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OpenBadges   HĀSTAC

Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA)

Badges for Learning: Competencies for Serving Youth in Libraries
http://www.ala.org/yalsa/badges-learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), a division of the American Library Association, is a national association of librarians, library workers and advocates whose mission is to expand and strengthen library services for teens ages 12 to 18. YALSA works to build the capacity of libraries and librarians to engage, serve and empower teens. YALSA was funded to develop a badge system to help library staff gain skills based on its Competencies for Serving Youth in Libraries by the Badges for Lifelong Learning Competition.

The goal of the YALSA badge system is to recognize, improve, and enhance the skills of library staff working with teens to serve that age group. YALSA's open badges are designed to recognize learning based on YALSA's seven competencies, titled 'Young Adults Deserve the Best: Competencies for Librarians Serving Youth.' For example, to earn the Communication, Marketing, and Outreach badge, library workers can learn how to use Twitter in order to build a professional learning network with teens, colleagues and other community members. Similarly, to earn the Leadership and Professionalism badge, library workers learn what teens need from mentoring and coaching experiences and how to best achieve these outcomes.

TYPE OF BADGE SYSTEM

- our badges are designed to be recognized by employers
- assessment of skills and competencies is based on peer feedback
- badges align to core competencies developed internally by our organization
- our badges recognize both hard and soft skills
- we use rubrics to help assess the competencies
- we plan to incorporate expert feedback and use levels in future phases of design

Lessons learned in developing the badge system include:

- The importance of a learning management system in which the badge activities, tasks, behaviors, and artifacts can live. This system needs to be robust in order to allow for high-level activities to ensure badge earners understand the process as they work towards success.

- The value of seeking community input in developing content and designing, evaluating and issuing badges. YALSA is using a community-based rubric approach for their badge criteria. Earners can gauge the success of the artifacts they develop via rubrics developed for specific tasks and submit work to community members for review. Community members evaluating the work are asked to provide constructive feedback to help in the skill development, understanding, and learning processes of badge earners.

- The need to have early conversations with the web development team and/or tech partners to guarantee that all understand and agree on the process and goals. If that understanding and agreement is not in place then it's important to seek other partners. One of the early challenges in building the badge system was a mismatch with the technology partner they had been paired with as a result of being selected as a winner of the competition. However, since finding a new partner to support the technology component of the badge system, user testing began in January 2014 with a full launch scheduled for March 2014.

Linda Braun

Nicole Gibby Munguia

Q&A with Linda Braun, Educational Technology Consultant, Libraries & Educators Online, and Nicole Gibby Munguia, Program Officer, Continuing Education, YALSA

Tell us about your badge system. What were your original goals for your badge system, and how have they changed as you progressed?

Our goal with the YALSA badging system was to recognize the professional learning and development of those serving teens in libraries (circulation staff, paraprofessionals, support staff, etc). We are always looking to help build up the skill sets of the individuals who work in communities.

The idea was that any library staff member could take part in web-based activities to gain skills - and badges - in the areas covered in each of YALSA's seven competencies. For example, we wanted badge earners to learn how to use Twitter to connect with teens and other community members and earn a badge for **Marketing, Outreach, and Communication**. For gaining skills in building library collections for teens, they could earn a badge for **Knowledge of Materials**. For writing an elevator pitch they could earn a badge in

the area of **Administration**. In our initial plan, the badges would accumulate to help earners unlock an **Expert** badge, awarded to those who completed a combination of challenge assignments.

Currently, in our badging program, badge earners will complete tasks and receive community feedback on the artifacts developed as a part of those tasks. Badges will be awarded when a pre-determined number of positive feedback responses are received by the badge earner via a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" feedback system. Badge earners who do not receive positive feedback will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit their artifacts.

Our current badge system doesn't include badge levels, but we plan to look into building levels into future stages of our system. We are sticking with what we have so we can move on to user testing and gathering feedback, which means postponing the Expert badge for now.

Tell us more about the process of creating your badge system. How did you get started?

Lessons learned in developing the badge system:

- Pick your development team well

- Get on the same page early, especially around goals. Be explicit.

- Listen to partners and stakeholders

- Ask for a lot of feedback throughout the process

- Your learning management system needs to be robust to allow for high level activities

What are your next steps and goals for the future?

For the assessment criteria, we have used rubrics based on the standards laid out in the [Competencies for Serving Youth in Libraries](#) developed by YALSA. We then leave the actual assessment to the community, allowing them to give a badge application a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" based on whether an application meets the criteria within the rubrics.

We softly launched our program with testers starting in late December 2013. We plan to fully launch the system by June 2014, after the testing period ends and any changes that result from the feedback we receive have been implemented.

