THE BASICS OF RUNNING A SUMMER READING CLUB FOR CHILDREN

If you've never run a summer reading club before, consider purchasing *Running Summer Library Reading Programs* by Carole D. Fiore, which gives an in-depth theoretical and philosophical background for reading clubs, as well as hands-on, practical information. There are probably as many different ways to run a reading club as there are youth services librarians. Consider these elements when you plan your club.

THE VISION

Create an environment where reading can be fun. During the school year children read for assignments. The summer reading club is a quintessential time to show them that reading can be fun. Create a welcoming atmosphere and present exciting programs for young people of all ages and ability levels. This invites children to participate in a variety of pleasant literature experiences.

Promote literacy at all learning levels. If librarians can help keep children reading all during the summer, they help them retain skills learned during the year and they participate in creating a literate population.

Entice new library users. Few programs receive as much publicity as a summer reading club. This makes it a great time to reach out to non-traditional library users.

Encourage families to use the library. This is the perfect time for families with children in different age groups to enjoy library activities together.

Demonstrate to the community the library's many resources. Summer programs can utilize a variety of library collections while focusing on sharing books with children.

Instill a love of reading and develop cultural literacy. By making the summer reading club an enjoyable activity (or series of activities), librarians can lead children toward a lifelong love of books and learning.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Planning ahead is a crucial part of running a successful reading club. The club can be as simple or complex as you would like to make it, given your staff, budget and community resources. Before you work out the details, you need to set your own goals and objectives. Your goals will come from the library's mission statement and your own vision. You also can set your own objectives, which are measurable achievements. Some general goals are listed in the Vision section. In order to set objectives, first evaluate the success of the previous year's club. Then determine the percentage of increase you would like to see, or simply strive for an increase.
Some specific objectives could be:

Increase the number of children joining the club.

Increase the number of children who attend individual programs.

Have more programs outside of the library.

Attract more non-traditional library users, such as children from at-risk families, children with physical disabilities or children with learning difficulties.

Start thinking about goals and objectives early. They will guide how you structure your reading club and what kinds of programs you choose to do.

As you consider what kind of club you would like to create and what activities you would like to offer, remember to make it fun. A program that is too complex, restrictive or demanding may discourage children from participating. Also consider staffing levels. Anything you plan needs to be carried out by your staff.

Allow lots of time to plan your reading club and the programs involved. A six- to eight-week endeavor requires as much planning and preparation time as possible. Remember to include all the ages you serve when you work out the structure of your reading club and determine the weekly programs you will present. To help you in this task, a possible time line could be:

September Calculate the level of funding required, based on the club you just finished, and submit your request to your director/supervisor. Some libraries are funded on a calendar year and some are on a fiscal year, so the actual month you need to submit your funding request may differ, but it's never too soon to start calculating it. Financial expenditures to keep in mind are:

? Professional performers (in many libraries these are paid for by the Friends of the Library)
? Craft materials
? Incentives and giveaways
? Paper and printing (reading logs, flyers, bookmarks, activity sheets, certificates, etc.)
? Seasonal staff

November Order items from Statewide Order Form.

January Evaluate last year's program and determine your goals and objectives for this year. If you want to change the way the club is run or investigate the possibility of adding new kinds of programs, now is the time to begin to

consider the changes you would like to make and what details must be worked out to bring your ideas to fruition.

March

Attend Statewide Summer Reading Club workshops.
Review the manual.
Determine the structure of your reading club.
Plan weekly programs.
List supplies that you will need.
Order paper.
Order craft/activity supplies.
Order additional books and materials to support the theme of the club.
Order additional incentives and giveaways from sources other than those offered on the Statewide Order Form.
Order other supplies as needed (puppets, Ellison or Accu-Cut dies, rubber stamps, flannel-board cutouts, etc.).
Book dates and times with professional performers (magicians, storytellers, puppeteers, musicians, clowns, scientists, etc.) you would like to hire.

April

Organize volunteers (teens, Friends of the Library, members of the community, etc.).
Plan publicity (posters, flyers, press releases, media announcements, school visits, etc.).
Solicit donations from local business for goods, coupons or funds.

May

Print and distribute flyers and/or calendars to patrons (parents and children) and community organizations.
Train volunteers.
Follow up on orders, making sure shipments are complete and replacing discontinued items.
Sign contracts for performers and make arrangements for payment to be ready when the performers complete their programs.
Plan school visits and/or rehearse promotional skit.

June

Print everything you will need for the summer (reading logs, activity sheets, certificates, bookmarks, reading club instructions, explanations for parents, calendars, etc.).
Decorate the children's room.
Visit schools (assembly presentations, promotional skit, individual class visits, flyer/calendar distribution, etc.).
Train all staff who will assist with running the reading club.
Submit publicity to media outlets (newspapers, community newsletters, radio stations, etc.).

July

Present opening program or party.
Begin to register children for the club (this may begin in June, depending

on your community's school schedule and your library's traditional starting time).
Conduct programs for preschoolers, school-age children and teens.
Keep statistics, as mandated by the State Library and your library.
Prepare for closing event in August or September.

August Continue programming for preschoolers, school-age children and teens.
Continue keeping statistics.
Hold closing event or party.

