



Let's Talk About It: A Planner's Guide



**American Library Association
Public Programs Office**

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INTRODUCTION

What is *Let's Talk About It*?

Let's Talk About It is a reading and discussion program model launched on a nationwide level for libraries by the American Library Association (ALA) in 1982. The original development, design and production of *Let's Talk About It* was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

The program model involves reading a common series of books selected by a national project scholar, and discussing them in the context of a larger, overarching theme. Reading and discussion groups explore the theme through the lens of the humanities.

In a typical *Let's Talk About It* program, a discussion group comes together for a five-part, scholar-led series in the library. During each meeting, the group discusses a theme-related book they have all read. The scholar opens the program, bringing the book to life, provoking the group's curiosity with insights and background on the author and the work. At the same time, the scholar relates the reading to the theme, raising questions and creating a catalyst that sparks discussion. The audience breaks into smaller groups to talk about the book, share ideas and raise more questions. The large group reconvenes for final discussion and closing comments. Discussion group meetings occur every two to four weeks, depending on local preference.

The granddaddy of library reading and discussion programs, *Let's Talk About It* has many incarnations. In addition to national program themes developed by ALA over the years, several state libraries and humanities councils have developed their own themes and programs. The hallmark of the series is to add depth and value to the discussion, through exploration of themes and scholar-led discussion. Whether you choose to follow that model, or start fresh, there is a wealth of information and resources available for use and adaptation.

What makes *Let's Talk About It* unique?

- It is designed for libraries.
- The readings are organized around an overarching theme.
- Reading and discussion groups explore the theme through the lens of the humanities – that is, by relating the readings to historical trends and events, other works of literature, philosophical and ethical considerations.
- A humanities scholar, often a professor from a local college or university, presents a short talk at the beginning of each discussion session to help focus and provoke discussion.
- The discussion is led or facilitated by the humanities scholar.

Why do ALA and libraries present reading and discussion programs?

Libraries are many things to their communities. They offer the practical information people need to improve the quality of their lives and to increase their options in a complex society. Libraries also give their communities something less tangible, yet just as essential to a satisfying and productive life – nourishment for the spirit.

Programs in the humanities and the arts that encourage people to think about literature, history, ethics, science, music, visual and literary arts, and human values are an essential part of the educational mission of libraries.

Reading and discussion series stimulate public interest in the world of ideas. They are as much an opportunity for continuing education as starting points for substantive discussion, study and programming.

One goal of ALA adult programming initiatives is to encourage the public to go beyond the stacks to explore themes with fellow patrons and the help of scholarly resources. A related goal is to help libraries strengthen their role as intellectual forums and central cultural and educational institutions in their communities.

We hope that the experience and information gained through these programs will encourage librarians to plan future humanities and arts based programs for their communities.

Sources and Acknowledgements

Material in this guide has been updated from *Let's Talk About It: A Planner's Manual* (American Library Association, 1984), as well as intervening iterations and programs, with input from many individuals and groups.

More detailed information on individual *Let's Talk About It* themes, a variety of templates, opportunities for networking with other project directors, and additional resources to support library programming can be found at www.programminglibrarian.org and <http://publicprograms.ala.org/ltai>.

PLANNING YOUR PROGRAM SERIES

How to Use the Planner's Guide

This guide has been created to make it as simple as possible for you to implement a *Let's Talk About It* reading and discussion series in your library. The guide is divided into five sections:

- **Planning Your Program Series** covers theme selection, goal setting, timeline development, library staff roles, scholar selection, establishing community partnerships and fundraising.
- **Program Format and Tips** includes an outline for a typical *Let's Talk About It* series, as well as tips for librarians and scholars who will work with program attendees.
- **Promotion** provides guidelines for defining your audience and reaching them through a variety of communication methods.
- **Related Programming** offers supplementary programming ideas that can help your library make the most of your *Let's Talk About It* series.
- **Budgeting and Evaluation Templates** help you keep your finances on track and offers tools to measure program effectiveness and impact.

