

# DRAWING TEENS IN: BEST PRACTICES

## Helpful Hints for Drawing Teens into the Library:

- The number one suggestion is FOOD – it is expensive, and it can get messy, but teens are much more likely to attend an event if they know there will be some kind of instant gratification for their participation. Particularly if it's the edible kind.
- Don't just talk to teens about what's happening at the library: talk to their parents! Often, parents are the ride to the library, and if you are able to get them to understand the value of your programs, they are more likely to encourage their teens to participate and provide them with the transportation to do so.
- Offer service projects for teens to participate in at your library. Need some shelves shifted? Have a new book display you might need some extra help with? See if any teens want to help out. Ownership is a big part of participation for teens – if they feel like they own a space or a project, they are much more likely to want to be there. If you feel really ambitious, see if you can start a Teen Volunteer program at your library, with teens that volunteer on a regular basis for event set-up and facilitation.
- Find out who the advisors are for different school clubs – like Key Club (community service), National Honors Society, robotics teams, Drama/Glee Clubs, sports teams, etc. See if you can incorporate the focus of one of these groups into your event, and seek group help in making the event happen! Not only will you have engaged teens in community service, you will also have built-in program participants!
- Attend open houses, family literacy nights, freshman orientations, school registrations, etc., etc. Become as recognizable of a face as possible for the teens in your community, so they feel comfortable coming up to you at the library and asking what's going on, asking for book recommendations, or simply to say hello. Other teens will see how approachable you are and catch on to your cool factor.
- Advertise EARLY and OFTEN, and not just in your library! Recruit teens to help create eye-catching signs (and maybe even teach them the way around a new design program, like Publisher, while you're at it! – bonus program) and have them distribute flyers to their friends and at their schools (after you get the School District Office's permission, of course). Put notices in the paper, on your website, Facebook and other social media, and in places teens like to frequent – coffee shops, ice cream places, movie theaters, any place with a community board.
- THE MOST IMPORTANT SUGGESTION, though, is to get to know your teens! Watch to see who your “regulars” are at the library; look for patterns in the presence of teens at the library, including certain days of the week and times of day. Program during those peak times, and invite teens face-to-face to join in with what you have going on. See where teens like to hang out in your library – it isn't always the YA rooms. Talk to the regulars and learn their names and interests and see if you can engage them in an activity or program. See what, if anything, they would want to do at the library. And don't be discouraged if they aren't interested in doing anything other than playing on a computer – use that as a springboard for a new program!

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To promote teen programs, I have done the usual by creating posters, tabletop signs, & distributing flyers. However, I have also had my information included on school announcements (usually running for an entire week before the program), and I have contacted specific teachers to have them promote my programs to their students. Word-of-mouth is also an essential part of promoting teen programs because if they know you, then they're more willing to give your program a chance.  
-Samantha, YA Librarian

Send your staff to set up a table at the middle and high schools during lunch. If you can make an announcement about who you are, even better.

-Patricia, Teen Librarian,  
Hussey-Mayfield Memorial  
Public Library, Cincinnati, OH

I would recommend thinking outside the "library" box in terms of collaborations, connections, and locations. Local high school guidance departments, for instance, can be very helpful in terms of spreading the word about programs (i.e., putting up fliers, sending notices to parents, etc.) and securing in-school space for events if the library is too small/too far away, especially if the events are even peripherally academic-related. As another example, if you're thinking about doing some kind of readers' theater, talk to local school drama departments and see if you can team up somehow, in terms of props, sets, costumes, performance locations... You could also offer a teen the opportunity to present on a topic about which he/she/ze is knowledgeable, within reason. Check out what school clubs are doing and how the library could work with them (i.e., if there's a teen anime club at the local high school and your library has a public performance license, see if you could show an anime film at the library and coordinate some activities to go with it, like making candy sushi). The possibilities are endless.  
-Molly, YA Librarian

Some teens might be attracted by an opportunity to help out - whether that means just showing up to help run a program or volunteering because they need community service credits.

If you are able to forge strong, positive bonds with local schools they are great in my city for word-of-mouth and posting our program flyers in their media centers. Each month I send the link out to the pdf of our program flyer to one of the media specialists to post to the media specialist email group for me.  
-Lauren, YA Librarian

One suggestion a member of my teen advisory board had was to advertise events on other relevant local Facebook groups. I also post events on our library's Facebook, of course, but reaching out to other Facebook groups brings in a different audience.  
-Renata, Teen Librarian