

*The # of school librarians in US  
shrank by 7% from '04 & '11*

*Only 62% of the  
nation's youth have  
access to a school  
library*

**ACT  
NOW**

*Only 33% of public  
libraries have a  
YA librarian*

*57% of public libraries  
report flat or decreased  
budgets in '12*

*62% of public libraries  
are the only source of  
free access to the  
Internet in their towns*

# YALSA ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

2017

**yalsa**  
Young Adult Library  
Services Association  
[www.ala.org/yalsa](http://www.ala.org/yalsa)

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
What is Advocacy?	4
Everyday Advocacy	6
Developing & Delivering Your Message	9
Using Web Tools for Advocacy	11
Build Partnerships	12
Basics of National Legislative Advocacy	15
Meeting with Elected Officials	18
Talking Points	22
Advocacy Resources	24

# INTRODUCTION

**I**nvesting in teen services isn't just good for teens; it's good for libraries and for communities. It is up to those of us who care deeply about those services and who understand their importance to make the case—with our administrators, with colleagues, with library boards of trustees, and with our communities.

The 2012 Public Library Data Service Survey (<http://www.ala.org/pla/publications/plds>) indicated that only about 1 in 3 public libraries has a teen services specialist on staff. Recent studies from the NCES indicate that only 79% of secondary schools employ a school librarian. Ongoing advocacy efforts can help ensure that all teens have access to great libraries! Why advocate? Because you are the voice for the teens! Help ensure that 100% of libraries have the staff, budget and resources needed to serve the nation's 42 million teens.

But sometimes we don't know how to get started making that case, or we're not sure what we can do. This toolkit will provide some practical tips, messages, facts, and strategies to help you speak up—without adding too much to your already full plate. Your teens deserve more, and you are their voice.

# WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

**A**s Linda W. Braun says in her book, *Being a Teen Library Services Advocate* (Neal-Schuman, 2012), “To put it simply, advocacy is about standing up, speaking out, and asking for support.”

Another helpful definition comes from the American Association for School Librarians. 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.”

Effective advocacy is a mix of:

- **Identifying the right audience**

In the case of libraries, this could be your library director, coworkers, board of trustees, school board, city council, county commission, or some other group or individual.

- **Having a persuasive message**

Clearly state what you want and why it is important. This could be more money for teen collections or programs, a full-time teen services librarian, or a change in a policy or law. Always tie the “ask” into the needs of teens and their families and explain why the library is the agency that can best provide the service or meet the need.

- **Including an individual or local perspective**

Tell a brief story about how a program or service has helped teens, their families, schools and/or the community at large. Better yet, get teens and their parents to tell the stories about the importance of teen library services in their lives.

Advocacy is NOT the same as marketing, although marketing can play a role in advocacy. Marketing gets the word out about what you are doing in the library, but advocacy goes beyond that to demonstrate the value of your programs and services—and lets your audience see what teens and the community are getting out of those programs and services.

Advocacy is NOT the same as lobbying. Many people believe that they are not allowed to advocate, because as employees of nonprofit or governmental organizations, they are not allowed to lobby, or may only do limited lobbying.

So what’s the difference between advocacy and lobbying?

**Advocacy** is the process of stakeholders making their voices heard on issues that affect their lives and the lives of others at the local, state, and national level. It also means helping policymakers learn about and find specific solutions to persistent problems. Anyone can engage in advocacy.

**Lobbying**, on the other hand, involves activities that are in direct support of or opposition to a specific piece of introduced legislation. As an individual constituent, you can always ask your own legislator to vote a particular way on a piece of legislation; however, as a representative of a nonprofit agency, such as a public library, there are limits to how much lobbying you can do.

The short version: **advocacy** is about providing information, especially information that emphasizes value; **lobbying** is about trying to influence a vote.

## Examples of advocacy vs. lobbying

### *Advocacy*

- Telling your member of Congress how a federal grant, such as an LSTA grant, your library received has helped your teens.
- Educating a member of Congress about the effects of a policy on the teens in your community.
- Inviting City Council members to your library to show them specific teen services and programs, and the difference they can make in the lives of teens.

### *Lobbying*

- Asking your member of Congress to vote for or against, or amend, introduced legislation.
- Emailing a “call to action” to your patrons urging them to contact their member of Congress in support of action on introduced legislation or pending regulations.
- Preparing materials or organizing events in support of lobbying activities

(Adapted from the National Council on Aging: [www.ncoa.org/public-policy-action/policy-news/are-nonprofits-allowed-to.html](http://www.ncoa.org/public-policy-action/policy-news/are-nonprofits-allowed-to.html))

In short, you can always educate elected officials about the value of teen services, teen programs, teen spaces, teen services staff and teen collections. Many adults, including elected officials, may not have been in a library since they were teens themselves. You can do a great service by letting them know what is happening these days, and how teen services fits into the overall life of the community.

As an individual, you can always ask your own legislators to vote for or against a particular policy. As a library employee, you may be restricted on what you can ask for.

Finally, advocacy is NOT all about self-interest. Some librarians and library workers hesitate to advocate for teen services because they think it looks like they’re just trying to keep their own job, or get more money for themselves. But if your job is to create great library services that help teens grow up into successful and contributing members of society, what’s wrong with that?

Remember: It’s not about you. It’s about the teens, and even more importantly, it’s about the community.

# EVERYDAY ADVOCACY

Everyone who works at the library is or should be a library advocate. Why? Because your teen patrons deserve more. Here are some tips for incorporating advocacy activities into your every day routine. Many take just minutes to accomplish. Share them with your colleagues. Remember, what's good for the library is good for teens. And what's good for teens is good for the library.