Establishing Goals and Objectives

Before selecting a theme, think about the reasons why you want to hold a *Let's Talk About It* series. It may seem like you already know the answer, but it's worth taking another look. Thinking about what you want the series to accomplish will help you develop a program plan. Consider the following:

Audience Goals:

- Who will your program serve (ages, demographics, library use)?
- How many (% of target population)?
- Why this audience?
- What are the interests of audience?
- What are the needs of this audience and how will they benefit?

(For more on target audience, see Promotion)

Collection/Thematic Goals:

- Is there an area of the collection that you want to emphasize or build around the theme you have chosen?
- Does this discussion series theme relate to other library or community programming or events?

Community Goals:

- How will the community benefit?
- Which partner organizations might be interested in the *Let's Talk About It* theme you selected?
- What community issues/agendas tie into the *Let's Talk About It* theme you selected?

Program Goals:

- What do you want this *Let's Talk About It* program to accomplish?
- How will the library benefit?
- What future activities might this series foster?

Theme Selection

Libraries interested in hosting a *Let's Talk About It* series many consider using one of the following themes previously developed by the American Library Association. Reading lists* to support a five-part discussion series for each theme are available online at <http://publicprograms.ala.org/ltai/index.html>.

- Being Ethnic, Becoming American: Struggles, Successes, Symbols
- Between Two Worlds: Stories of Estrangement and Homecoming
- Contemporary Japanese Literature
- Demons, Golems, and Dybbuks: Monsters of the Jewish Imagination
- Destruction or Redemption: Images of Romantic Love
- The End of Life: Conversations on Death and Dying for Contemporary Americans
- End of the World or World Without End: Readings for the Millennium
- Exploring the West...Whose West?
- Family: The Way We Were, The Way We Are: Seasons in the Contemporary American Family
- Individual Rights and Community in America
- Isabella's Sisters: Women Creating Worlds
- The Journey Inward: Women's Autobiography
- Liberty and Violence: The Heritage of the French Revolution
- Long Gone: The Literature and Culture of African American Migration
- Love and Forgiveness in the Light of Death
- Love and Forgiveness in the Presence of the Enemy
- Love, Forgiveness, and Wisdom
- Making a Living, Making a Life: Work and Its Rewards in a Changing America
- The Many Realms of King Arthur
- A Mind of Her Own: Fathers and Daughters in a Changing World
- The Nation That Works: Conversations on American Pluralism and Identity
- New American Worlds: Writing the Hemisphere
- Not for Children Only: Children's Classics for Adults
- One Vision, Many Voices: Latino Literature in the U.S.
- Picturing America: Constructing Redemption

- Picturing America: Land of Opportunity
- Picturing America: Making Tracks
- Picturing America: Places in the Heart
- Rebirth of a Nation: Nationalism and the Civil War
- Seeds of Change: The Encounter That Transformed the World
- Sovereign Worlds: Native Peoples Reclaim Their Lives and Heritage
- What America Reads: Myth Making in Popular Fiction
- Your Heart's Desire: Sex and Love in Jewish Literature

* Please note that some titles may have gone out of print since the original development of these reading lists.

Support Materials

The following support materials are available for each theme listed on page 5, and may be found online at <http://publicprograms.ala.org/lta/themes/index.html>.

- Summary of the theme
- Reading list for a 5-part series
- Annotations of the book list which illuminate the theme
- Humanities scholar's essay on the theme
- Related reading lists, with brief summaries

National project scholars have written thoughtful and reflective essays that inform each theme. These essays are discussion tools and guideposts for local scholar and participant alike. Each *Let's Talk About It* participant should be given the essay appropriate to the program theme in advance of the first discussion session.

