A Teen Advisory Group: What’s in it for my library?

Lisa Matte, Teen Services Librarian
Jervis Public Library, Rome, NY
L.Matte@midyork.org
Did you know?  A Teen Advisory Group (TAG):

Will improve services to children, teens, and adults and

Will facilitate wiser use of funds and staff time.

You won’t believe what teens will do given the chance!

In the beginning, a TAG will

• Give you new and fresh ideas

• Increase your knowledge about current clientele
  o more relevant collection=increased circulation
  o more relevant programs=increased attendance
  o relevant displays=increased circulation

• Attract teens who were not previously library users

Later on, a TAG will

• Increase passive marketing in the community (word of mouth)

• Provide assistance at all programs for ushering, handing out programs or refreshments, registering participants

• Shift the perception of the library as a cool place to be

As you hit your stride, a TAG will provide

• More outreach possibilities

• Increased active marketing in the community with teens as formal ambassadors (floats, community festival representation)

• Increased children’s programming

A Teen Advisory Group requires an investment in time and energy, but there is no law of diminishing returns. Success breeds success breeds success. Just do it!
Recruiting Members for a TAG

Market the group in the library

- Post flyers and sign up sheets in the library where teens will see them
  - By the pay phone
  - At the teen computers
  - Next to the water fountain
  - In teen books
  - In bathrooms
  - At teen book shelves
  - Under flap of photocopy machine
  - On teens' tables
  - On the CD racks
- Walk up to teens in the library and invite them to join
- Make a display in the teen area
- Advertise the TAG on computers that use screen savers
- At all adult programs announce that the TAG is accepting new members (Get parents to draft their children)
- Invite those who have outgrown the children's summer reading program
- Advertise on library-produced teen reading lists
- Ask teen employees to join and to tell their friends
- Ask employees for nominations from their family and friends

Market the group outside the library

- Make school and agency visits so you become a familiar face
- Send out press releases and public service announcements
- Get articles in schools' newspapers
- Post information on the library's web site
- Have a booth at volunteer fairs or activities fairs at the local junior/senior high school or elsewhere
- Attend junior/senior high orientations to peddle services including the TAG
- Offer community service credit through teachers whose classes require it
Contact school and community agencies to see if they would nominate someone to serve and/or post flyers about the group.

- 4-H
- Boys and Girls Club
- Boy Scouts
- Church youth groups
- Girl Scouts
- Home schooling organizations
- Junior division of coin or stamp collecting clubs
- Junior high and high school librarians and guidance counselors (public, private, and parochial)
- Salvation Army
- YMCA
Preparing for the First Teen Advisory Group Meeting

• Purchase food on sale in bulk and provide what you said would be there.

• Collect door prizes to hand out at the meeting.

• Reserve a space for the meeting.

• Alert your coworkers to the meeting date, time, and place. Include the Circulation Desk! Remind them on the day of the meeting.

• Set up a time and date to meet with interested teens via their preferred communication method with promises of food. (Communication methods in order of increasing success)
  
  o Phone calls--teens hard to catch at home, messages get lost, time and date get lost
  o Letters--require using a mail merge database which can change frequently, postal cost
  o Postcards--your hand gets tired writing the same thing on 10 postcards; can't attach the agenda
  o Email--you're speaking their language many times, it's easy to attach the agenda, it will be answered; set up a YA distribution list in your address book

• Set the agenda and send it out early so everyone is there and prepared.

• Send a reminder a few days before the meeting asking what they’d like to see on the agenda.

• Prepare for off-the-wall introductions
  o *Recreation Handbook for Camp, Conference, and Community* by Roger E. Barrows has interesting ice-breaking suggestions. ISBN 0786409533
  o McFarlane, Evelyn. *If... Questions for Teens*. Villard Books; ISBN 0375505555
  o West, Edie. *201 Icebreakers: Group Mixers, Warm-ups, & Playful Activities*. ISBN 0070696004
  o Good thing, bad thing
Each person introduces by telling one bad and one good thing that happened to him or her during the day

- Two truths and a lie
  - Each person tells two truths and a lie about him or her self. Others have to guess which is a lie.
- Zobmondo questions.
  - These are unique, odd, and revealing questions that give two choices. Have each member answer the same question. For examples, go to zobmondo.com.

- Put together a welcome packet

  - What you’d like the group to do
  - What similar groups have done
  - Example mission statements
  - Example TAG names—may be removed for later joiners
  - A “state of teen services” blurb or why you wanted a TAG in your library; include a list of prior teen programs
  - List of services/materials for teens; ask teens to check off ones with which they were familiar
  - Survey
    - Likes/dislikes in pop culture
    - School
    - How they think teens are being served now
    - What teens would like the group to do
    - Favorites foods/drinks to have at the meeting
  - Volunteer or TAG applications if appropriate
  - Parental permission forms if appropriate
  - Photography release forms if appropriate
  - List of benefits of group membership
    - Tshirt?
    - Volunteer buttons/name tags
    - Membership card?
    - Annual appreciation outing?
    - Community service credit?
    - Gratification
    - Personalized library service! (They will ask reference questions at the meetings.)
    - Meeting new people
    - Food
At the First Meeting

- Feed them!
- Consider having background music with members taking turns choosing the radio station or CD’s to fill uncomfortable silences.
- Introductions (see previous section for details)
- Follow the agenda loosely with room for tangents.
- Doing may be better than talking in the beginning; don't fall into the rut of talking to the teens about issues unless your teens like that! Try to have a project ready no matter how small. Then the talking takes place as an incidental. It becomes comfortable. This is more important in the early stages since members may not know each other.
- Go through the welcome packet.
- Discuss possible mission statements.
- Discuss possible names.
- Give a tour of the library, introducing to staff and paying particular attention to places of interest to teens.
- Laugh!
- Offer door prizes for members who bring new people
- Make an action plan—what needs to be done before the next meeting and by whom
- Set a date and time for the next meeting
Projects for the Group: Some of these are talking projects; they encourage participation as opposed to a librarian running a meeting. Try pairing a talking session with a hands-on project if needed. Every group is different.

