

TEEN VOLUNTEERS

Often a teen volunteer program is a key component of a summer reading club for all the parties involved. Teens become involved in library programs in a meaningful way, librarians receive assistance in what often can be time-consuming tasks, and children benefit from more attention. There are several ways of using teen volunteers in your library, some of which are presented here.

What is a teen volunteer program?

Many libraries have programs in which middle and high school students are given the opportunity to serve their community. Your teen volunteer program will depend upon the interests of teens in your community, the types of jobs you need teens to do and the comfort level of your staff in managing teens.

Why use teen volunteers?

The main reason to use teens as volunteers is that teens often are eager to become involved. Creating opportunities for teens to do something useful in the library is a sure-fire way to get teens into your building. They are eager to take on responsibility and to show everyone what they can do. Volunteering is an activity that fits perfectly with the developmental stage teens are in. They are ready to handle increased responsibility within a structured environment. They are searching for ways to make a difference in the world around them. Playing an active role in the services offered at the local library empowers teens.

Teen volunteering has many benefits. In the midst of a busy summer reading club, librarians can teach teen volunteers to do some of the more routine duties and so have more time for other tasks. Teen volunteers are positive role models for younger children who use the library. Adult members of the community often are glad to see teens volunteering at the library because it shows that teens care about their community. For teen volunteers, the projects may be fun and provide much-needed community service hours.

How do you start a teen volunteer program?

It is important to set goals for your teen volunteer program. Start small. Identify one or two ways that teens can help in your library. Decide how many volunteers you'll use and exactly what tasks they'll do. Then let teens sign up. You'll probably find that you have to turn some away. You may decide to enlist teen volunteers on a first-come, first-served basis. You also may decide to interview prospective volunteers. After you've got the number of teens you want, take some time to train them. Clearly outlining the goals of your volunteering project and your expectations of the teen volunteers will minimize the problems you might encounter. Included in this manual are some forms you may adapt for your own Teen Volunteer Program.

What can teen volunteers do in a library?

Volunteer programs at libraries can take many forms. Teens fill various roles in libraries, from shelving materials to giving public relations advice.

Here are some ideas for using teens in your library:

- 1. Help with running your children's summer reading program.** Teens can distribute prizes, mark reading logs, count books or minutes read and file reading logs. Teens are invaluable because they are role models for younger kids.
- 2. Assist in programs for children.** Teens can prepare materials and help set up program spaces. Teens also can assist younger kids in craft programs, helping them to cut, paste and create.
- 3. Plan and implement events for children.** Besides helping with programs that librarians plan, teens have great fun taking part in the planning process. They can come up with game ideas, recommend activities and prepare signs and publicity. Some events that have proven successful with teen volunteers: Library Carnival, book character birthday parties and theme parties.
- 4. Assist in programs for teens.** Teens can help plan events for their peers. They can help set up supplies. They also can teach their peers a new skill such as beading, juggling or making balloon animals.
- 5. Shelf-reading.** Teens can take care of a specific area of the library, performing shelf reading on a weekly basis. Letting teens participate gives them a sense of ownership in the library.
- 6. Processing library materials.** Teens can help library staff by affixing labels, helping with discards and cleaning materials.

Tips for Running a Successful Teen Volunteer Program

Remember that the volunteer program is a service your library offers to teens. Don't expect everything you ask teens to do to run smoothly. Expect teens to give their best effort. Help teens solve problems as they arise. Remember that a paid staff member is ultimately responsible for the activities of all teen volunteers. Keep these tips in mind as you develop your volunteering program.

- 1. Set guidelines for teen volunteers.** Let them know what you expect of them, from the tasks they'll perform to appropriate dress. Teens need to know the rules. Creating a Teen Volunteer Contract is a good way to ensure that teens are aware of the rules and responsibilities of volunteering.
- 2. Keep track of the time teens serve.** Many teens need to have a formal record of their community service. Keep a record of each volunteer's activities and the time spent volunteering at your library so that you easily can write letters of recommendation for your volunteers. You can use a form like the Teen Volunteer Time Sheet for this purpose.