September Compile statistics.
Send statistical information to the State Library.
Give a report to your director/supervisor.
Evaluate the program and write reports.
Send thank-you letters to your volunteers, Friends of the Library, community organizations and anyone who donated prizes or coupons.
Begin planning for next year.

STRUCTURING THE READING CLUB

Generally, two separate but related components occur concurrently during the summer reading club. The first is the club itself, which is something children usually register for in some way (in the library, over the Internet) and which encourages them to keep reading over the summer. Often a reading log is maintained to keep track of their progress. The other component is the special programs you run each week, storytimes, book parties, booktalks, book-discussion groups, craft programs, games, special performers, opening and closing events, etc.

Designing the structure of your summer reading club is critical to the success of the club. Evaluate how your library always has conducted its reading club. In light of your goals and objectives, decide if you would like to modify any procedure or even change the essential structure. Discuss your ideas with your staff and your director/supervisor. Keep in mind the amount of staff time the changes will take and the amount of training time a new kind of club will require.

Some concepts to consider as you structure your reading club:

Age of participants: Who is your reading club for? Will you include children who are not reading yet but can be read to? Will you include young adults?

Competition: Will your club be competitive and in what way? The current trend is to steer away from simply rewarding the child who reads the most books. Two alternatives to this would be to have a completely noncompetitive club, where children simply strive to meet their own goals, or to have teams. The children can be placed on teams, by age or by choice (i.e., have a blue team and a red team, and let the child choose a team. Each book read, minute spent

reading, etc., can be counted for the team). The team option gives the children the motivation of competition without individual pressure and fosters a teamwork approach.

Counting: What will you count, if anything? Historically, only the number of books read was counted, but in recent years counting the number of minutes a child reads, or the number of days per week a child spends some time reading, has become more popular. There are several reasons for this. These methods:

- Encourage the habit of reading daily;
- Let children read at their own level, so that children with reading difficulties can enjoy participating in the club;
- Discourage children from reading books that are clearly below their reading level simply to get more prizes; and
- Demonstrate that reading longer books is a valued activity.

Another alternative is for the child to make an individual contract with the library or his/her parents to read a certain number of books over the summer or each week, or to read for a certain number of minutes each day or each week. This is a very personalized approach and lets children determine how much reading they want to do.

Listening: Does listening to a story count? By allowing children to be read to or to listen to audio books, you will include a much broader audience, notably: preschoolers, the visually impaired and/or dyslexic and children with reading difficulties. Listening to stories still gives children the experience of the story and can help them realize the wonders of books.

Reading materials: What can they read? Can magazines, pamphlets, graphic novels, comic books, etc., count? Can they read books from home or just library books? Remember, the broader your definitions, the more children you can include.

Recording and reporting: Will the children have to write down titles, number of minutes, number of days? Will they have to report to a library staff member on the books/material they have read or listened to? Must they report all of them or some of them? Keep in mind staff time and the enjoyment level for the children when deciding this.

Incentives: Do you want to give material rewards for reading? There has been a debate in recent years about the true value of giving prizes as incentives for reading, whether they are small prizes or coupons from local businesses. Some believe that a small reward encourages children to keep reading. If they keep reading, they may discover the joy of reading for its own sake. Others believe that giving rewards for reading encourages children to only read for the purpose of getting the prize. They never will know the inherent joy of reading

because they always will be looking for an external reward.

Reading requirements: Do you want to have a specified number of books, minutes or days that children must read in order to earn a certificate and/or participate in the closing event? Many libraries set a minimum of whatever they choose to count in order to motivate children to continue participating throughout the summer. Other libraries do not because they believe that the number might discourage reluctant readers and be too easy for good readers.

DESIGNING YOUR PROGRAMS

Once you have answered these kinds of questions and determined how the reading club component of your summer will run, it is time to decide what programs you will offer over the summer. Again, these will be influenced by your budget, your staff time and the size and expectations of your community. Many libraries offer the same kinds of preschool storytimes they have during the school year and add some special programs. Some do entirely different programs than they do during the year. A mix of programs, in terms of age group (preschool, school-age, teen and family) and audience size (small book discussion groups, large puppet-show audiences, etc.), usually provides a good balance. Often these programs are planned around the theme.

PUBLICITY

When you've worked out how you are going to run your summer reading club, then you can create your publicity. Sending out your information to as many outlets as possible (schools, daycare centers, community organizations, newspapers, radio stations, etc.) is key to letting people know all the wonderful things you are planning.

RULES

Once you know how you want your club to run, write it down. Make it as clear and succinct as you can and have two versions: one for the staff and one for the children. The staff procedure should lay out, step-by-step, how to register children for the club, how to help them keep track of their progress, etc. The instructions for children should include everything they need to know about participating, phrased in an easy-to-read, child-friendly manner. You also may want to write a description of the club and its value for parents (perhaps calling it "A Word to Parents"). This document would be the perfect place to explain the goals of the reading club.

EVALUATIONS

The State Library will require certain statistics be submitted in your library's annual report. In addition to these, you will want to look at how successful you believe your club was. Did you accomplish your objectives? Did you take steps towards your goals? Did you try something new? Did it work? Why or why not? How can you make it better next year? Some directors/supervisors may require a written report covering these kinds

of issues, or you may want to record your thoughts to remember them when you start planning your next summer reading club.