

Club PROGRAMS *for* Teens



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An imprint of the American Library Association
Chicago 2015

www.alastore.ala.org

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ISBN: 978-0-8389-1334-5 (paper)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Alessio, Amy J.

Club programs for teens : 100 activities for the entire year / by Amy Alessio and Heather Booth.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8389-1334-5 (print : alk. paper) 1. Young adults' libraries—Activity programs—United States. 2. Libraries and teenagers—United States. 3. Library clubs—United States. I. Booth, Heather, 1978- II. Title.

Z718.5.A425 2015

027.62'60973—dc23

2015004189

Cover design by Kimberly Thornton. Images © Shutterstock, Inc.

Text design by Alejandra Diaz in the Avenir, Alabama, and Charis SIL typefaces.

♾️ This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48–1992 (Permanence of Paper).

Printed in the United States of America

19 18 17 16 15 5 4 3 2 1



DEDICATION

For my family, and all teens who help make
libraries into vibrant communities.

— AA —

For Paul, at last.

— HB —

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INTRODUCTION

Overview and Using This Book

Welcome to *Club Programs for Teens*. A good problem for libraries to have is a group of teens that grows increasingly bigger at each program until staff are unsure how to manage it. A huge group is still a challenge, and developing a teen club is a solution. What is a Teen Club? In many cases, it is a popular teen school or public library event that the teens want to revisit based on specific passions, such as writing, food, gaming, fashion, or green initiatives. The club could meet weekly, monthly, quarterly, or on a different recurring schedule agreeable to the staff and teens. Many times, a teen club grows from a successful teen program or develops from a strong teen interest in a particular topic, like anime and manga. Focusing on teen passion may help break up the unwieldy group into manageable sessions while encouraging teens to return and to focus on their interests at the library.

Why Should I Have Teen Clubs in My Library?

Teens have tight schedules these days and are used to regularly attending rehearsals, sports practices, and classes. Offering a consistently meeting club will help them remember to attend. Teens who come will get to know library staff and teens from other areas. Each person will learn more about others outside her immediate purview—and about how the library can serve her. This benefits the library in several ways. As more meetings on a theme continue, interest in that subject will grow, and library materials on that subject will be used more widely. Attending teens, as well as parents who bring them, will be exposed to new and more services and deepen their connection to the library. Teens will get to sample and explore new interests without investing time and money in expensive classes and lessons their family may not be able to afford, and parents will appreciate this aspect.

There are also benefits for library staff from offering a monthly club for teens. Staff will gain continuous feedback from teens—sometimes more than they would wish! That feedback will help staff plan more targeted and successful services for that age group. They will be able to have the regulars begin to lead programs and even apply to the library for future work positions.

A themed club makes planning programs easier, just as a summer reading theme can help inspire programs. If staff know a core group of teens will be coming each month, they can be confident that ideas with that theme will be favorably received. Offering a fashion or crafting program by itself may not garner teen attendance, depending on the date, time, or local competition for teen attention. But staff can have the club members engage in that activity at their prearranged time and know that some will be attending for sure.

Attending a library club contributes to healthy teen development. In addition to sharing positive experiences with the library and staff, a consistently attending teen will feel as if he belongs. Providing feedback and helping to run activities promote leadership skills and offer teens a feeling of ownership in the successful group. Getting to know teens from other schools expands their knowledge of their community and diversity.

A teen may have an interest in writing, but might not have time to add a creative writing course to a heavy school workload. Attending a library club allows her to write some poetry without worrying about a grade. Teens will feel comfortable trying new activities or library services within the comfort of club meetings or with library staff they have come to know well.

Tips for Building Clubs

Although library staff hope that teens will flock to the first, publicized meeting of a new group, it often takes some time for a club to grow. This section will provide ideas on starting a new group or growing a teen club organically from existing and popular teen services.

LET TEENS LEAD THE WAY

You know when teens are really interested in a topic. Registration lists will fill, many teens will come and want to stay beyond the formal program, materials on those topics will be checked out. Did way too many teens come to the Battle of the Bands night? Did the room fill for the *Divergent* party? Did the volunteering fair bring in more teens than there were jobs available? These are possible subjects for clubs. Before setting up a schedule of meetings in the next brochure, try some surveys with teens to discover when they can come and what topics intrigue them. Surveys may reach regular library users only, so be sure to try some methods to reach folks with the themed interest beyond regular library visitors. Post information about a new crafting for charity group with local church youth groups, craft stores, school volunteering clubs. Invite respondents to follow a link or fill out a paper survey. Host focus groups

at different dates and times, or even at community areas such as a YMCA by offering pizza or snacks for teens who give up thirty to forty-five minutes providing feedback about a new library club. Poll library regulars about topics the schools do not cover, such as scrapbooking and photography, food clubs, and more. Or perhaps the schools offer those topics, but events or classes are hard to attend or so popular and crowded that teens would welcome another outlet for their interests at the library.

BUILD A BASE

To help kick things off, offer club meetings after other popular recurring events. For example, start the new Scrapbooking and Photography Club meetings right after the Teen Advisory Board meetings, especially if you know teens on the board may be interested. Offer incentives such as a couple of dollars off fines to teens who bring a friend to meetings. Have punch cards for meetings with prizes for frequent visitors.