3. **Create a system for staff to notify one another of problems that arise.** Having a formal method in place will prove useful in the unfortunate event that you need to take disciplinary action or release a volunteer from service. Creating a confidential record for each teen is a good way to keep track of staff feedback about individual volunteers. You can use a form like the Teen Volunteer Record for this purpose.
4. **Keep track of behavior that is outstanding and behavior that is disappointing.** If you need to take disciplinary action, this record will prove invaluable. You can use a form like the Teen Volunteer Record for this purpose. Another method of keeping track of problems is to create a confidential notebook. Staff members can leave notes for the volunteer coordinator in the notebook. Always inform teens that you have made a notation about their behavior in the confidential record. This is a great way to provide them with positive feedback about their efforts. It also can be a good way to let them know they need to modify their behavior in order to remain volunteers. Never write something in the teen's record that you would not want the teen and his/her parent(s) to see.
5. **Ensure that confidential records remain confidential.** Separate qualitative comments made by the professional staff from the time sheets. Make sure that only staff have access to confidential records.
6. **Give teen volunteers a way to discuss problems.** Let teens know that they can talk with you about any problems that arise.
7. **Take pictures of your teen volunteers.** Get permission from teens to take their pictures so that you get to know their faces and names. If possible, affix each teen's picture to his/her time sheet. Create displays of teen volunteers in action to recognize their efforts and create publicity for the program.
8. **Create name badges or stickers that identify teens as volunteers.** This cultivates an awareness of the program and lets patrons know that they're dealing with an unpaid volunteer rather than a staff member.
9. **Let staff know what to expect from teen volunteers.** Educate staff about all aspects of the teen volunteer program, so the teens' work will not come as a surprise.
10. **Supervise teen volunteers.** Create situations in which teens are challenged but also supported. Teen volunteers should be carefully trained in new tasks and should be monitored as they perform the tasks. Make sure you know where your teen volunteers are all the time and what they're doing. As you get to know your volunteers, you may feel comfortable giving them more freedom. Be careful not to give teens more freedom than *they* are comfortable with.

Teen Volunteer Training Session Feedback

Name

Training session attended: 6/25/2002

6/26/2002

6/27/2002

Preferred volunteering assignment:

Circle all that interest you.

Behind the scenes

Summer Reading—Kids

Summer Reading—Teens

Program Assistant

Preferred day of the week and time slot:

Please indicate as many time slots as possible

i.e., Monday 9-12 or Tuesday 3-6

Conflict dates:

Dates of vacations, Dr. appointments, other conflicts. Only list those dates that are relevant!

For example, if you're able to work every Monday from 6-9 p.m. except for one day.

Teen Volunteer Agreement

The _____ Library has developed a program for area teens to volunteer during the summer. Teen Volunteers provide assistance with the children's and teens' summer reading clubs and with events at the library. Teen Volunteers are positive examples for younger patrons and encourage library usage and a love of reading. Before beginning their service to the community, Teen Volunteers must sign the Teen Volunteer Agreement.

As a Teen Volunteer at the _____ Library, I agree to the following:

1. I will arrive at the library at my assigned time. If I am unable to do this, I will call _____ (phone number) and notify _____ (staff member). If at all possible, I will do this at least 24 hours before I am scheduled to arrive.
2. I will remain at my post until my time slot has ended. If I am unable to do this, I will speak with the librarian on duty.
3. I will speak with _____ (staff member) if I need to make changes to my schedule. I will swap time slots and cover for other volunteers only with the approval of a librarian.
4. I will perform my duties as assigned. If I have questions about what I am to do, I will ask the librarian on duty.
5. I will refer patrons to the librarian on duty when questions arise that are not directly related to my assignment.
6. I will be courteous and respectful of the library patrons, staff and other volunteers.
7. I will use the phone only with the permission of a librarian.
8. I will use the computer only with the permission of a librarian.
9. I will not bring food or drink into the library, with the exception of water bottles with caps.
10. I will wear a volunteer nametag while I'm working.
11. I will wear appropriate attire to the library (no bathing suits).
12. I will focus on my assignment while I'm working. I will keep socializing to a minimum. Out-of-town visitors and friends are welcome to use the library but may not participate as volunteers.
13. *I will never complain that I am bored.*

Print name

Signature

Date

Suggested Read and Grow Programs Involving Teen Volunteers

Title of Program:	Community Garden
Materials:	Large pots or window baskets Trowels or large plastic cups Topsoil Pebbles Plants Watering can Water
Preparation:	<p>Scan your children's and teen areas for appropriate places for plants. Think about your library's supply of shade and sunlight. Buy pots or window boxes that will fit the spaces you have.</p> <p>Purchase a variety of colorful plants that require the amount of sunlight you have in your space. Arrange these plants in the programming area by color or by plant type.</p> <p>Tape plastic tablecloths, paper or large black plastic garbage bags to tables. Tape the gardening instructions to each table. Neatly arrange all of the gardening supplies in the programming area.</p>
Directions:	<p>Teens at each table will work together to create a window box that will be displayed in the library throughout the summer.</p> <p>Ask teens to arrange themselves around prepared tables. Depending on the number and size of pots or window boxes, teens may work alone or in groups.</p> <p>Explain to teens that they will be arranging the plants in the window boxes. Ask them to select a container to work with and then to select some plants for the container.</p> <p>Have teens place an inch of large pebbles in the bottom of the planter for drainage.</p> <p>Because the plants come in dirt, the planters need very little extra topsoil. The teens can use trowels or large plastic cups to add topsoil to the planter beneath and around the plantings.</p>

Instruct the teens to space the plants to give them a little room to grow.