Ordering Books

If your library regularly hosts reading and discussion programs, you will already have policies and practices in place for making books available to patrons. Whether reading and discussion programs are new to your library or not, here are the most common strategies for ensuring that patrons have access to the books:

The library provides the books: Ideally you will provide one book for each participant for each program in the series. Larger systems may be able to gather enough copies from their branches and through interlibrary loan to respond to the demands of participants. Most libraries create a budget to purchase multiple copies of each title in addition to any they have gathered. In either case, plan in advance and place copies of the books on reserve for *Let's Talk About It* participants.

Participants purchase their own copies: Even when the books are available through the library, participants often want to purchase their own copies to annotate as they go along. It can be helpful to contact local bookstores and let them know about the *Let's Talk About It* series far in advance. Bookstores can be a valuable partner in publicity and will often agree to offer a discount on purchases of books for the series.

Exchanges with other libraries: Libraries that participate in *Let's Talk About It* programming may wish to communicate with each other to work out book sharing, buying, and exchange arrangements.

A Tip

Consider putting together program “kits” that pre-registered participants can check out. Kits might include the first book and a participant folder (containing essays, bookmark, brochure, and flyer with meeting times and dates). For future sessions, participants can trade in the title discussed that night for the next title in the series, adding it to their kit.

Costs and quantities: The majority of the titles selected for LTAI series were chosen with their availability in paperback in mind, in an effort to keep costs down. However, some titles may have gone out of print since the original development of the reading list. If you have difficulty purchasing any of the titles listed on the ALA Public Programs Office’s website, please notify us at publicprograms@ala.org.

Because book orders should be placed in advance of pre-registration deadlines, the number of books you order will usually be based on your audience estimate. Also, when estimating quantities, keep in mind that publicizing the *Let's Talk About It* programs may create demand for the titles among those who want to read the books but do not have the time to participate.

The possibility of higher-than-estimated participation is another reason to contact local bookstores in advance and work out favorable purchasing arrangements for participants. Encourage the bookstores to create window displays featuring *Let's Talk About It* books and publicizing the series and discount offered.

Setting the Timeline

Good programs are the result of good planning. After your project goals are in place and your theme chosen, you should construct a practical working timeline. The following checklist should help you give yourself enough time to produce an excellent, well-organized *Let's Talk About It* series.

- Prepare a project budget
- Recruit program scholar
- Select program dates, times
- Recruit potential program partners
- Apply for funding, contact potential sponsors
- Alert library staff, board, Friends
- Contact scholar, program partners with notification of grant award

- ❑ Reserve meeting space
- ❑ Finalize marketing plan
- ❑ Order books, alert local book stores
- ❑ Finalize audience recruitment plan
- ❑ Publicize reading and discussion series
- ❑ Distribute publicity materials to program partners
- ❑ Place ads, public service announcements
- ❑ Put together staffing plan; if need be, recruit discussion group leaders
- ❑ Secure “buy-in” from library staff and administration
- ❑ Track potential participants through sign-up system
- ❑ Order refreshments
- ❑ Distribute program materials to pre-registered participants
- ❑ Last minute confirmations with scholar, partner organizations
- ❑ Send email reminders to registrants (week or day before sessions)
- ❑ Hold discussion sessions
- ❑ Monitor book circulation
- ❑ Publicize throughout series
- ❑ Distribute evaluations at each program
- ❑ Collect end of series evaluations from participants and scholars
- ❑ Write and submit final report

Not all of these steps may be necessary for your program series, or you may come up with other items for your checklist – tailor the checklist to fit your library’s needs.

Program Personnel Job Descriptions

Program Director

The program director has the job of managing the *Let’s Talk About It* series from beginning to end. This may seem like a large undertaking, however, with adequate planning it can be quite manageable.

Although the program director may have help from a planning committee, volunteers and other library staff, he/she is primarily responsible for overseeing:

- Selection and coordination of the scholar
- Reservation, preparation of the meeting room
- Pre-registration of participants
- Distribution of program materials
- Publicity and outreach
- Working with community partners
- Preparation of budget, payment of bills, honorarium
- Management of programs
- Coordination of assisting staff and/or volunteers
- Evaluation and reporting

Program Scholar

If you've worked with humanities programming before, the idea of involving a scholar is not only familiar but also appealing. The scholar isn't an obstacle to be overcome – if that's your approach it could all too likely become the result. Think of the scholar as your program partner and make sure he or she understands that role.