## Five minutes or less

- Tell YALSA how you and your library help teens; a handy online form is on YALSA's advocacy page: [www.ala.org/yalsa/advocacy](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/advocacy). YALSA will use your stories in creating more advocacy tools for members.?
- Add key stakeholders like school board members and the mayor's office to your library's newsletter and holiday card mailing list. If you keep your name in front on them, it will be easier to approach them when you have a specific issue or problem.
- Sign up for ALA's District Dispatch blog ([www.districtdispatch.org](http://www.districtdispatch.org)) to learn more about policy issues and lobbying. To keep an eye on the profession and learn about advocacy efforts of other youth services practitioners, subscribe to lists like yalsa-bk, ya-yaac, pubyac or LM\_NET.
- Set up an RSS feed for youth services blogs, including the YALSAblog (<http://yalsa.ala.org/blog>) and The Hub (<http://yalsa.ala.org/thehub>), to keep abreast of the latest developments in serving teens and how to increase advocacy for youth issues.
- Send news articles relating to teens to staff or policy makers. Choose articles that show the value of library services or that indicate gaps the library can step in to fill.
- Talk briefly to a staff person or community member about an upcoming library event or about a recent success story. Tie it in to teen needs, so they can see why it is important.
- Share this link with your coworkers, director, and other stakeholders: [www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries)
- Follow the ALA Washington Office (@ala\_wo) and YALSA (@yalsa) on Twitter, and retweet advocacy-focused messages

## Fifteen minutes or less

- Send an invitation to key stakeholders whenever you hold an event. Consider asking them to be judges for any contests you do or speakers at appropriate events. You can include a note in the invitation explaining why the event is important to teens or the community, or how it meets teen needs. Publicly recognize them when they do attend and thank them for their support.
- Send your legislators copies of YALSA's Issue Briefs that are available at [www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries). They include:
  - Libraries Help Keep Teens Safe Online
  - Libraries Help Teens Build STEM Skills

### •Teens Need Libraries

- Print out photos of successful events and mail them to key stakeholders with a brief note about how the program adds value to teen lives.
- Share advocacy ideas at staff meetings.
- When you attend community functions, mention appropriate library resources or distribute relevant library brochures and highlight how these programs help teens to grow up successfully.
- Post photos of key stakeholders (trustees, city council, foundation and friends officers, etc.) in the break room so staff will recognize them and make them feel welcome. This not only gives the stakeholders a positive impression of the library, but it makes it easier for staff members to approach them with stories about how library services have helped teens.
- Stay abreast of library-related issues. Visit your state library association's website for news, subscribe to the ALA Twitter feed ([www.twitter.com/ala\\_library](http://www.twitter.com/ala_library)) or get the RSS feed or email updates for the Washington Office's blog, District Dispatch. For more information go to <http://www.districtdispatch.org/>
- Bookmark the ALA Office for Library Advocacy homepage ([www.ala.org/ola](http://www.ala.org/ola)) and subscribe to its discussion list.
- Share information via a blog or other means about positive teen news.
- Create a flier about YA activities, additions to the collection, or services you provide at your library and post it around the library or school with notes about how the program, service, or collection supports teen development. Keep copies at checkout. Make sure your own efforts on YA services are well publicized.

### Thirty minutes or less

- Watch for issues in the local news related to teens/libraries and write a letter to the editor that explains how the library supports teens and their families in the same area as those mentioned in the news story.
- Inform all new employees and board members about the importance of teen services and how what you do helps teens grow up successfully. Make an information packet for just this purpose, and share it with local stakeholders and community members as well.
- Find out if key stakeholders have teenage children and provide them with booklists and other helpful information. Include a message about how the materials you provide help teens succeed.
- Connect with educators and youth organizations in your area to see what their needs to ensure that your advocacy efforts are appropriate for your community.

### When You're Able to Devote More Time

- Attend a library legislative day event at your state capital or participate in ALA's National Library Legislative Day in Washington, D.C. each May. For more information, go to [www.ala.org/nlld](http://www.ala.org/nlld). YALSA offers a stipend for one member to attend each year. Apply by Dec. 1st. [www.ala.org/yalsa/awardsandgrants/yalsaawardsgrants](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/awardsandgrants/yalsaawardsgrants)

- Take advantage of National Library Week, Teen Read Week™ and other occasions to celebrate the library and what you do. For a calendar of events go to [www.ala.org/conferencesevents/celebrationweeks](http://www.ala.org/conferencesevents/celebrationweeks)
- Volunteer to host library/school board meetings. If the opportunity arises, give a brief tour or share a recent success story.
- Create and distribute an award for a stakeholder who has shown significant support to the library.
- Regularly attend town meetings, board meetings, etc. and make your presence known. Introduce yourself to elected officials; make announcements about library events when appropriate, and include a comment about the value that the program adds to teen lives. Share this responsibility with other library staff.
- Attend your local representative's Town Hall Meetings, where they meet with constituents at local venues to discuss legislative issues. Be ready to talk about how the library supports teen development.
- Prepare proclamations that include statements about the value of teen library services to send to your city council, county board, etc., for events like Teen Read Week™, Teen Tech Week™, and other library occasions. See the Teen Read Week and Teen Tech Week pages on YALSA's website for suggested wording.
- Form a friends group at your library to help you advocate for excellent teen services. For more information go to United for Libraries (<http://www.ala.org/united>).
- Contact your local newspaper; see if you can write a column about the latest news and developments in serving teens at your school or community.
- Last but not least, consistently deliver over-the-top library service that demonstrates what you do for teens and how you support their education, growth and development.



# DEVELOPING & DELIVERING YOUR MESSAGE

To be an effective advocate, you must present a compelling case.

To do that, you must do three things. The first is to develop a persuasive message—one that touches your listeners’ hearts, as well as their minds. The second is to deliver it with conviction. Sharing your enthusiasm is the best way to get other people excited and motivated. The third is to use it consistently. The more you (and your supporters) deliver the message, the more people you will reach and the more impact it will have.

Having a message sheet will help you deliver a message that is clear and compelling. You will need a key (overall) message, supporting points, stories and examples that support your key message. Most importantly, you will need a call to action that clearly defines what you want to happen.