Make meetings both productive and fun. Formal meetings with rules will turn off teens because of similarities to school. Basic rules, however, can be established to keep order without making participation rigid. Make some time to offer suggestions or go over club business at the beginning over snacks, followed by the themed activity, to satisfy both staff needs and teen interests.

Offer rewards to consistently attending members or to those who bring friends. This can be done by establishing a line of communication, such as e-mail or a Facebook, Yahoo!, Twitter, or Tumblr feed on the club. This gives staff a way to send reminders about the club and to keep teens tuning in to look for little bonuses, such as a fine-free coupon or a prize for the first few teens who respond to a request for feedback.

Be flexible. Welcoming newcomers each time keeps the groups going. Publish topics, speakers, or activities for some upcoming meetings to attract new folks. And be smart with these specialized promotions. A Green Teens Club is not going to appreciate lots of paper handouts. A Food Fan's attention will be caught by pictures of food. If attendance at a new club is slow to pick up, work on targeted promotion. Each club idea in this book will provide tips for promoting the club to teens.

Finally, try to build a constant connection with your new group. You can keep momentum going between meetings with displays, online links and lists, or tweets. Teen club members should see something new every couple of weeks at the library or on the websites that would appeal to them. Don't be afraid to try new formats. Most programs described in this book have online options or variations, and these can help inspire ideas. Are any teens visiting the library website or Facebook pages? Give them a reason to do so and keep trying. Invite teens to make their own video clips or tutorials on club topics to get attention. Libraries are always on the edge of new formats—show teens the truth of this.

KEEP IT REAL—FOR YOURSELF AND THEM

Planning for clubs can be easier than planning stand-alone programs. After a while, your base will be attending, and you just have to keep them interested with new session ideas. Teens who are coming will also have suggestions or may want to spend

a couple of sessions on a popular topic. You should build on their suggestions. This will save you time and help build the group's popularity. Telling teens that their ideas could be implemented in the next fiscal year means nothing to them. Try to follow their suggestions as quickly as reasonably possible and let them know their suggestions are happening. This could be as simple as offering another session on a popular topic or activity, so they can work more on projects and try to do things differently.

No one has time to offer twelve clubs a year, and no teen has time to attend all those. If you simply don't have the time to offer one more thing, try some variations or online ideas or look hard at other offerings to see if programs can be combined or rescheduled.

Also, be sure to get help when you need it. We are definitely not experts on all the topics in this book. Amy Alessio, for example, hired a former teen art club member to run her computer animation classes as he had those skills. Teens like it when other teens teach. Is one teen really good at a craft? Solicit his help. Teens who teach can use the experience on résumés and applications, and if the library cannot pay them a fee, perhaps they would agree to be rewarded in other ways, such as with prizes. Some programs in this book require expert teachers, though not many. Self-Defense Basics in the Active Teens Club does require an expert, but Stop Motion Animation may not, with the help of tutorials. Teens often use the tutorials at home, so why not in a group where they can also help each other? In situations where your teens are eager to learn something but you lack a teen expert or funds to hire someone, do consider jumping in yourself as a facilitator for teens' own exploration instead of as an instructor. In doing so, you can demonstrate to teens that learning and trying new things are lifelong processes and that it's okay to try and fail and try again.

GIVE IT TIME

Groups generally require four to six months to catch on, which can be frustrating during the school year and as teens grow and move on to new sports and activities. But, it takes a while for new things to grow. Offering a club for a few months and then breaking off because of low attendance is not realistic. Staff time is gold, but give clubs a chance. If no one is coming, try a new time and date or even a quarterly schedule at first. Try out topics weekly or monthly in the summer to test the waters.

Try to build in flexibility for the future. The only constant in working with teens is change. A successful program this year may not be next year. Budgets need to be realistic but not rigid. Expect that staff will also change. Keep a file of ideas for future events or for programs that need to stop for a while or combine. Although administrative changes can be big surprises, often there are clues that new procedures are coming. For example, an administrator who has made it clear that she is not keen on craft programs may pull funding in favor of technology-themed events. Be prepared to morph those programs into something like Creative Computing to keep the teens and the administrator happy.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A CLUB DOES NOT WORK OR STOPS WORKING?

Teens are only teens for four to seven years if library services cover junior and senior high school ages. A group that is proactive and serious about art programs may age and fizzle out if no younger teens take up the interest. A group is no longer working when teens are not coming up with new ideas or when only a few come each month and just want to do a favorite social activity like playing board games and snacking. Although there is a place for those types of casual programs in the school or public library, they are not the focus of a club. Adult groups stall and change also—consider a book discussion group in which members who read each week and contribute ideas and discussion move away. What happens next?

Make sure the club is changing with the teens. If the same teens attend the Teen Advisory Board (TAB) for a few years, their interests and ability to work together are going to change. Do not stick to the same meeting procedures and rules. Even snack preferences and goals of the group are going to change. Certainly the goals and budgets of the library may change with new boards and personnel. Adaptability garners success and results in less stress for staff members.