- Write a mystery to perform for children
- Dramatize some children's stories and perform them
- Make items to sell to benefit local charities or families in need
- A mailing or other project that lends itself to assembly line work
- Rearrange or shift books or furniture
- Put up displays of their own creation from theme to contents
- Gather data from surveys
- Work on a library web page
- Hold a book discussions
- Improve an existing program with a brainstorming session
- Make props for dramatizations, mysteries, and game shows
- Creating game show knock-offs for children and teens
- Choose paperbacks to purchase
- Choose music CD's to purchase
- Develop a list of TV shows, musicians, authors, etc. about whom teens would read
- Choose posters
- Suggest display ideas
- Make bookmarks and posters using the teens as models with a catchy phrase (Normal Teens Read was used in Normal, IL)
- Write and produce television commercials for the library
- Write and record PSAs for the library
- Suggest pathfinder needs for homework and read alike lists for leisure reading
- Suggest topical programming for teens
- Write book reviews to be used in the library
- Produce a teen audience library newsletter
- Design or fine tune a teen summer reading program
- Give library tours
- Read stories to children at holiday or community festivals
- Decorate or redecorate the teen area
- Greet, usher, and hand out refreshments at programs
Maintaining the Group

- If the teens make suggestions, act on them to any degree possible. Then show them how they made a difference. (For example, if they suggested posters for the library, show which ones were purchased and ask for help hanging them.)
- The meetings will be a great place for the teens to ask reference questions. Get back to them as soon as possible.
- Remember their reading likes and tote along books that may strike their fancies.
- Ask them to bring friends to the meetings and reward them with door prizes when they do.
- Have meetings somewhat regularly and be willing to try different meeting times and days.
- Create an atmosphere that allows teens to miss meetings, arrive late, and stop coming. If they have stopped coming to the meetings, still greet them with a smile the next time you see them in the library or elsewhere.
- Make a display in the teen area to entice new members. Include:
  - Photos or collage of things the group has done or things the group can do
  - Sign up sheets
  - Reprints of newspaper coverage
  - Who to ask for more information
  - Web site address of TAG
  - Email address of advisor
  - Dates of future meeting
  - Survey for teens to fill out
  - Future projects and programs
  - Books reflecting positive teen images

- When promoting programs they’ve developed, state that they are sponsored or created by the TAG.
- Take many pictures and develop in doubles; create a scrapbook archive and create displays in the library
- Contact local newspapers and ask them to send a photographer or reporter to TAG meetings and TAG suggested teen programs
- Write a letter to the editor about the great things “your” teens are doing
Sample Mission Statements

The Youth Advisory Committee’s mission is to ensure the availability of quality resources for both leisure activities and homework assignments for junior and senior high school students. The Committee encourages teen involvement in the library through creative original programming and suggesting programs to be held at the library.

--Jervis Public Library Rome, NY

TALK ABOUT BOOKS
EVALUATE AND SELECT TEEN MATERIAL
ENCOURAGE NEW IDEAS
NEW AND IMPROVED TEEN SERVICES
AUTHOR VISITS
DESIGN A TEEN LIBRARY WEB PAGE
VOLUNTEER AT THE LIBRARY
INCREASE LIBRARY AWARENESS
STUDENTS GRADES 6-12
OFFER YOUR IDEAS TO LIBRARIANS
REVIEW AND DISCUSS BOOKS
YOUNG ADULT SUMMER READING PROGRAM
BECOME INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY
OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS YOUR IDEAS
ASSIST WITH TEEN PROGRAMS
READ NEW BOOKS
DEVELOP TEEN LIBRARY PROGRAMS

--Bay County (Michigan) Library System

The mission of the Library Teen Council is to suggest services, materials, and programs that are needed by city teens and to work with library staff to provide these services.

--Salt Lake City
Are You Psyched?  Here's where to go for more information.

This is part of RoseMary's See YA Around site. It is awe-inspiring. I like to call her The High Priestess of Teen Services. WOW!

How to Organize a Teen Friends of the Library Group (From FOLUSA)

Jones, Patrick. Read anything you can get your hands on!

www.jervislibrary.org/yaweb/teenparticipate.html
This is the content of my very first workshop on TAGs. You will recognize most of it from the handouts, but I do update the site regularly.

www.jervislibrary.org/yaweb/TAGs.html
This is a collection of links to TAG related sites. Included are links to sample agendas, applications to join, mission statements, and TAGs featured on library web sites. I hope to see your library there in the future!

TAGAD-L - a list for TAG Advisors (You!)
Subscribe by going to www.topica.com
This is the most useful list to which I have ever subscribed.

Vaillancourt, Renee. Managing Young Adult Services: A Self-Help Manual;

VOYA (Voices of Youth Advocates) magazine. Beg or borrow it, but don’t steal!

YA-YAAC - a listserv for YA Advisory Councils
*Subscribe by emailing listproc@ala1.ala.org
This is much more quiet than TAGAD-L.