify implementing solutions. ALA as well as some of its Divisions, such as AASL and ACRL, create and issue these types of documents, as do other organizations such as the IRA. Creating white papers may help the association meet its advocacy goal in its strategic plan, while at the same time providing its members and other library workers with a valuable resource to support the work that they do. The proposed guidelines are presented below.

**Action Required:** Action

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### **I. What Is a White Paper?**

A white paper is a short document designed for one of the following purposes:

- To state an organization's policy, position, or philosophy about a subject (called a Position Paper)
- To pose a problem or question and then answer that question with information or a proposed solution (called an Issue Paper)

### **II. Why Create a White Paper?**

A white paper can serve to transfer knowledge and understanding of a particular issue, provide information to aid in making a decision, or present a professional perspective. Often, a white paper explains the results or conclusions resulting from some organized committee, research collaboration, or design and development effort.

- In government, a white paper is often a policy or position paper used to explain and implement a policy or procedure.
- In a collaborative organization, a white paper is often an issue paper used to help develop understanding of a problem and build support and acceptance of a proposed solution. A white paper can focus on pre-assessment (plan), assessment (execute), or post-assessment (evaluate).
  - Pre-assessment: What is XYZ and what are the benefits of it?
  - Plan & execute: How can XYZ affect young adult library services? What benefits can be expected?
  - Post-assessment: How can the effectiveness of XYZ be judged? Case studies?

### **III. How to Determine if a White Paper is Necessary and Feasible:**

1. Ask the following questions to ensure that the topic is appropriate for a white paper:

- Is it a real issue, with genuine controversy and/or uncertainty?
- Is the issue critical to the field of young adult librarianship and/or teen library services?
- Will advocating a position or highlighting an issue help YALSA advance its mission?
- Is there enough research/evidence to support the association's opinion?

2. Once the topic is identified, research the subject to ensure that the position is well supported. Listing the pro and con sides of the topic will help you examine your ability to support YALSA's position, along with a list of supporting evidence for both sides. Supporting evidence includes the following:

- Factual Knowledge - Information that is verifiable and agreed upon by almost everyone.
- Statistical Inferences - Interpretation and examples of an accumulation of facts.
- Informed Opinion - Opinion developed through research and/or expertise of the claim.
- Personal Testimony - Personal experience related by a knowledgeable party.

3. Consider the audience. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who is the intended audience?
- What do they believe?
- Where do they stand on the issue?
- How are their interests involved?
- What evidence is likely to be effective with them?

### **IV. Who Should Write the White Paper?**

- Experts on the topic, including:
  - An existing committee, taskforce or interest group
  - An individual or group that has been specially appointed by the Board to write the paper

### **V. How Does the White Paper Get Published?**

- Before the paper can be published, it must be submitted to the Board of Directors and approved by them.
- Once the paper has Board approval, it may be published in the following forms:
  - Electronically, such as on the YALSA web site

- In print, such as in *Young Adult Library Services*, as a press release and/or as a pamphlet
- Others: as the Board determines is necessary

## **VI. What Goes Into an *Issue Paper*?**

An issue paper should be short and to the point. It needs to pose a problem or question and then answer it with a viable solution. Resources must be provided and cited. The paper should be highly structured and cleanly organized. Typically, an issue paper includes the following sections:

1. Introduction: introduce the issue paper and give any relevant background regarding how/why it was formed/written.
2. Abstract: The abstract contains the purpose of the paper. Give a very high-level overview of the content of the paper and include a clear case for action. The intent is to convey to the reader why this is important. Most abstracts are written in the future tense, because the reader hasn't read the paper yet, so explain what they will read, not what they already know.
3. Problem Statement: Include a description of the issue paper subject with focus on the problem the white paper is attempting to solve. Include two or three paragraphs describing the problem or question to be answered. Provide background details that are required to understand the issue. This is one of the most important sections – work to clearly convey thoughts and issues. Do not include specific solutions at this point. One helpful question to ask is, “Why?” Why is the desired or proposed solution needed or required?
4. Proposed Solution(s): This section, consisting of the introduction and application of the solution, will probably be the longest sections in the paper. A proposed solution might consist of several options with varying degrees of complexity or sophistication. Group the proposed solutions by category and stay at a higher level than detailed implementation. Include graphics, figures, etc. only if they are necessary to convey key thoughts or ideas.
  - a. Introduction of Solution: Introduce the proposed solution by describing the idea.
  - b. Application of Solution: Describe how the solution solves the problem identified in the problem statement. Include any proof that the solution works, any comparisons or case studies, identify the success factors, etc.
5. Future Direction / Long-Term Focus: The intent of this section is to provide some thoughts regarding the overall future direction of the problem and solution. It will probably be somewhat philosophical or “blue sky.” This section may also include any lower priority items or unrefined ideas that may need more thought or work.
6. Recommendation: Conclude gracefully. If applicable, make a recommendation of one solution over another to solve the problem. Explain succinctly why this solution is being recommended.
7. Appendices:
  - a. Appendix A – Scenarios: This appendix is optional. If applicable, include any detailed operational scenarios that were referenced in the problem statement (Section 3, above).

- b. Appendix B – Options: This appendix is optional. If applicable, include a compiled list of enhancements applicable to the issue paper which could be resolved if the issue paper were completely implemented. These enhancements should be referenced in the proposed solution (Section 4, above) or the long-term focus (Section 5, above).
- c. Appendix C – Authors: This appendix is mandatory. Include a list of the primary author(s) and contributors with names, affiliations and contact information.
- d. Appendix D – References: This appendix is mandatory. Include a bibliography of resources used during the preparation of the paper. Be sure to cite references actually used in the paper. If the issue paper was prepared without the use of references, indicate “No References Used”.

### **VII. What goes into a *Position Paper*?**

A position paper presents an arguable opinion about an issue. The goal of a position paper is to convince the audience that your opinion is valid and worth listening to. It is very important to ensure that you are addressing key components of the issue and presenting it in a manner that is easy for your audience to understand. It is important to support your argument with evidence to ensure the validity of your claims, as well as to address the main counterclaim(s) to show that you are well informed about both sides.

1. Abstract: The abstract contains the purpose of the paper. Give a very high-level overview of the content of the paper and include a clear case for action. The intent is to convey to the reader why this is important. Most abstracts are written in the future tense, because the reader hasn't read the paper yet, so explain what they will read, not what they already know.
2. Background: describe the issue(s) and give any relevant background.
3. Position: Include a description of the position paper subject with focus on the issue the paper is addressing. Include two or three paragraphs describing the issue. Provide background details that are required to understand the scenario. This is one of the most important sections – work to clearly convey thoughts and issues.
4. Conclusion: Conclude gracefully. If applicable, make a recommendation of one solution over another to solve the problem. Explain succinctly why the association is taking this position.
5. Appendices:
  - a. Appendix A – Scenarios: This appendix is optional. If applicable, include any detailed operational scenarios that were referenced in the position (Section 3, above).
  - b. Appendix B – Authors: This appendix is optional. Include a list of the primary author(s) and contributors with names, affiliations contact information.
  - c. Appendix C – References: This appendix is mandatory. Include a bibliography of resources used during the preparation of the paper. Be sure to cite references actually used in the paper. If the position paper was prepared without the use of references, indicate “No References Used”.
  - d. Appendix D – Endorsements: This appendix is optional. Include a list of any organizations that have officially endorsed this particular position statement.

**VIII. Bibliography**

Lowell Thing, Editor. Whatis?com web page. <http://whatis.techtarget.com>, August 2001.

Megan Conklin. White Paper Guidelines. North Carolina Wesleyan College, 2000.

[http://www.nwcg.gov/teams/pmo/products/documents/White\\_Paper\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.nwcg.gov/teams/pmo/products/documents/White_Paper_Guidelines.pdf)

<http://homepages.uhwo.hawaii.edu/~writing/position.htm>