



Book to Action Overview

Book-to-Action is a new concept in the community book group model provided by many public libraries. Book-to-Action builds on the traditional book club concept, but in addition to providing an opportunity to collectively read and discuss a book, Book-to-Action enables readers to put their new-found knowledge into action by engaging in a community service project related to the book's topic.

This program is designed for all ages with book suggestions made in each of five topical areas for five different groups: adults, older youth, middle youth, younger youth, and families.

LSTA sub-grants will be awarded to up to 10 South Carolina public libraries for up to \$3,000 to host and report on a SC Book-to-Action program.

Topics for South Carolina's 2014 Book-to-Action program

Protecting the Environment

Rescuing an Animal

Sowing Seeds, Urban Farming and Healthy Eating

Health and Aging

Homelessness, Poverty, Hunger, and Hard Times

About Book-to-Action

Book-to-Action first launched in Multnomah County California in 2008. After several years of growth and change, the California State Library offered grants across the state to public



libraries implementing their own Book-to-Action programs. This year the South Carolina State Library has adopted a modified version of California's Book-to-Action program.

Public libraries are uniquely positioned to cultivate friendly, casual relationships with our library customers that are critical to fulfilling our role as a community hub. On a daily basis, we meet and interact with people from all walks of life, with wide-ranging interests, talents, and needs. At the same time, the library is positioned to survey the activities of local organizations that seek the participation of local residents in community-betterment projects and campaigns. Add to that our knowledge of outstanding, engaging books that inform and educate about timely, relevant social issues, and we have all the variables that add up to Book-to-Action.

Book-to-Action will appeal not only to an intergenerational audience of adult readers and volunteers, but can also be directed to younger community members: students who attend local schools and after-school groups.

At the heart of this program is selecting a good book, a book that not only enlightens readers about a socially relevant subject, but also pulls readers in from the first page. We offer a list of books on a variety of topics that come recommended by readers, librarians, booksellers, and publishers. It's not intended to be a comprehensive list, but a starting place.

Your Library's Book-to Action Program

This toolkit provides a step by step process for implementing a program in your community. Grant funding is available to assist with expenditures such as book purchases, promotion, or speaker stipends. You will start with a grant application, then proceed through a series of activities that will lead your discussion group to the choice of a meaningful project for your community. The tips contained in the following pages will ensure the success of your program.

The State Library will provide templates for evaluating your program's success, and materials for promoting your program (bookmarks and flyers.)

The State Library is also looking for groups interested in digitally documenting the local Book-to-Action events and program. State Library recording equipment is available for checkout, and training can be provided on how to use the equipment as needed.



Tips for Implementing a Book to Action program

In the following section you will find recommendations for all aspects of your Book-to-Action project, from the initial reading and discussion phase through the community activities your group will engage in.

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Tip #1: Allow Ample Time to Plan – But Don't Get Stalled

Allow at least a few months to consider your options and plan accordingly. Develop a rough timeline that will help you select dates and potential activities. Know when not to organize a major activity because of conflicting community events, holidays, or school schedules. And remember, even the most careful planning doesn't mean that everything will work out as you anticipated. If you encounter snags along the way, don't get discouraged. Be willing to compromise and be flexible. Have at least one back-up community-engagement activity in mind, in case, for example, the organization you had hoped to partner with is not available.

Tip #2: Do Some Research

Unless you have a topic and potential book already in mind, start off by doing a brief inventory of the non-profit organizations or informal volunteer networks that are active in your community. Identify national organizations that might have local or regional chapters in your community.

You probably already know a lot of people and organizations whose efforts are making a difference in your community. Contact your citywide volunteer coordinator, if there is one, and find out which organizations are actively recruiting volunteers. It is likely there are potential collaborations within your library or with a city or county level department, perhaps with your library's friends group, a literacy organization, or a department that provides services to residents. Or maybe you are interested in supporting a statewide activity that offers opportunities for local engagement.