## Tips

- Keep your key message simple—about 10 words. Avoid library jargon.
- Adapt your talking points to address the concerns for your audience, whether that is teens, parents, the library director/principal or public officials.
- Don’t just talk about the library. Talk about the needs of the community and how teen services helps address them.
- Don’t just talk about how much fun teens have at your programs; talk about how the programs also support their educational, developmental and/or recreational needs.
- Paint a positive picture. Focus on benefits, as well as needs.
- Use statistics but use them judiciously and back them up with stories and examples that bring them to life.
- Test your message on other people to see whether it resonates, is clear and memorable.
- Find out what the priorities and needs are for the individual or group that you’ll be speaking to, and craft a message that shows how teen services can address their need. For example, if an elected official says a key issue for him or her is workforce development, talk about how libraries help teens build career oriented skills, through volunteering, attending programs, accessing test prep resources, and so on.

## Incorporate Personal Stories in your Messaging

One of the best and most powerful ways to tell your story is to get others to do it for you. Here are a few examples, but it’s easy to collect your own testimonials—just ask, “May we quote you?” “Would you be willing to speak to our library board/board of education?” Comment cards also can be a good source of

quotes, but don't just collect them. Use them in reports, presentations and publications. Post them on your website.

## **Listen, Don't Just Talk**

Advocacy is most powerful when it's about the people in your community and their needs—not what the library needs. How do you know what those needs are? You listen.

Showing how your library addresses real needs is the most powerful way to demonstrate the value of the library. Whether it is improving reading scores or helping immigrant families adjust to a new country, every community has many needs. Keeping teens safe and engaged during out-of-school time (OST) is an area of particular concern.

Set up informational sessions for your patrons. Let them talk about their needs and concerns, and approach funders and stakeholders with these issues and use your community members' stories to advocate for resources.

# USING WEB TOOLS FOR ADVOCACY

**B**logs, email, social networking sites, wikis, your website: all of these offer opportunities to deliver your message, gather information and garner support. The key is in understanding which tool or tools are the best for your particular needs.

**Email blasts** are a great way to make announcements and point your supporters to other Web resources, such as your blog, your Facebook page, or your wiki. They are also a good forum for releasing alerts and telling subscribers any news they may need to know.

**Twitter** posts are helpful if urgency is a factor. Messages such as “remember to vote tomorrow” or “be sure to attend the school board meeting” can easily be disseminated to library supporters. In general, however, these tools are most effective when the goal is simply to provide information, rather than change minds or educate supporters on the finer points of an issue.

**Social networking sites** such as Facebook provide an online gathering point for your current supporters and if used effectively can nurture a sense of community among your library supporters. They also allow you to attract potential library supporters and build a list of contacts that you can use to assist you with advocacy efforts.

While opportune for sharing information, one of the most valuable uses of web tools for library advocates is for gathering information. Free or inexpensive tools such as sites that allow you to create surveys to get feedback from your library patrons can provide you with invaluable information and support for your effort to improve library services to teens. Wikis are free and easy-to-use tools where individuals can share information. They can be used for gathering and sharing success stories of advocacy efforts, for example.

Video sharing sites such as YouTube can have a powerful impact on your advocacy efforts. For example, have your teen advisory board create and post a brief commercial that features all the great things the library has to offer the teens in your community. Be sure to link to it from your library’s website and show it at board meetings.

For maximum impact, keep your message consistent and use a mix of media. When deciding which strategy to use, think about the strengths each one offers: send bulletins through Twitter, build community support through Facebook, or use email blasts to deliver a variety of news to a wide base of supporters.

# BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

**W**hen community and school leaders discuss how to address the needs of teens, are you at the table?

One of the best ways to build your base of support is by working in collaboration with community groups like the YWCA, YMCA, Rotary Club, 4-H Club, PTA/PTO, etc. Look online for other possible organizations that might be a good fit for your library and your specific goals. But don't wait for them to come to you—and don't wait for a crisis. Passive doesn't pay when it comes to advocacy.

When the time comes for you to ask for a show of support, it helps to have well-established relationships in place. Building relationships takes time. Set a goal for yourself of reaching out to two or three groups per year and set reasonable expectations. You'll find that some organizations are easier to work with than others. Make the best use of your time by focusing your efforts on those groups that are easy to work with and that are a good fit for your goals.

## Tips

- Make a list of both existing and potential partners. Be strategic. Which have goals compatible with yours? Which represent the audiences you want to reach? Which potential partners are most influential? Send your legislators copies of YALSA's Issue Briefs that are available at [www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries).
- Do some research. What are the basic goals of the potential partner? Is it to help youth build more STEM skills? Show how your library can help with that.
- Be prepared to give as well as get. Make a list of what you can offer—it's a lot! For example, many libraries have:
  - meeting and display space
  - a newsletter and website
  - highly trained staff
  - direct access to community members
  - a network of existing community groups, partners, supporters and volunteers that can be leveraged
  - a capacity to implement programs
  - a wealth of information, tools and resources
- Make the connection. Pick up the phone. Invite your contact to have coffee or lunch and invite their views on what you are trying to accomplish. The best partnership projects are hatched together.
- Build your network. Ask to meet with representatives from key organizations to talk over how you might work together for mutual benefit. Attend their meetings and invite them to yours, when appropriate. Serving on boards and committees of other organizations is one effective way to show the library cares and is a player.
- Be open to business partnerships, but be very clear about what you are asking and what you can offer in return. Put it in writing.
- Make sure your partners get regular updates and have opportunities to give input.

- Thank everyone involved. Whether it's a personal letter, a party or plaque, a thank you is powerful.

## **Library Staff**

### **Library Directors, administrators and managers**

These are busy people! Want to get their support? Then help make their job easier for them.

