

Public libraries all across North America are discovering the power of community reads. While different programs may have unique names, a “Big Read” or a “City Read” is a city-wide program that encourages residents to read the same book(s) at the same time to foster discussion, build bridges between communities and generations, and promote the power of literacy. This document compiles best practices shared by public library systems that have taken part in this process.

GETTING STARTED



Selection Process:

- Establish a diverse selection committee.
- Gather recommendations from staff and community members.
- Involve community leaders strategically—library directors, mayors, NGO leadership.
- Consider a community vote, but be mindful about the process.

Staff Input:

- Encourage staff to suggest book titles.
- Involve staff in program planning and execution.
- Identify staff who will be champions of the program and lead programming.
- Ask staff to keep their ears open for community input.

Community Input:

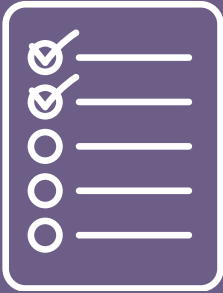
- Utilize surveys, focus groups, and/or community meetings to gather input.
- Engage community leaders and organizations in the selection process.
- Get feedback every year from your book clubs and other library "superusers" on their participation in the program.



Choosing the Book(s):

- Consider a book’s relevance to the community and beyond.
- Ensure the book has broad appeal and fosters discussion.
- Choose a reading level that many members of the community can access.
- Delineating specific criteria (i.e., a regional focus) may make selection easier.
- Think about related events or occasions important to your community that you might want to tie into; for example, your city's anniversary or other citywide/regional celebrations.

PLANNING:



Setting Program Goals:

- Define clear objectives for the Big Reads program.
- Think about creative metrics beyond library data, such as bookstore sales, local bestseller lists, people spotted reading on public transit, etc.
- Align program goals with the library's mission and community needs.
- Use the program to uplift the other work your staff is already doing—celebrate book clubs, tie your local cultural celebrations in where applicable, etc.



Budget:

- Determine a realistic budget for the program.
- Explore funding opportunities and partnerships—sometimes a partner organization can help with costs like speaker fees.



Audience:

- Identify target demographics for the program.
- Consider diverse audience needs and preferences.
- Does the chosen book have versions in different languages?



Key Partners:

- Collaborate with local organizations, schools, and businesses.
- Engage authors, experts, and community leaders as partners.
- Look at the themes in your selected book and think about what new partnerships unique to this title might be possible; for example, a book set on a farm might lend itself to programming with your local gardening clubs.



Key Communications:

- Develop a comprehensive marketing and communication plan.
- Utilize social media, email newsletters, press releases, and posters.
- Utilize networks at the branch level—neighborhood listserves, etc.
- Local media outlets are often interested in Big Read programs—think about giving a particular journalist an "exclusive" on the announcement day or invite a local journalist to moderate a discussion.

IMPLEMENTATION:



Programming Elements:

- Plan a variety of events and activities around the selected book.
- Select a time period where the book can be the major focus for the library.
- Include book discussions, author talks, workshops, and performances.
- Keep it simple if needed—a handful of meaningful programs can make for a rich overall program.
- Sometimes patrons will come to a related program, and not care to read the book—that's okay!

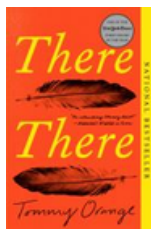


Events:

- Schedule events at varying times and locations.
- Promote events through multiple channels to reach a wide audience.
- Cross-promote at each event and build on your book clubs.
- Think about how you roll out the program.
- Consider offsite events to reach new audiences (i.e. book discussion at a local bar).

Thank you to the following libraries for contributing to this resource:

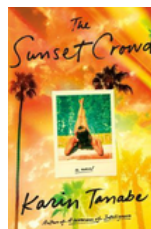
**CHICAGO
PUBLIC
LIBRARY**



One Book, One Chicago launched in fall 2001 as an opportunity to engage and enlighten residents and foster a sense of community through reading. CPL's 2023 pick for One Book, One Chicago was *There, There* by Tommy Orange.



DC Public Library



DC Reads is a DC Public Library program that promotes citywide conversations focused on a single book. DCPL offered three DC Reads written by DC natives last year, the most recent of which was *The Sunset Crowd* by Karin Tanabe.



**San Francisco
Public Library**



One City One Book: San Francisco Reads is a citywide literary event that encourages members of the San Francisco community to read the same book at the same times. Its most recent pick, the 18th One City One Book selection, was *The Chinese Groove* by Kathryn Ma.