Both of you, the project director and the scholar exist only to make this discussion series a terrific experience for the participants. You must both be open to the interests of the group, encouraging their ideas and offering assistance. You both have a great deal to offer in facilitating this program, but the program is for the participants, not for the scholar or the library. The scholar's responsibilities include:

- Thorough and thoughtful review of all project materials, theme concept and overall series approach to the material.
- Preparation and delivery of an opening presentation on the material to be discussed (typically 15-25 minutes).
- Preparation of autobiographical information (2-3 paragraphs) for the program director to use in an introduction.
- Preparation of opening discussion points to be used as a basis for group or small group discussion. (Ideally, these should be sent to the program director, for distribution to discussion leaders at least one week before the program.)
- Facilitation of group or small group discussions, including listening to comments, answering questions and highlighting the important ideas expressed during discussion.
- Completion of program evaluation for the program director.

Scholar Qualifications:

- Scholar should possess appropriate academic qualifications to speak on the program themes and have teaching or other experience relevant to selected titles;
- Should be engaging, comfortable and experienced speaking before and facilitating discussion with adult audiences in non-classroom settings.
- A Ph.D. or advanced degree in English Literature, American Literature, or other related humanities subject is preferred.
- He or she should be adept at facilitating discussion with adult audiences on themes related to the human condition, and in particular on the theme of your library's series.

Selecting a Scholar

If you have never been through the process before, selecting the right scholar (or scholars) may be one of the more challenging issues you face during the series planning. Just remember that this process is not only manageable, but will also establish important connections that may strengthen your library's programming in the future.

There are several sources you can contact to identify scholars. These include:

- State humanities councils

- Colleges
- University humanities departments
- Community or junior colleges
- Museums
- Historical societies
- Other librarian program directors who have used particular scholars in their reading and discussion series

After receiving the names of candidates from these sources, you might ask members of other organizations who have heard them speak to give you an evaluation of their work. Department chairs might provide some ideas. You might even simply sit in on a lecture or two by the candidate to get a feel for his or her style. Don't forget that your state humanities council may have a roster of scholars it keeps on hand just for such occasions.

Just as there are informal networks for the professions of publishing, medicine, law, finance, and of course, librarianship, so there are networks for humanists. Once you tap into a scholar network, you are likely to find an abundance of good scholar candidates.

After compiling a list of recommended scholars, talk to them. Explain your series in a concise, appealing way. Then listen to them to determine their understanding of what is involved and to be certain that they are sincerely interested, as well as qualified.

Working with a Program Scholar

Finding and contacting a scholar is only the first step; working with them so you have a mutual understanding of program goals and expectations is what will make this a successful experience for the participants, the scholar, the partners and you.

- Try to “interview” the scholar before making your selection. Ask if they've worked with library audiences or out-of-school adults before; gauge their interest in the overall subject; ask for a short biographical statement or other background information.
- This is not a college-level class – people are participating for the pleasure of reading and talking about the things they've read. They want to learn about – but not necessarily major in – the subject or subjects introduced by the themes. Make sure your scholar understands this and has experience working with non-college student audiences.
- Make some educated guesses about the general characteristics of your audience (age, interests, education, etc.) and share that information with the scholar.
- Be clear about the format – an opening set of remarks from the scholar, usually not more than 15-25 minutes, followed by discussion for the rest of the program.
- Be clear about the scholar's role – the scholar is not only to take the lead in the opening remarks, but also to facilitate participation by the group during the discussion portion of the program.