- When the time comes for you to ask for a show of support, it helps to have well-established relationships in place. Building relationships takes time. Set a goal for yourself of reaching out to two or three groups per year and set reasonable expectations. You'll find that some organizations are easier to work with than others. Make the best use of your time by focusing your efforts on those groups that are easy to work with and that are a good fit for your goals.
- Help them understand the basics of a strong teen services program. Share resources such as YALSA's different national guidelines with them ([www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines))
  - Give them the fact sheet for administrators: [www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/guidelines/yacompetencies/evalonesheets/tool\\_admins.pdf](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/guidelines/yacompetencies/evalonesheets/tool_admins.pdf)
- Keep them up to date. Provide them with brief information about teen services trends, new practices, recent research, etc. The YALSAblog is a good place to find this kind of information.
- Show how teen services supports the stated mission and goals of the library. Is the library's mission to strengthen the community, then make sure your director knows about your outreach efforts to immigrant families has helped to connect them with critical services, such as health care or afterschool programs.
- Don't just share concerns and complaints with them—offer possible solutions.
- Invite them to attend and/or say a few words at teen programs and events.
- Thank them for whatever show of support they provide.
- Always be professional (in both appearance and demeanor) and respectful. Never be argumentative or confrontational.
- To learn more about interacting with library managers, check out Sarah Flowers' six part series on the YALSAblog, "What Your Manager Wishes you Knew," <http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/2013/06/12/what-your-manager-wishes-you-knew-part-6/>

### **Library Co-Workers**

- Get buy-in from them when you're in the planning stages of an event or program, especially if their support or participation is needed.
- Keep them in the loop. Share a calendar of teen programs and events with them.
- On the day before or day of, give them a heads up when there are going to be lots of teens in the library for a program or event so they can be prepared
- Post news stories about teens doing great things in the break room to help co-workers build a more positive attitude toward teens Don't just share concerns and complaints with them—offer possible solutions.
- Share what you learned at a workshop, webinar or conference with co-workers via a brief chat at a staff meeting, or by forwarding information to them via email
- Tap into their interests and expertise. Is a co-worker an amazing cook? Ask them to help you plan and

implement a food program with your teens.

- Be respectful of their point of view and recognize that you may not be able to sway their opinion or perception of teens.
- Encourage them to attend a teen program or event.
- Introduce them to some of your ‘super’ teens—the ones who are super helpful, super polite, super in general
- Offer to do ‘brown bag’ lunches or coffee breaks that focus on a particular teen services issue
- Start up a staff YA book club
- Make sure there is good signage in the teen area so co-workers can easily find things for teen patrons when you’re not around
- Share any teen center policies, rules or guidelines with co-workers, so they can easily enforce them when you’re not around
- Model positive interactions with teen patrons for co-workers

### **Local Elected and Appointed Officials**

Many times, the focus of advocacy will be local elected and appointed officials, such as your library trustees, city council members, county commissioners, school board members, or city employees (e.g., city manager). Sometimes you might even need to advocate for teen services to your own library administration and colleagues.

### **How can you be an advocate?**

You can be an advocate by educating these people about the needs of libraries and the teens you serve and how the library helps meet the needs of teens. You also can organize supporters on issues of importance and educate a wider audience on your accomplishments. Some examples include:

- Writing letters, calling, or organizing meetings to see legislators and their staff
- Attending town hall meetings with lawmakers
- Communicating with policymakers through social media and other methods

Keep in mind that these activities cross the line into lobbying if they call for action on introduced legislation or a pending regulation.
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### **“Stand up, show up, and don’t leave”**

That’s the way Chuck Ricks, executive director of Roane County Committee on Aging, Spencer, WV suggests that you advocate:

1. **Stand up:** You have to stand up, leave your desk, leave your organization, and actually go to the policymakers and legislators. You can’t advocate effectively from behind your desk except for writing letters or emails.
2. **Show up:** Go to your city council, county commission, state capitol, and Washington, DC. Make an appointment, and arrive on time. Hand the person your business card, have something to leave for them, be brief, stay on script, never whine, and make your goal to get a commitment.
3. **Don’t leave:** Do leave the office, but don’t leave the consciousness of the person or agency. Make a lasting, positive impression and follow up your visit with a thank you letter. Offer to provide data and feedback as lawmakers debate issues. Soon, you’ll be a familiar face, and they’ll be calling you for information.

# BASICS OF NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

## Reasons for Getting Involved in Legislative Advocacy

- While ALA is the official voice of libraries, librarians and library workers, individual members have a responsibility to promote the interests of the library profession and to speak on behalf of their library patrons. Advocacy is only successful when it's a grassroots effort that engages large numbers of people
- Even though librarians and library workers are respected members of the community, the competition for the attention and time of elected officials is great, as is the competition for federal funding. Every year thousands of associations and interest groups converge on Washington DC to compete for Congress' attention and federal funds. Some well-known groups like oil and tobacco can afford to pay for powerful lobbyists, but ALA is not in a position to do that. As such, we rely on our members to help ensure that the needs and interests of libraries, librarians, library workers and library users are adequately addressed by Congress.

## Keeping Track of Current Legislative Issues

- Bookmark ALA's advocacy page: [www.ala.org/advocacy/](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/)
- Bookmark YALSA's advocacy page: [www.ala.org/yalsa/advocacy](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/advocacy)
- Go to [www.ala.org/offices/wo](http://www.ala.org/offices/wo). This is the homepage of ALA Washington Office. They provide information about federal legislation that affects libraries.
- Check out the ALA Washington Office's blog, District Dispatch, at <http://districtdispatch.org/>
- Sign up for ALA's Action e-list at <http://bit.ly/2gtSHjE>. This is an announcement service that the ALA Washington Office uses to send out timely information about issues and legislation.
- Bookmark ALA's Capwiz site for quick access to information on legislative issues and an easy way to contact legislators: <http://cqrcengage.com/ala/home>.
- Check the category called "Legislation" on the YALSAblog at <http://yalsa.ala.org/blog>

## Taking Action

- Each year the ALA Washington Office organizes National Library Legislative Day where librarians converge on the Capitol to advocate for library issues. It is also possible to participate virtually in Library Legislative Day if you can't make the trip to DC. Learn more at [www.ala.org/nlld](http://www.ala.org/nlld)
- Volunteer to serve on YALSA's Legislation Committee—all of the work is done virtually, so you don't have to attend conferences to participate. Learn more at [www.ala.org/yalsa/getinvolved/participate](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/getinvolved/participate)
- Find out if your state library association has a Library Legislative Day in your state capital or if they have a Legislation committee
- Take action when ALA or YALSA send out requests via email or on YALSA's Twitter ([twitter.com/yalsa](https://twitter.com/yalsa))

- Keep your local elected officials informed about issues that affect your library and its patrons.
- Visit the ALA Advocacy Resource Center at [www.ala.org/advocacy](http://www.ala.org/advocacy). From here, you can view advocacy tools, resources and publications, learn about legislative issues, funding issues and subscribe to electronic discussion lists.
- Take part in YALSA's District Days ([http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/District\\_Days](http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.php/District_Days))



### **Finding Out Who Your Elected Officials Are**

Go to [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov). From here you can find out who your federal, state and local officials are. To begin, type your zip code into the text box on the left.