Perhaps you'll identify a need in your community that isn't currently being met. Once you start looking, you may be astounded by the number of potential partnerships or community-engagement activities that await you.



Tip #3: Seek Input from Potential Partners and Volunteers

Discuss goals and priorities at the city or county level to help you identify the area of service you will focus on. If you have time, conduct a survey of library members to determine which areas of community service are most popular, and to begin to recruit potential volunteers. Consider forming a Book-to-Action advisory committee composed of library staff members and some of the known movers and shakers in your community who can advise on potential community projects and campaigns. Or consult informally with community leaders to help you evaluate possible partnerships.

It's likely that partnering organizations or members of the community will have more knowledge in the book's subject than you do. Acknowledge their expertise and welcome their involvement. If possible, incorporate a community member with special knowledge or experience as a guest speaker at one of your programs. Perhaps they will feel a deeper level of commitment to the issue, and will be willing to share some of the work involved in program preparation.

You may decide to focus on one subject matter over another based on your assessment of which organizations are most enthusiastic about a partnership, which project or activity is most suitable for recruiting the largest number of volunteers, or which is likely to have the biggest impact in your community.

Determine the terms or requirements of participating partners or co-sponsors. Perhaps you'll want to ask every co-sponsor to make minimum cash contribution towards publicity materials or an author's fee. Or maybe you're more interested in a sponsor making a commitment to promote the Book-to-Action program to their constituents, and doing outreach about the event. Keep in mind that not all non-profit or community organizations you wish to collaborate with will be in the position to participate as equal Book-to-Action program organizers. A worthwhile organizational partner might want to play more of a receiving, rather than an active, role in the program. Just be sure that the organization you work with welcomes volunteers that the library organizes to participate in an agreed upon civic engagement activity. Whatever the requirements are, be as clear as you can at the outset about your expectations, so all parties involved understand the terms of the collaboration.



Tip #4: Understand the Appeal of an Engaging Book

Making your book selection might be the hardest task on your “to-do” list. An ideal book is one that both entertains and educates your community about an important social issue and that can be readily tied to a civic engagement activity. You probably won’t have time to read every book on your selection short list, but be ready to do some sampling. You can only properly endorse a book that you or the selection committee feels enthusiastic about, so give yourself time to do some reading. Chances are if you’re hooked by the first 20-50 pages, others will be too.

Review comments from readers posted on Amazon.com, GoodReads.com, or LibraryThing.com to get a feel for the book’s strengths and weaknesses. Like any book group selection, nothing is going to please every reader equally. Differences of opinion about the book will stimulate interesting and thought-provoking discussions.

This toolkit includes a list of recommended books to get you started. Reading lists invariably leave out overlooked options or become soon outdated, so don’t limit yourself to this list. Use the criteria that guided our selections as a foundation to select a book that speaks to the interests and needs of your community.

Tip #5: Invite the Author or a Subject Expert as a Guest Speaker

If your budget allows, invite the author to your library to enhance the experience of your Book-to-Action participants. Readers often develop a special connection to the featured book when they have an opportunity to meet the author and gain insights about the author’s background and purpose in writing the book. Audience members may become inspired to participate in the Book-to-Action program after they have had a chance to listen to the author or guest speaker.

If possible, make direct contact with the author to make the event arrangements. You will need to determine the fees required by the author and develop a contract specifying the time and date of the presentation, and outlining your expectations, including whether you want the author to make a presentation, read from the book, answer audience questions, or sign books. Make sure you tell the author about the Book-to-Action program. It’s possible the author will offer you a discounted rate, or schedule the event when he or she is in the area for another event, and thus bring down the cost. Or explore the possibility of a joint author event with your local community bookstore.



If the author is in high demand, you might be required to make arrangements through the author's representative, publisher, or speakers' bureau. Authors often set their fees high to reduce the number of inquiries and potential engagements. After all, the business of an author is to write, and presentations take away valuable writing time. Anticipate that the fees for a high-profile author might be prohibitively costly. If that's the case, a good alternative is to invite a subject expert from a nearby college, university, or nonprofit organization.