In terms of introducing the new system to the testers, we've discussed putting together video tutorials to educate badge earners about the process of badge earning and claiming. Our intent is for the badge system to be as self-explanatory as possible; we want to know what the badge testers' experience of the system is without someone instructing them on how to move through the system. It will be necessary to provide an instructional guide because we know the process won't be intuitive right away, and we suspect that those earning the badges are going to come from a wide variety of background with varying levels of tech-savviness.

Our badge system has been designed to help anyone in libraries who needs to better serve teenagers. Originally, our badge system was designed for public libraries, but after being approached by a few school libraries wanting to use our system in their own districts, we gathered testers from both public and school libraries. Schools are interested in using our badge system for professional development among their staff, pushing the badges out in whatever ways are appropriate for their professional

communities. Staff from both public and school libraries will be able to use our system once it is fully launched.

At the moment, our system is very specific to the library staff YALSA serves, but we'd like to open it up for expansion. We also want our artifacts to be connected to community feedback, and to allow for flexibility based on how the system is perceived by those who might consume it – but we're not there yet. We're still approaching the user testing stage, so there will surely be more changes and flexibility before we scale the project up.

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What were some of the challenges you faced in this process? How did you overcome them?

As a result of the DML Competition, we were originally partnered with another organization to provide the technical resources to help us build our system, but due to differences in goals and capabilities, we parted ways and had to start again with our badge system. If you're looking to partner with other organizations to assist in the technical or other aspects of building your system, this can't be said enough: ask as many questions as you need to so you can be sure you will be supported in the ways you need to be to allow you to develop your system.

We're constantly learning new things about how the system works, and as a result we have had to adjust our expectations and expect to reach expert level badges in future iterations.

How has your community reacted to the implementation of badges? How will this feedback affect your future involvement with badges?

We recently presented at a forum, talking about our badge system and some of the challenges we'd faced, and asked participants for feedback and ideas. Something interesting about our assessment method is that it is left to the community to assess applicants based on the rubrics of the ALA competencies. We found in our presentation to the forum that our "thumbs up / thumbs down" system raised concerns that individuals assessing the badge submissions might not give a "thumbs up" when they should - or give a "thumbs down" when they shouldn't. We're just going to have to see how this actually works before we'll know enough about the validity of a badge being earned based on the community engagement piece.

Certain elements of our system were confusing to participants at the forum, but they had some great ideas and feedback. For example: at the moment, we use rubrics for assessment of the badge earning process; one suggestion was to change to a numbered scale for success. If someone was searching our artifact database, they could sort the results based on how "good" or "bad" the badges were on a scale of 1 to 10, based on community feedback. We want to build a database of artifacts that people can search through to find examples of good service to teens within a professional library setting.

One of the key messages we received when we presented the badges to focus groups in the community is: don't make this too easy. Many respondents urged us to create a rigorous program, more than we anticipated they would want. So our badges will not be quick to earn – when the system does go out to the testers, it could take a week or a month for them to get through the various activities.

If you knew then what you know now, what would you have done differently? What advice would you have for someone thinking about implementing Open Badges?

One thing people really need to know is that you don't create a badge program just because you want a badge program - there has to be a need in the market for it, and you really have to think about those needs, otherwise you're basically trying to install a roof on a house without a foundation. This can't be a top-down process.

You also have to think about the entire process - we knew we wanted to award badges for meeting the YALSA competencies, but we didn't think enough about how to get people there. You don't want to start with the badge first, otherwise you're going to reverse-engineer a weaker learning experience. The badge is the thing at the end - what you'll be spending your time and money on is figuring out how to get people there, through activities and so on. The focus should be on the process of a person getting a badge, rather than the badge itself. This includes introductory resources for your badge earners - have in your minds the least tech-savvy members of your communities, and provide them with the most basic instructional materials.

What it all often comes down to is cost: the more complex your badge system is, the more money it's going to cost to roll that system out. Don't let that limit your thinking in terms of what you want your system to be - it's okay to think about what you want it to eventually look like, but you may have to roll it out in stages. Be prepared to factor in all of the associated costs.

Partnering with other organizations to maximize your collective knowledge and resources is a great idea, but make sure you do your research to determine if the organizations you're looking at can support you in the ways you need.
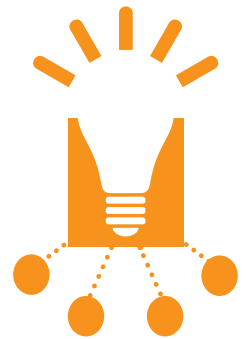
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For More Information:
http://bit.ly/QA-YALSA

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