### **Getting in Touch with Members of Congress**

By Phone: use the Capitol Switchboard, 202-224-3121. From here you can get connected to the offices of your Representative in the House and/or Senators. Please note: one of the Congressperson's staff members or even an intern will answer the phone. Don't expect to talk directly with the Congressperson.

You can get fax, email, phone and snail mail addresses by going to [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov).

### **Communicating with Elected Officials**

- If time permits, make your communication as personal as possible. A well thought out, personal email or letter has more impact than a mass-distributed form letter.
  - Method of communication: Contact your representative and find out the best way to contact him or her to voice your opinion; phone calls, faxes and emails are preferable to snail mail.
  - All snail mail is irradiated at a location off site, so there is often a significant lag between when you send a letter and when it is received. Additionally, the irradiation can make the letter brittle and/or hard to read. If you want to snail mail your Congressperson, mail it to his or her local office in your home state.
- Check with your representative about getting in touch; some officials have spam-blocking software that could prevent your message from being received. Also, some officials only allow email via an online form on their website.
- If contacting the official by phone, do not expect to speak with him or her. Only staffers answer the phones, but do not be put off by this. Their job is to take messages and tally how many calls are received

and the topic of the calls. Staff members also advise their boss, your legislator, on issues. Cultivating a good relationship with staff is good practice.

- When communicating in writing, address the official as “The Honorable Firstname Lastname.” For example: “The Honorable Dianne Feinstein.”
- Always identify yourself.
- Be concise, specific, and support your views with facts when possible.
- Be polite and respectful.
- Stay on message and keep to your main points.
- Always be sure to thank them for their time.

These tips on communicating with elected officials are adapted from the American Institute of Architects’ document “How To Lobby Elected Officials—A Guide for AIA Members,” at: [www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/howtobby.pdf](http://www.aia.org/SiteObjects/files/howtobby.pdf)

# MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

Meeting face-to-face with elected officials can provide a very effective and valuable opportunity to voice your concerns and share your views about a legislative issue. Not surprisingly, there are a number of ways that you can make a success – or a failure – out of a meeting.

Keep in mind that you don't necessarily need to travel far for a meeting. Congresspersons are in their home states for part of the year (usually beginning in Aug. and running through Labor Day), and state legislators spend a big part of the year home in their districts. To find out when they're available visit <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/schedules.html> or your state legislature's website and find out what days they're in session (when they're not, that's when you can schedule to visit with them locally).



- Always make an appointment in advance – don't just show up

Legislators have numerous demands on their time. Call ahead to schedule an appointment, and be flexible about when you'll meet. Keep in mind that legislators' schedules can fill up quickly; try to give yourself as much lead time as you can.

When calling to schedule an appointment, identify yourself as a constituent and clearly state the purpose of the meeting. The following script may help as you make this call:

“Hi! I'm \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_. I'll be in (your state/capital/city) on (date), and would like to schedule an appointment to meet with (Governor/Senator/Assemblyperson or Representative \_\_\_\_\_) to discuss proposed legislation that would impact young adults' use of technology and the Internet in schools and libraries. I would be more than happy to meet with the legislative assistant familiar with H.R. 5319 if the (elected official) is unavailable. Is someone available the afternoon of the (date of visit)? If no one is available, I would like to drop by the office to leave information for the (elected official) to review.”

Important: Don't just show up to a legislator's office. Chances are you won't get to meet with the official and at best you won't have the time and attention you need to express your views. At worst, you may not be remembered the way you wanted.

- **Research Your Legislator**

Know his/her history, especially any positions they may have taken on the issue you wish to discuss with him/her.

- o To research his/her voting record, position statements, ratings from special interest groups and

other pertinent information, go to: [www.vote-smart.org](http://www.vote-smart.org)

- **Prepare a concise statement for your meeting.**

It's essential that you are prepared to get your point across succinctly and effectively – you won't have more than 15-20 minutes to speak with your legislator.

- o Write down key points you plan to highlight.

- o Discuss how the issue impacts the young adults with whom you work on a personal level.

- o Be familiar with opposing arguments and be prepared to defend your position with facts.

- o Include local data and anecdotes about how the people in your community are affected by the issue.

(You can find great data about youth library use from

- YALSA's Harris Interactive poll at <http://ala.org/ala/yalsa/HarrisYouthPoll.pdf>,

- 2012 PLDS surveys distributed by the Public Library Association

- [www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries)

- o Conclude by providing your elected official with a proposed solution to the issue and ask him/her to take a particular action.

- o Avoid library jargon or acronyms and be sure to define terms, such as "information literacy," that the legislator may not be familiar with. It is highly probable that the legislator has not been in a library since his or her college days. This presents a challenge for you: you'll need to paint a picture of what a modern library is like without overloading them with technical terms (e.g. subscription databases).

- **Bring select written materials with you**

Leave your elected official with a resource that provides quick reference or support to the points you discussed. A brief fact sheet, position papers or other resources, along with brief information about your organization, is helpful.

- **Be on time & be flexible with your time**

Don't be late, even by just a few minutes – it may mean you miss your meeting entirely. If you think you may be delayed, be sure to call ahead and let them know. In addition, be flexible during your meeting. Interruptions can occur, and you may need to communicate your views while walking with your elected official to another meeting.