Find out whether the author prefers to provide copies of the book and handle book sales, or whether the author prefers that the ordering and selling of books be taken care of by a bookstore or third party.

The author event is an important occasion to drum up interest in the civic engagement project. Consider inviting a representative from an organization you will be working with or supporting, to make a passionate pitch for volunteer engagement in a future activity. Circulate a sign-up sheet to gain a commitment from potential volunteers.

Tip #6: Choose a Realistically Achievable Civic Engagement Activity

Embrace your role as a connector, not as an activist, and make that clear to the program participants and volunteers you enlist. Your first priority as a librarian or library support staff member is to keep your library functioning in all the core ways that your constituents depend on. As you get involved in a compelling community service project with huge demands, community members might apply pressure on your library to devote more time than you have. The civic engagement activity you choose to support should be a short-term project aimed at raising awareness about an issue addressed by the book you have selected. Once the civic engagement activity is over, it will be up to community members to decide whether to devote more of their personal time and energy to the issue or community partnership. It's not the library's job to sustain the demanding day-to-day work associated with a challenging social problem, as much as you might wish you could.



Tip #7: Involve Local Schools and Community Colleges

Find out if there are opportunities to partner with teachers or parents to promote the Book-to-Action program in local schools. Contact local community colleges or universities to let them know about the book you have selected, and to encourage them to offer extra credit to their students to attend the author event or participate in the civic engagement activity. Teachers may not have the flexibility to incorporate your book selection in the student curriculum, but if you have enough lead time, you could encourage teachers to devote a classroom lesson to an excerpt from the book. Middle school and high school students are often required to fulfill a certain number of hours of community service, so make sure they know about the civic engagement component of the program.

Tip #8: Be Flexible and Don't Be Afraid to Experiment

Don't feel like you have to have every detail figured out in order to move forward. For example, it can be hard to anticipate how many volunteers you will be able to enlist for a community-based activity you have never organized before. Be frank with both the partnering organizations and your program participants that this is the first time you have organized a Book-to-Action program. Expect that you'll need to make decisions about things you didn't anticipate as you go along.

Book-to-Action is designed as a series of at least two or three events, and you will want to encourage community members to experience the full impact of the program by participating in every aspect of the series: the book discussion, author event, and civic engagement activity. Don't be disappointed, however, when someone participates in only one of the events. Welcome participation at any level.

If you are accustomed to organizing an annual "One Community, One Book" program, consider adding an "action" component to your next series. With the right book selection, a community service project can provide added enhancement and meaning to your program participants.

You are embarking on a learning experience along with your program participants and community partners. Trust that you'll not only learn a lot from your experience, but that everything you learn will better prepare you for your next Book-to-Action program.



Tip #9: It's Okay to Start Small – But Set Long-term Goals

You don't have to have a big budget to organize a Book-to-Action series, though being able to devote some funds to book purchases, outreach materials, and speakers' fees will be helpful. If you've organized a One Book, One Community program, chances are you devoted a significant amount of funding for purchasing books for free distribution to community members. If purchasing books to give away is an option for your Book-to-Action program, great. If not, purchasing 10-15 copies of the book selection for circulation in your library is all you need to get started. Be prepared to help customers locate copies of the book from other nearby libraries, interlibrary loan, or a local bookstore.

Start with modest goals – but keep your eyes on long-term goals for expanding the reach and impact of the program. You're likely to have more success with every Book-to-Action program you organize. Once community members have had a chance to experience the power and potential of the program first-hand, they may be willing to get involved in promoting the next program to their friends and neighbors, and throughout the community.