Variation:

Decorate the planters one week and add the plants to them the next week. Teens could paint ceramic pots or wooden planters to fit the summer reading theme or the theme of the teen area. Items could be glued to the planters as decorations.

Find an outdoor spot near the library or in an area park where you have permission to plant flowers, shrubs or trees. Arrange for teens to meet you there and plant.

Title of Program: Library Carnival

The most important aspect of this program is teen participation! Let the teens dream up ideas. Tell them about the carnival and ask them for *their* input and their plans for creating the various games. Let the teens direct the carnival planning and the creation of the activities. Your carnival may include some of the activities listed in the Opening/Closing Events section, pg. 56, but let the teens brainstorm first.

Materials: Craft supplies such as large rolls of paper for signs, construction paper, markers, scissors and paint.

Other supplies depend on the activities at the carnival. Teens can bring recyclable items such as tin or soda cans from home.

Preparation: Sign up volunteers for the program. Many volunteers will be necessary, so encourage volunteers to enlist their friends or siblings.

Arrange a schedule of dates in which teens will meet to organize the carnival. Set a schedule with tasks for each meeting. A staff member should be present at each of these meetings to provide focus. Suggested topics of meetings:

Meeting 1: Brainstorm ideas for carnival. Types of activities, crafts, foods, etc.

Meeting 2: Narrow focus, selecting easy-to-prepare activities. Determine how the group will realize these objectives. Create posters and banners to publicize carnival.

Meeting 3: Create signs for the event. Each game or food stand needs a sign.

Meeting 4: Assign tasks at carnival. Learn any special skills necessary to perform tasks.

Meeting 5: Final meeting. Gather all supplies, set up carnival for a run-through. Make sure everything needed is present.

Program Description: Teen Volunteers will plan and run a carnival for young patrons. The teens will brainstorm ideas and then work as a team to implement their plans. A staff member working with the teens will keep them focused and help them solve problems.

Variation:

This program could be done on a large or small scale. It could include crafts, games, rides, food, music or performers. It could be an all-day event, an evening event or an event that lasts a few hours.

Title of Program:	Read Together, Grow Together
Materials:	Name tags for teens and kids Craft supplies Age-appropriate books
Preparation:	Sign up children for the program. Sign up volunteers for the program. Select an easy craft and set up materials for group. Select books for the volunteers to read to the kids. (See the preschool and school-age programming sections for book suggestions and craft ideas, pp...)
Directions:	The teen and senior volunteers assist the children with the craft. It would be best to have them working one-on-one while the parents browse in the library. After they've completed their craft projects and have gotten to know each other, the pairs of children and volunteers can read a book together. Pairs should sit in a visible area and should be supervised by a professional staff member.
Variation:	This program could be done once or as a series of events with pairs continuing to work together throughout the summer.

Program Title: Talk It Up! A Book Discussion Program for Teens

Talk It Up! is a book-discussion program for teens that was developed by Judah Hamer, former young adult services coordinator of the Bergen County Cooperative Library System. The Talk It Up! program consists of a series of six sessions and is open to teens entering the sixth through the eighth grades. Each one-hour session includes the following components: an icebreaker activity, a book discussion and a team-based game. The icebreakers and games are in the School-Age Activities section, pg. 137 and the tips for leading a book discussion are copied in a modified form here.

Young Adult Book Discussion Groups

Young adult book-discussion group meetings should have a casual tone, distinct from discussions that take place in classrooms. Creating this atmosphere means the facilitator must keep the discussion moving and organized without appearing obtrusive. To do this, let the interests and reactions of the participants direct the discussion. Listen, encourage sharing and provide positive feedback during the meeting. Select books with teen appeal and devise questions that are intended to elicit a reader's reaction to the characters, events and themes of a novel. These are different from comprehension questions, which test the reader's literal understanding of a text. (Remember those pop quizzes your English teacher used to give?) Reader-response questions open up a conversation. Comprehension questions do not encourage the sharing of thoughts and ideas; consequently, they should be avoided. If you're nervous about facilitating a discussion, jot down a few responses as you create the questions. Considering your own ideas and reactions will help you guide the discussion smoothly. Include general questions about the readers' response to the novel as a whole, to the characters and to different aspects of the story.