- **Dress professionally**

Wear business attire to the meeting. Don't let your clothing or accessories distract the official from what you have to say. If you're unsure, err on the side of caution.

- **Be prepared to meet with a staff person, if your elected official is unable to make your appointment**

It's not uncommon for a schedule change at the last minute. Don't be disappointed if you end up meeting with a staff aide. Key staff aides are sometimes just as familiar – if not more – on policy or proposed legislation. Make the most of your time with them; they, in turn, will communicate your views to your elected official, often at the most opportune time.

- **Be professional and diplomatic**

Present your case in a straightforward, friendly, and professional manner. Never argue about an issue with your elected official – rather, show him/her respect and try to find common ground from the very start, and use that bond to express your views. If it appears you will need to "agree to disagree", follow up with a letter explaining your views more comprehensively, thanking him/her for the meeting.

- **Listen Carefully**

Politicians tend to speak generally, avoid the issues and/or go off on tangents. Try to draw out specific answers to your questions and/or look for topics to connect your point of view with. If the official asks you a question that you do not know the answer to, let him/her know that you will find the answer and get back to him/her.

- **Put the issue in human terms**

Let your elected official know how the policy or proposed legislation will impact the young adults you serve every day. Use short but effective anecdotes to support. Help your legislator understand how this piece of legislation will affect the real people he/she represents.

- **Bring a well-spoken teen or parent**

When a teen or parent speaks about the same issues that concern you, it sends a message to the official that this issue is one that a large part of the community is concerned with, and not just something limited to librarianship.

- **Be inclusive**

We speak on behalf of youth because we want them to have access and opportunities that will help them achieve, succeed and grow into competent caring members (and voters) of our community. This is a point where, most likely, you and your elected official can see eye-to-eye. Finding common ground, then demonstrating how this legislation is important to those efforts, respects the motivations and the emotions that drive a piece of legislation. Keep the focus on fostering an environment where young adults have the resources they need to thrive.

- **Volunteer to serve as a contact for this issue in the future**

Legislators will often call on individuals they see as knowledgeable on a specific issue or policy topic. Make them aware of your area of expertise and provide contact information so they can call on you in the future. Leave business cards with the legislator and his or her staffer.

- **Give the official an open invitation to visit your library**

Politicians love a photo-op, especially during an election year. What could be better press for him or her than a photo of them at your Teen Read Week™ celebration, helping teens with homework, giving out the summer reading award to the winning teen? Once they're in your library, take advantage of the opportunity to educate them about library services to teens.

- **Say thank you**

Be sure to send a thank you note promptly after your meeting. This offers another opportunity to restate your views, send any additional information on the issue. If you met with a staff aide, be sure to send a separate letter to your legislator.

- **Don't wheel and deal**

Never offer an elected official anything in return for their support, and never discuss campaign finances, PAC contributions or endorsements.

These tips on meeting with elected officials is adapted, with permission, from the "Teacher Leader's Network's Tips for a Successful Meeting with Your Elected Officials," accessed on July 26, 2006, at: [www.teacherleaders.org/Resources/talkingtips.html](http://www.teacherleaders.org/Resources/talkingtips.html)

Whether you're inviting the President of the United States, or your local Sheriff, you can easily enhance your event by following the guidelines below. And always remember, when dealing with politicians:

**Be Persistent / Be Polite / Be Patient**

## **Inviting Elected Officials to Library Events**

Inviting policy- and decision-makers to your library events is a great way to inform them about what is going on and demonstrate to them the value of library services to teens.

### **Plan as far in advance as possible.**

- Politicians' schedules fill up rapidly. Create a list of your top three choices and get the invitation out to your first choice 6 weeks in advance. This will put you on their radar and, in case your first choice declines, gives you enough time to reach out to other options. In order to increase your chances of getting a positive response, offer a few different dates for the official to choose from.
- For federal (and some state) officials, contact their local office. This shows that you are respectful of their time and will almost always get you a response.
- Describe the benefits of the official attending (e.g., ability to talk about an issue that is important to him or her or the chance to meet with a significant number of voters in the district).

### **Prepare for the event.**

- Work in coordination with the official's staff so that everyone is on the same page as to what the expectations are. Be clear about what you hope the official will do (e.g., present an award or introduce a part of the program). Try to make it as easy for them as you can.
- Provide staff with a complete agenda and alert them to any media you think will attend. Give them a full list of the media you expect to attend as you get closer to the date.
- If you present an award to the official (always a great idea), alert his or her staff in advance and ask that the official say a few words of thanks and support.

### **During and after the event.**

- Have a staff photographer on hand to record your event. Put it in your newsletter or other communications and be sure to send copies to the official and his staff.
- To get the ball rolling, have one of your staff ask the first question if there is a Q & A session. Be sure to let the official's staff know which question is coming.
- Following the event, thank the official with a note or card, photos, feedback, stories, and anything you'd like to share.
- Be sure to follow up in a timely manner to any questions they may have asked you during the event that you couldn't answer. This allows you to continue your connection with the official after the event.
- Finally, don't be offended if a staff member shows up for the official at the last minute. Politicians are very busy and are often pulled in multiple directions. Just make a note to try again in the future by inviting them to another event.

Follow these simple tips, and you are well on your way to getting the elected official's attention and developing a successful event for your community.

(Source: National Council on Aging: <http://www.ncoa.org/public-policy-action/advocacy-toolkit/how-to-get-an-elected.html>)

# TALKING POINTS:

## Libraries Provide Critical Services to Teens, their Families and the Community

### The Challenge

- Approximately 14 million middle and high school students are on their own after school
- 8 in 10 Americans want all children and teens to have some type of organized activity or safe place to go after school
- The hours between 3 and 6 p.m. are the peak hours for juvenile crime and experimentation with drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sex.