Tip #10: Form a Partnership with Your Local Bookstores

If you are not already teaming up with a local bookstore to promote author events or other book-related programs, Book-to-Action provides you a perfect opportunity to initiate a partnership. Bookstores are logical partners, willing to help you promote the book selection to their customers, handle book purchases and sales at an author or associated event, and encourage local participation in the series. An independent bookstore is likely to not only share your interest in promoting literacy and "giving back" to the community, but may also have the flexibility to get actively involved in promoting the program. Ask your local bookstores if they will offer a discount on books purchased at their store. (Do this in advance of printing your outreach materials, so you can advertise the discount.) Developing a strong relationship with your local independent bookstore can open up new opportunities for both parties to support each other's success.



Tip #11: Publicize, Publicize, Publicize

Outreach and publicity is essential to the success of your Book-to-Action program. Don't limit publicity to just your library's calendar of events or a poster on the library bulletin board. Book-to-Action offers your library new opportunities to reach out to people who aren't already taking advantage of their local library. Give people a chance to recognize that the library is expanding its role in the community.

In addition to informing organizations whose members will be most interested in your program, you'll want to broadly distribute information about your program in the community.

Develop a press release and send it to every local newspaper, magazine, radio, and television station. Use the Toolkit Press Release Template to help you write a concise announcement. Send it out at least two weeks before your event, or according to the requirements of each media outlet. One or two weeks before the event, make follow-up calls to verify that the press release has been received. Include a high-resolution photograph (300 dpi) of the book cover or author, to increase chances that the announcement stands out on the page, and catches the eye of readers.

Ask if the editors will print an article before the event, or if they might consider attending the event and writing a follow-up report. See if there is a public relations officer at the city or county level willing to assist you with publicity. Make use of city or regional websites, cable channels, billboards, or other government-sponsored media or outreach resources.

Distribute your brochures, leaflets, postcards, and/or posters at local schools, cafes, and community centers. Adapt the Toolkit Brochure Template, or Bookmark Template to advertise your program.

Make use of social networks like Facebook, Flickr, Goodreads, and twitter to expand awareness of the program.

Consider videotaping a special event like the author's presentation for broadcast on the city's or local cable television. Enlist the involvement of skilled camera operators who can make sure that the sound and lighting is optimal for broadcast quality. City or county media specialist employees who have access to high quality cameras and equipment might be willing to provide



this service at a discounted rate, or even for free. If possible, add the DVD for circulation in the library's catalog at a later date.

Tip #12: Enlist Volunteers through VolunteerMatch and at Book-to-Action Events

VolunteerMatch.org is an excellent online resource for attracting volunteers to your Book-to-Action series. Get Involved is a statewide initiative designed to expand the visibility and contributions of skilled volunteers in public libraries. List your volunteer opportunities at www.volunteermatch.org, which will also link your listings to other major volunteer opportunity aggregators that VolunteerMatch partners with. You can list short-term volunteer opportunities, as well as long-term functions. Aim high. Want someone to help with graphic design? Or to be on-site to photograph or film special events? Perhaps you want someone who will manage Book-to-Action publicity or fundraising. You may attract the involvement of a high school or college intern seeking resume-building experience, or a baby boomer looking for a meaningful opportunity to use their special skills and experience to make a difference in their community.

Don't be afraid to ask everyone who shows an interest in the book selection, author event, or other related Book-to-Action events to make a commitment to volunteer in the planned civic engagement activity. Making an open invitation to an audience or group to participate in a civic engagement activity may not yield as many volunteers as you need or hope for. Tell people you need an advance commitment. Send around a sign-in sheet. Send out follow-up emails or make phone calls to ask people to reply with a promise to volunteer on a specific date and time. Participants are much more likely to show up when they're needed if they know they are being counted on.

One of the long-term benefits of engaging volunteers in Book-to-Action projects is that we cultivate future advocates and active supporters of library services.

