

Teen Advisory Boards

What is a Teen Advisory Board (TAB) or Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC)?

Working with an adult coordinator (staff or volunteer), the TAB serves to promote the library to their peers and plans activities and special projects to benefit the library and its teen patrons. TABs can plan and implement young adult programs, create attractive teen spaces, promote and encourage reading by teens, advocate to library management for the rights of young adults, and provide input for purchases for the young adult materials collection.

Why have a TAB? What's the purpose of youth participation?

This volunteer group can provide a positive sense of direction and leadership guidance for teen input into library programs, services, policies, and collection development. Active youth involvement in the library is the goal, with teens learning responsible action and significant service to their peers and the community. YAAC can be an experience through which teens can enhance their learning, personal development, citizenship, and transition to adulthood.

What's in a name? Here are some ideas:

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| ✓ Board of Library Teens (BLT) | ✓ Teen Advisory Group (TAG) | ✓ Young Adult Advisory Council (YAAC) |
| ✓ Teen Advisory Board (TAB) | ✓ Teen Council | ✓ Teen Friends |
| ✓ Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) | ✓ Teen Library Council (TLC) | ✓ Junior Friends |
| | ✓ Teenlab | |

How do you work with a TAB? Guidelines for success:

- ✓ Success will depend on listening to the young people and sharing leadership with them. Teens should be engaged in real work, not make-work or busy-work.
- ✓ Train youth to become independent: give teens a sense that they “own” the group, with adult support and guidance.
- ✓ Offer a variety of programs and activities of real interest and concern to group members.
- ✓ Help teens develop an ethic of service to the community, benefiting people outside of the group.
- ✓ Empower members to develop personal responsibility and initiative from the planning stage forward.
- ✓ Listen to and respect teen opinions; value their input and involve members in decision-making; discuss progress made and problems encountered.
- ✓ Use a mentoring system to help new members feel welcome; recruit new participants regularly.
- ✓ Insist the teens respect one another and their opinions—provide support for one another.
- ✓ Praise them—directly and to the library administration; publicize their good works and give them credit for their contributions; give evidence their decisions are being implemented.
- ✓ Be enthusiastic about their goals—get behind the things they want to try and then focus on specific, doable tasks.
- ✓ Treat them as adults, but let them be kids. Allow for jokes and time for silliness.
- ✓ Use email to communicate: send agendas before the meeting; use a group distribution list to remind teens of the meeting dates.
- ✓ Provide clear, reasonable, and consistent rules. Boundaries should be reasonable, logical, and fair. Agendas should be flexible and allow for tangents.
- ✓ Enjoy them! Open yourself to their ideas and opinions along with their sense of fun.

How do you get started?

Try an initial organizational meeting for student leaders. Invite the class presidents, extracurricular clubs' presidents, sports team captains, and other leaders from school organizations. Contact leaders of church youth groups. You might include vice-presidents of these organizations as well. Be certain student service clubs such as the chapter of Rotary Interact are included. A goal is to collect a wide range of ideas from as diverse a teen population as possible. Opportunities for collaboration with these groups will present themselves. Ask library pages for referrals and perhaps have a page serve as a liaison to the group. Strive to involve those teens that are already library users as regular patrons and teen library volunteers. Ask everyone to spread the word and bring their friends. An application and interview process might be needed if the pool of teens becomes too large. Seek to balance the group by age, by school, and by areas of interest. Quotas may be necessary.

Make some initial decisions by the library staff:

- what is the group's mission? why do we need an advisory board?
- when, where, and how frequently will the group meet?
- who will run the initial meeting? how will leadership be passed to the teens? where will members come from? will you use an application form procedure for potential members?
- where will financial support for the group come from?

Decisions for the advisory council to make:

- how will leadership be selected?
- how will items be placed on the meeting agendas?
- what rules are necessary for the group to be effective?
- what projects will they work on? what would they like to accomplish?

What do TABs do? Some potential activities:

- ✓ Create an interactive feature on your teen web page where young adults can share ideas with each other and library staff.
- ✓ Provide training for youth as advocates for library services and participate in lobbying with other adult library supporters.
- ✓ Plan and staff library exhibit booths at community events.
- ✓ Plan and facilitate programs for children and families, e.g., fund raising carnival with games run by teens.
- ✓ Plan and facilitate programs for teens, e.g., summer reading program, prom fashion show.
- ✓ Utilize the board as a focus group for suggesting changes to the library's physical space for teens and then carry out their ideas.
- ✓ Brainstorm about books, music recordings, videos, magazines, and other materials they'd like to see in the library for teens.
- ✓ Write book reviews for the web page or a publication to distribute (e.g., a poetry journal, teen newsletter).
- ✓ Make a float or march together in local parades to give the library a presence in the community.
- ✓ Provide service to library departments outside of regular council meetings, e.g., prepare crafts, volunteer for children's activities, paint bookcases, learn to mend materials, create displays.

Where to find further information:

- YALSA's TAG Site www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/tags/tags.htm
- www.midyork.org/jervis/yaweb/TAGs.html and www.jervislibrary.org/yaweb
- Chapman, Jan. "The Care and Feeding of a Teen Advisory Board." VOYA (Feb. 2003)
- Wilson, Evie. "The Young Adult Advisory Board: How to Make it Work." VOYA (Feb. 2003)

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