- The scholar should prepare discussion points for the group, based on the theme, books and essay. These may be distributed to participants in advance of the sessions, along with the rest of the program materials.
- Outline the commitment from the library and the commitment from the scholar in writing – include honorarium to be paid, any expenses to be covered, and schedule of all programs.
- Provide the scholar with any background materials you feel would be helpful, including the theme essay, copies of the books, related articles, “typical questions,” or prompts for discussion, copies of PR materials, roster of pre-registered attendees, etc.
- If you’ve held *Let’s Talk About It* programs before, share some of the comments from participants’ evaluation forms, to give the scholar an idea of what to expect.
- Involve the scholar in publicity, such as an interview with a local newspaper or magazine about the program. Encourage the scholar to market the series to his or her own network.
- Keep the scholar informed throughout the process. Let them know how pre-registration and publicity progresses. If you receive feedback from participants after each session, share their comments with the scholar.

See pages 16-17 for reading and discussion program tips to share with your scholar.

Community Partners

Partnerships can assume many forms: co-presenters, financial partners, organizations that will donate goods or services, marketing and outreach efforts, and volunteers.

A partnership is successful if both partners gain something from the relationship. Identify groups that you have worked with in the past and ones that you would like to work with in the future. Share your project plans with potential partners and see if your goals resonate with their mission, interests, or intentions for community outreach.

Possible *Let’s Talk About It* program partners:

- Community centers
- Senior organizations
- Area churches, synagogues and other religious organizations
- Social Justice Agencies
- Public libraries in neighboring communities, library systems
- Arts and humanities organizations (historical societies, museums, cultural centers)
- Professional associations
- Community colleges
- Universities

- Local high schools
- Literacy organizations
- Literary magazines
- Book clubs
- Writers groups and poetry guilds
- Fraternal organizations
- Local businesses
- Councils on Aging/AARP groups
- Ethnic associations
- Local chapters of national organizations (ADL, ACLU, ZONTA, ROTARY)

More information on promoting the series by working with community partners can be found in the Promotions section.

Funding Resources

Grants for Library Humanities Programming

You may want to seek funding to support your *Let's Talk About It* series. Outside programming support, perhaps to match expenses covered by the library foundation or Friends group, can expand the budget for your program and increase the potential reach and impact.

- Many state humanities councils award “mini-grants” or “resource grants” to support free admission public humanities programs of short duration. In most states, programs must involve a humanities scholar in order to qualify for a grant.
- Short-term grants usually cover only the direct costs of a humanities program, for example, honoraria and travel expenses for lecturers, film or video preparation and presentation, printing and postage for promotional items, and the purchase of books for discussion programs. Short-term grants do not in most cases cover the costs of food or beverages for receptions or other social events.
- Mini-grants and resource grants range from \$100 to \$1,500 or more, depending upon the state's guidelines and the purpose of the grant. Matching funds or in-kind contributions are often required for state humanities council grants.
- Application deadlines for short-term grants vary from state to state. In general, state humanities councils ask that mini-grant applications be received from six to ten weeks before a program is to begin. Some states also award one-time grants of a few hundred dollars that can be applied for at any time.
- Contact your state humanities council for short-term grant guidelines and application requirements.
- For a list of state humanities councils or information on your state humanities council, visit The Federation of State Humanities Councils Web site at www.statehumanities.org.

PROGRAM FORMAT AND TIPS

Program Length

One and a half to 2 hours are about right for this type of reading and discussion program. Attendees should come prepared to discuss the reading and the essay. Distribute participant folders at least two weeks in advance of the first program, to allow for time to read and consider the essay. The scholar will talk for 15-25 minutes, group discussion will last for about an hour, and time will be needed for getting started, seated, wrapping up, and if needed, taking a break.

Group Size

There is no magic number for the best group size. You want to make this program available to the largest number of people who will make an active commitment to participate. If the group is large, either break into smaller groups for discussion or plan to hold the program at additional times, and/or venues. Asking people to pre-register by signing up in advance for these programs is the best way to predict group size, as well as to ensure a commitment to attendance.

If you know you will have very large attendance and opt to break up into small discussion groups, recruit staff or experienced volunteers to serve as discussion leaders. Under this model, the scholar floats between the discussion groups.