Tip #13: Invite Diverse Opinions and Manage Controversy

When you focus on a book that highlights a social issue, you can expect that people won't always agree with the author or with each other about the best way to address a social problem. Don't shy away from a book that takes a stand. If the book is well-researched and



supports its arguments for recommended social changes, your library can play an important role in facilitating discussions that allow people to reflect on and either agree with or challenge the book's conclusions. Let your community know that you see your library most importantly as a facilitator of civic discussion. On the other hand, be in touch with your community, and know when to steer clear of particularly divisive issues.

Facilitate discussions that give people permission to respectfully disagree with each other. Diverse opinions will contribute to an interesting discussion. Set some ground rules that discourage judgment, name-calling, the domination of one participant, or a heated disagreement between two parties. Invite people to share information about organizations that are addressing the problem both locally and nationally. If you perceive that someone is trying to "take over" the discussion, emphasize your role in allowing everyone the opportunity to speak and participate. When you see the discussion veering off track, remind people that time is limited, and steer the discussion back on track.

Be sure to let participants know that you value their input and feedback. Be prepared to consider book selections that community members recommend for future programs. The program's success can be measured in part by how much community members feel collective pride in the program outcomes, and whether they feel motivated to get involved in the library's next Book-to- Action program. Invite enthusiastic participants to join in the planning of future programs.

Tip #14: Evaluate Your Program and Stay in Contact with Participants

If you think you might want to organize Book-to-Action programs in the future, it's very important that you find out who attended your first program, and to invite participant feedback. Circulate a sign-in sheet and an evaluation form that allows people to give feedback about the program anonymously, if they wish. Give program participants an opportunity to indicate whether they want to be contacted about future Book-to-Action programs.

Use existing email lists to reach avid readers who are already attending book groups, author events, or other related activities. Those contacts, along with the contacts you collect at Book-to-Action programs, will help you to notify and mobilize Book-to-Action participants and volunteers in the future.



Tip #15: Document Your Library's Book-to-Action Story in Photos and Videos

A picture is worth a thousand words, so make sure you document your events and activities with photographs and, if possible, videos. Write a short summary of what made your program special and meaningful, and what you learned from the experience.

Invite program participants to help you promote a future program by asking them to articulate their experience in front of a camera. It is much more powerful to hear testimonies from those who joined your Book-to-Action program than it is to hear library staff talk about the steps they took to organize a Book-to-Action program. Highlighting the positive experiences of Book-to-Action participants is the best and most authentic advertisement you can produce. Testimonials can both demonstrate how Book-to-Action works, and motivate others to join your future efforts.

Send your success stories to the to help other libraries learn from your experiences. (Fill out "Our Library's Book-to-Action Story" and send it to the South Carolina State Library, with photos or links to videos posted on YouTube or other social networks.)



General guidelines for selecting a book for this project:

- Book should be highly readable and engaging for a general audience, preferably no longer than 350 pages in length;
- Preferably published within the last 3-5 years and available in trade paperback (though hardcovers will be considered; eBook, audio, and Spanish translation formats a plus);
- Subject should address a relevant social issue, without being highly controversial or divisive;
- Book should be readily matched to local civic organizations doing work in a variety of non-profit and civic-service focused areas, or a community-building activity;
- Nonfiction titles will lend themselves to this kind of series if they are inspiring and thought-provoking rather than “how-to” in nature. Fiction will also be considered.
- South Carolina authors are a plus as are authors or subject experts available for appearances at a reasonable cost.

Some exceptions have been made to these guidelines on the recommended reading list. You may select a book that does not appear on the list. We have identified South Carolina authors or South Carolina related books with the symbol (SC) preceding the book title.

You should read published library program materials, including video reviews that can be found online to help you determine if a title is a good choice for your reading community, and adopt or adapt program details as necessary.

In addition to identifying books suitable for adults, we have provided book recommendations for younger readers, which can be selected independently or in concert with an adult selection. The terms related to age (applied very loosely) are: “Younger” (K-3rd grade); “Middle” (4th-7th grade); and “Older” (8th-12th grade).