Never permanently cancel a group that is no longer relevant. “I tried a teen group for a while, but no one came, so I canceled it” does not cut it with teen services. Think of how much technology has changed in the past five years. Have library programs and services kept in tune with teen trends as well? Teen services require constant feedback and adjustment.

All libraries have experienced failed teen programs that no one attends or in which things do not turn out well. Know when to change, end, and move on. Do not give up on programs, just reorganize them or take a break for a few months. Maybe the Teen Tasters session was so popular that a core group wants to do that at every meeting of the Food Fans Club. Break that group off into a separate club of themed tastings after the Food Fans Club meeting. Maybe lots of teens have grown out of the Teen Advisory Board and only a handful are attending who just want to talk about anime and manga. Help them form their own Anime and Manga Club, and get out the surveys to find out what younger teens want in terms of a Teen Advisory Board. After a break, start the board again with a new focus and possibly a new date and time. If you decide to take a break from a club for a few months, circulate a survey about times, dates, and interests among the teens who are coming to the library to see if a new time is needed or if the club needs a new focus. If a few teens are upset that the old club has been taken down, use their interests and efforts in planning a new one. Engage their help in volunteering in the meantime to keep them coming in to the library.

When it is time to restart an old club with a new focus or to establish a new club, spend time and effort on publicity—even more so than for other programs. Consider offering simple, easy applications for clubs even if all teens are accepted. Having teens list their interests and reasons for coming will solidify a vague interest in a poster they saw at the library into a commitment. Having teens fill out an application also weeds out those whose parent(s) may be forcing them to attend. If a public library

is starting the program, staff should be sure that schools are well informed about it. Having expert speakers from school staff for clubs is a good way to keep that communication going—for example, you might pay a high school art teacher to run a creative teen event at a meeting.

There can be times when it seems no one is coming to teen programs. Offer a virtual club or chat times, or a virtual Teen Advisory Board, with rewards or occasional face-to-face meetings to keep feedback coming in until a new group of teens can be recruited for events.

Finally, sometimes clubs and programs are ended by administrators. Can you reach those teens online or through events that meet less often? Do topics need adjustment to better tie in with current library themes? Dealing with this reality can be painful, but a new, exciting program may come from it, so do not let it discourage you.

How to Use This Book

In each of the themed chapters in this book, we present a club for teens with at least seven ideas for meetings, with most programs offering suggestions for variations and online aspects. It is expected that some of the topics from other clubs may cross over or that clubs might not meet for all twelve months of the year. Libraries that do not have the staff or space to offer a monthly club on some of these themes can try out a described meeting as a stand-alone program or select programs across themes to accommodate other themes, such as state summer reading initiatives.

The Read-a-Latte Books and Media discussion group is presented differently than the other clubs. Ideas for twelve themes, such as *Out of This World* (science fiction) or *Teens Get Real with Reading* (nonfiction), are described, rather than broken out into separate sessions. The Read-a-Latte Books and Media Club will use the same format for each meeting with little in the way of themed props other than snacks or simple decorations. Libraries that are new to club programming may well be accustomed to, or at least familiar with, book clubs and can easily use the Read-a-Latte format to discover which topics and interests held by book club teens might be spun off into new clubs.

Libraries with long-standing Teen Advisory Boards or other popular clubs will find further ideas in the chapter titled *More Ideas for Established Clubs*. Ideas for other groups in that chapter pull from themes throughout this book to offer suggestions for advisory boards, writing clubs, creative or crafty groups, teens who meet to discuss volunteering and community service projects, money management clubs, technology-themed groups, drama clubs, or a monthly club of teens dedicated to making movies.

Each club description begins with an introductory page offering some ideas for Power Promotion and listing any Crossover Programs. Crossovers are sessions described for one club that will appeal to at least one other club as well. For example, *Ancient Fashions*, a session from the *Fashionista Teens Club* in which teens learn about ancient

Greek and Roman fashions and make togas and laurel wreaths, should also appeal to members of the Traveling Teens Club. A session on Rain Barrel Decoration for the Green Teens Club could also be a session for the Crafting for Charity Club. The two clubs could meet together for that topic, or the same idea could be used twice, saving staff preparation time.

Details for each club program are provided under the following headings.

CROSSOVER

If the meeting topic could also be used for a different club, that information is provided here as well as on the introductory page.

SHOPPING LIST

Many ideas presented in this book require no purchases, but audiovisual equipment may be needed, such as a laptop and projector.

MAKE IT HAPPEN

This part presents activities for each club meeting. Some of the sessions will require teens to view tutorials, and you will want to view them first. Information may change online.

It is expected that promotion of events takes place three to six months prior in public libraries especially, but some of the activities include extra suggestions to help advertise the events.

VARIATIONS

Most club session ideas are followed by variations, both physical and virtual, for different library situations, such as school library settings.

ONLINE

Many club session ideas also contain ways to continue the topic online after the meeting.

RESOURCES

Some club sessions have resources listed here, but many include links to tutorials or information in the Make It Happen section. With many nonfiction topics, you are always encouraged to pull some general books, magazines, or media on those topics for interested teens, but no list of titles is required for these programs.

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