Day of the Program Checklist

The following items should be in place before the start of each program. An affirmative answer to the following questions should mean you are ready to go.

- Staff:** Has staff been alerted to the program location?
- Signage:** Are there signs telling people where to go?
- Room Set-up:** Are the chairs, nametags, and sign-in sheets in place?
- Refreshments:** Have you checked delivery and setup?
- Scholar:** Has the scholar been called to confirm directions, time, place, and other arrangements?
- Volunteers:** Do volunteers and staff have all the necessary information?
- Pre-registration:** Have participants who signed up for the program in advance picked up their program materials? Do you have a sign-in sheet ready for the program?
- Introductions & Acknowledgements:** Have you prepared introductions and a list of funders, sponsors, partners, and others to thank?
- Reminder email:** Have you sent a reminder email to pre-registrants?
- Greetings:** Has someone been designated to greet participants as they arrive?

Program Outline

I. Welcome and Introductions (5-10 minutes)

Project director welcomes participants and introduces self, scholar. Thank participants, library, funders, and partners. Go over format and let people know what to expect. Provide any necessary information regarding program materials, schedule for rest of series. Lead applause for scholar.

II. Scholarly Presentation (15-25 minutes)

Scholar's presentation on the book, the author's background, the work in context of the theme and essay, salient points made by the book and other relevant matters.

III. Discussion (45-60 minutes)

If the group exceeds 30-35 people, it may be necessary to break into small groups. In this case, the project director should recruit discussion leaders to facilitate small group discussion while the scholar floats between the small groups. After the discussion period, the small groups may reconvene for closing remarks.

IV. Wrap Up (10 – 20 minutes)

Closing comments by scholar.
Project director thanks the participants and scholar, distributes and collects evaluations, gives instructions for next session, and other announcements.

Total Program Time: 1 hour, 30 minutes – 2 hours

Tips for Scholars - Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- Be sure that everyone wears a nametag to help the participants become acquainted with each other.
- Suggest that the group form a circle, if possible, so that each person can see all the members of the group and the format is less like a classroom.
- Make certain that everyone who wants to participate has a chance to do so.
- Help keep the group on track.
- Aim to be the “leader” as little as possible.
- Accept and acknowledge the ideas of all group members.
- Look mainly at the overall group atmosphere. Don't overreact to the needs of specific individuals.
- Listen attentively to what each member has to say. Listen in such a manner that members will see that you are listening and are genuinely interested.
- Encourage wide participation by occasionally asking if there are alternate points of view.

Don'ts

- Don't require members to ask for permission to speak.
- Don't require members to speak only to you.
- Don't preach or teach.
- Don't take sides or argue on any issue.
- Don't manipulate the discussion or inhibit its flow.
- Don't push people to participate before they feel ready.
- Don't embarrass any member.
- Don't hog the spotlight.

Dealing with Problem Situations

Here are some ideas from experienced discussion leaders of ways to deal with typical problem situations.

To deal with a dominating participant:

“Just a second, Jennifer. Let’s get back to the first point you made. Is there someone who would like to add to Jennifer’s remark?”

“Bob, I think your point is a good one, and I see that Mary would like to comment.”

To include the shy participant:

“I remember your saying, Bill, that you lived in New York during the time this novel takes place. Did the writer capture that period?”

To include all participants:

When participants share information about themselves, make a mental note of it and bring it up at a later time, when appropriate.

Use personal names often during the discussion and encourage others to use them.

To cope with expressions of deep emotion:

Remember that *Let’s Talk About It* is a reading and discussion project. While its purpose is to encourage lively and profound discussion of the humanities through literature, it is not the appropriate setting to explore personal problems.

Acknowledge the depth of feeling in a members’ remark: “I can feel from the tone in your voice how much this means to you.”

Draw others into the discussion. This helps remove the person from the focus of the group and allows him or her to get their emotions back under control. “I understand this is a problem for you, Lisa. Let’s hear how the others have coped with it.”