(source: Afterschool Alliance's "Afterschool Essentials: Research and Polling")

### The Solution

There are more public libraries in the U.S. than McDonald's restaurants. Libraries have a strong track record of providing a variety of key services that meet the needs of teens, including:

**Workforce Development.** Preparing teens for the workforce is a major concern in the U.S. In the last three decades, the skills required for young adults to succeed in the workforce have changed drastically, but the skills emphasized in schools have not kept up with these changes. 87% of public libraries offer services and programs for teens, including career planning and computer skills. Additionally, libraries recruit teens to work as interns and staff, helping them build practical job skills.

**Digital Literacy.** In 2010, 50% of the nation's 14-18 year olds reported visiting a library to use a computer. Data suggests that while teens are comfortable with new technologies, they are not always as technically savvy as adults believe them to be. Librarians provide formal and point-of-need training to teens to help them use the Internet safely, effectively, and ethically.

**Traditional Literacy.** 97% of public libraries provide a dedicated section of their library to teen books and other teen materials. Librarians are trained experts who can match the right book to the right teen, whether he or she is a struggling reader, an English language learner, or developmentally disabled.

## Additional Talking Points:

### Why Teens?

Teens are an important part of our community. The library has a responsibility to address their needs.

Teens aren't children and they aren't adults. They have unique needs and interests.

In order to mature into productive adults, teens need adult guides, mentors, and coaches who like, understand and respect them.

Millions of teens rely on school and public libraries for computers and internet access.

Teens have a lot to offer to libraries. They have insights that library staff might not have, and are able to help plan programs for the future.

## **Why the Library?**

Investing in teen services isn't just good for teens; it's good for the library.

Teens are our future—future voters, taxpayers, citizens, parents and library users.

The library offers unique resources, services and specially trained staff that community centers, afterschool programs, parks and recreational programs, schools, etc. do not

Keeping teens safe and engaged during out-of-school hours is a major community issue. The library is part of the solution.

## **Why Teen Services?**

Teens need free access to books, the internet and other resources that reflect a wide range of topics and opinions. They need to be connected to information that can help them gain and education and that meets their developmental needs.

Teens turn to the library for more than information. They attend educational and recreational programs, volunteer, participate in service learning projects, and interact in a structured setting with peers and adult mentors. As a result they gain important developmental skills and assets that will help them be productive workers and engaged citizens.

The library helps bridge the digital divide by offering access to technology and by helping teens learn how to use technological tools and build critical digital literacy skills.

Almost every library has children's and adult specialists. Teens have special needs and therefore need a staff person dedicated to serving them. Teen specialists understand teens as well as adolescent behavior their developmental needs and interests. They are expert in evaluating and selecting resources and matching the right resources to the right teen at the right time.

## **Why School Libraries**

For many students, the school library is their first and only library.

Dozens of research projects have shown a direct relation between well-stocked and professionally staffed school library programs and increased student achievement.

The school library reaches every student and supports every teacher and curriculum area.

School librarians teach 21st century information skills that will help students learn and achieve throughout their lives.

School libraries have resources that support the Common Core State Standards.

# ADVOCACY RESOURCES:

The following resources are suggested to help you build support for young adult services.

## Online

**Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA):** [www.ala.org/yalsa/](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/)

The world's premiere organization for individuals who work for or with teens through libraries. Its mission is to advocate, promote and strengthen service to young adults. Through its member-driven advocacy, research, and professional development initiatives, YALSA builds the capacity of libraries and librarians to engage, serve and empower teens.

**28 Days of Advocacy:**

[http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/28\\_days\\_full.pdf](http://yalsa.ala.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/04/28_days_full.pdf)

Series of YALSA Blog posts from February 2009 with ideas, information, and thoughts on advocating for teens and libraries.

**ALA Office for Library Advocacy:** [www.ala.org/ola](http://www.ala.org/ola)

The office for Library Advocacy (OLA) supports the efforts of advocates seeking to improve libraries of all types by developing resources, a peer-to-peer advocacy network, and training for advocates at the local, state and national level.

**AASL Advocacy Toolkit:** <http://www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/tools>

A wealth of tools and tips, talking points, sample materials and other resources to help school librarians speak out. From the American Association of School Librarians (AASL)

**Afterschool Alliance:** [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org)

The premiere advocacy organization for afterschool programs provides extensive resources, including the latest research, success stories and guidance on organizing youth programs.

**ALA Advocacy Resource Center:** [www.ala.org/issues&advocacy](http://www.ala.org/issues&advocacy)

Extensive resources on all aspects of advocacy, including an *Advocacy Action Kit*, the *Library Advocate's Handbook*, a *Media Relations Toolkit* and much more.

**ALA Graphics:** [www.alastore.ala.org](http://www.alastore.ala.org)

Find colorful, posters, bookmarks, t-shirts, coffee mugs, pins and other gift items to help reinforce your message. Also see the *ALA Graphics Catalog*.

**ALA Legislative Action Center:** <http://cqrcengage.com/ala/home>

Check out this comprehensive website for updates on current library and information issues, action alerts, contact information and links to members of Congress.

**ALA Office for Research and Statistics:** [www.ala.org/offices/ors](http://www.ala.org/offices/ors)

Check here for national research and statistics to help build your case.

**Libraries Transform:** [www.ala.org/transforminglibraries](http://www.ala.org/transforminglibraries)

**Ilovelibraries.org:** [www.ilovelibraries.org](http://www.ilovelibraries.org)

Designed for the public, this website encourages library advocacy and makes it easy to support all types of libraries. Users are invited to share their stories and advocate to members of Congress.

### **Intellectual Freedom for Young People:**

[www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/foryoungpeople/atschool/school](http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/foryoungpeople/atschool/school)

Guidance and resources for advocating intellectual freedom for youth from the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom and Office of Advocacy.

### **Library Advocacy Discussion Lists:**

Share ideas updates and stories about library advocacy via the Library Advocacy Now (ALADNOW) and YALSA advocacy (yadvocacy-l) electronic discussion lists. To subscribe, go to <http://lists.ala.org>. Click on Login. (First-time users will need to get a password.) Click on the discussion lists you want and then Subscribe.

### **Library Research Service:** [www.lrs.org](http://www.lrs.org)

Check here for studies and research to help build your case.

### **New on the Shelf: Teens in the Library: Findings from the Evaluation of Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development:** [www.chapinhall.org/research/report/new-shelf](http://www.chapinhall.org/research/report/new-shelf)

A look at how public libraries can reach out to teens and connect libraries more closely to their communities. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, 2005.

### **YALSA's Advocacy Benchmarks**

Designed to help any staff member working with teens stand up for the value of library services to adolescents and created so that you can mix and match efforts based on personal experience.

Advocacy Benchmarks by Activity

[http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/AdvocacyBenchmarks\\_Activity.pdf](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/AdvocacyBenchmarks_Activity.pdf)

Advocacy Benchmarks by Category

[http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/AdvocacyBenchmarks\\_Category.pdf](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/AdvocacyBenchmarks_Category.pdf)

Advocacy Benchmarks Infographic

[http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/AdvocacyBenchmarks\\_Visual.pdf](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/AdvocacyBenchmarks_Visual.pdf)

### **YALSA's Legislative Advocacy Guide for Members:**

[www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/LegAdvocacyGuide.pdf](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/sites/ala.org.yalsa/files/content/LegAdvocacyGuide.pdf)

Advice on when, where and how to contact your public officials.

## **In Print**

**ALA Editions:** [www.alastore.ala.org/](http://www.alastore.ala.org/). Check here for many helpful titles regarding planning, delivering and promoting YA services.

Braun, Linda W. *Being a Teen Library Services Advocate*. ALA/Neal-Schuman, 2012.

Flowers, Sarah. "Advocacy Adventures." *Young Adult Library Services* 9, no. 1 (October 2010): 10-12.

Flowers, Sarah. *Evaluating Teen Services and Programs*. ALA/Neal-Schuman, 2012.

Flowers, Sarah. *Young Adults Deserve the Best: YALSA's Competencies in Action*. ALA Editions, 2010.

Gallaway, Beth. "Make it Count: Advocacy and Teen Read Week." *Young Adult Library Services* 8, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 24-28.

Gruenthal, Heather. "A School Library Advocacy Alphabet." *Young Adult Library Services* 11, no. 1 (Fall 2012): 13-18.

Hartman, Maureen L. "Good Teen Librarians Make Great Library Advocates." *Young Adult Library Services* 11,

no. 1 (Fall 2012): 10-12.

Kendrick-Samuel, Syntychia. "Junior Friends Groups Taking Teen Services to the Next Level." *Young Adult Library Services* 10, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 15-18.

Kerr, Elizabeth. "Engaging the Decision-Makers and the Influencers." *Teacher Librarian* 38, no. 3 (February 2011): 69-71.

Matthews, Steve. "Stopping the Slow Train to Disaster or How to Talk Up, Trick Out, and Establish Beyond a Doubt That School Libraries Are Vital for Kids (and That Means TEENS!)." *Young Adult Library Services* 10, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 5-6.

Ray, Mark. "Charlie Bucket Gets the Golden Ticket." *Teacher Librarian*. Apr2013, Vol. 40 Issue 4, p64-66.

Wegner, Ted. "ALA Washington Office: Lots of Resources for You." *Young Adult Library Services* 11, no 2 (Winter 2013) 4-6.

Wong, Patty, and Julie Todaro. "Frontline Advocacy Is Everybody's Job." *American Libraries* 41, no. 6/7 (June 2010): 82-84.

## Institutes & Training

Advocacy workshops are available to local, regional and state library groups at no or minimal cost (for travel). Topics can be structured to focus on areas of concern. Contact the ALA Office for Library Advocacy at [advocacy@ala.org](mailto:advocacy@ala.org).

ALA's Advocacy University.

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/advocacyuniversity> (ALA login required)

- Links to resources and toolkits on advocacy.

Turning the Page. <http://publiclibraryadvocacy.org>

ALA periodically offers free advocacy webinars. They are usually announced via the District Dispatch blog, [www.districtdispatch.org](http://www.districtdispatch.org)

## More from YALSA...

*The Future of Library Services for and with Teens*

<http://www.ala.org/yaforum/future-library-services-and-teens-project-report>

A report that provides direction on how libraries need to adapt and potentially change to better meet the needs of 21st century teens.

YALSA Position Papers

Position papers from YALSA, advocating for important issues in serving teens: [www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/whitepapers/whitepapers](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/whitepapers/whitepapers)

- The Importance of a Whole Library Approach to Public Library Young Adult Services: A YALSA Issue Paper by Linda W. Braun with contributions from Sarah Flowers and Mary Hastler.
- The Benefits of Including Dedicated Young Adult Librarians on Staff in the Public Library by YALSA with Audra Caplan.

- The Importance of Young Adult Services in LIS Curricula, by Don Latham.
- The Need for Teen Spaces in Public Libraries, by Kimberly Bolan.

YALSA Issue Briefs:

- Available at [www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/teens-need-libraries). They include:
  - o Libraries Help Keep Teens Safe Online
  - o Libraries Help Teens Build STEM Skills
  - o Teens Need Libraries

**YALSABlog:** <http://yalsa.ala.org/blog>

Get news and updates from YALSA. Exchange ideas with other YA specialists.

**YALSA's National Research Agenda**

<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/research/researchagenda>

**YALSA's National Guidelines**

<http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines>

**YALSA Electronic Discussion Lists:** <http://lists.ala.org/sympa/lists/divisions/yalsa>

**YALSA Wiki:** <http://wikis.ala.org/yalsa/index.ph>

Practical information and tips for librarians and library workers serving teens, written by librarians and library workers

**YALS: *Young Adult Library Services*:**

[www.yalsa.ala.org/yals/](http://www.yalsa.ala.org/yals/)

The official journal of YALSA focuses on issues of concern to those working with teens. Sent to all members and available by subscription. Quarterly.

**Young Adults Deserve the Best: Competencies for Librarians Serving Youth**

[www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/yacompetencies2010](http://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/yacompetencies2010)

What it takes to deliver the best service—skills and knowledge in seven key areas.