Widen the discussion, moving from the personal to the impersonal: “You sound like the man in this story, Glen. Do you remember how he dealt with this situation?”

To deal with conflicting opinions:

The way you handle conflict will greatly influence the way the participants handle it as well. Give people time to say what they think, but don’t prolong the exchange beyond the interest span of the group. No matter what is said, it is important that no evaluation of opinion or judgment of personality is indicated.

“This disagreement shows diversity of feelings here.”

“I think both points of view are valid.”

“This subject certainly evokes strong emotions and that’s good.”

PROMOTION

To draw the audience you seek and create awareness about your *Let's Talk About It* series, your library needs to plan and implement an effective promotional campaign.

The following guidelines are intended to help you launch a successful campaign. If you would like more information about promoting your series, the ALA Public Information Office has developed *A Communications Handbook for Libraries*, which is available in PDF format online at www.ala.org/pio under "Resources."

Please note: All promotional materials should carry an acknowledgement of the funder(s) that is providing support for your *Let's Talk About It* series.

Getting Started

To meet media and other deadlines, you will need to start promoting your *Let's Talk About It* series at least two months in advance.

First, determine your target audience, goals for audience size and the best communication methods for this program. Involving your fellow staff members in program planning can be a great way to start determining these things and foster new ideas and additional support and enthusiasm. Try holding a mini-workshop or brainstorming session. During this session:

- Emphasize the potential for recruiting new users and building support for the library.
- Communicate the goals for your program – what audiences you wish to reach, what you wish to accomplish.
- If possible, assign staff with various interests/talents to work in small groups to carry out the goals.

Additionally, share your program plans with the library director, board, Friends and other library support groups and invite their ideas and cooperation.

Defining the Target Audience

General promotional materials such as postcards, flyers, press releases, and advertisements are great vehicles for reaching a general audience of mixed ages and backgrounds. Certainly, there are also several groups in your community that will be very interested in your *Let's Talk About It* series. These groups can provide support through passing information about the series onto members of their organization who may be interested in attending or providing financial, programmatic, and other support. For a list of some of these organizations that may be in your community, see "Community Partners" on page 12.

Choosing Communication Methods

Once you've determined who you would like reach out to, you need to focus on how you're going to let them know about the series. Most communication methods fall into these four categories:

- **Public Relations/Publicity:** newspaper and magazine articles, announcements on television and radio programs, Web sites, public service announcements (PSAs), letters to the editor;
- **Direct Marketing:** mass e-mail messages, Web marketing, direct mailings;
- **Personal Contact:** word of mouth, public speaking engagements, telephone, e-mails, letters;
- **Advertising:** print ads, TV and radio spots, banners, flyers, bookmarks, posters, buttons, and displays.

Public Relations/Publicity

Contacting the media and using the Web to publicize your event is key to getting your message out to a mass audience. Here are a few methods you can use to contact your local media and through the Web:

- Send a *press release* announcing the event to your local newspapers, radio stations and television stations at least two to four weeks before the event. If you have regional magazines or talk shows that list upcoming events, you may want to send a release to them as well. Since these media outlets often have longer lead times, send these press releases out at least four to eight weeks before the event.
- About a week before your event, follow up the press release by sending a *media alert* via fax or e-mail to key contacts. A media alert provides specific information about the date, time and location for reporters and photographers who may be interested in attending the series, reporting on the series, or including the information in an "Upcoming Events" section. If possible, call each contact a day or two later to confirm that they received the media alert, find out if they have any questions, and see if they are interested in attending the program, scheduling an interview with the program director or scholar, getting more information about the program, or if they plan to include the news in an upcoming issue.
- If you find that media professionals are interested in visiting the library for a program in the series, a related event, or an interview, you will need to have additional materials available in a *press kit*. The press kit should contain one copy of the press release, media alert, photos and biographies of your scholar and other key participants, and copies of all promotional materials – flyers, bookmarks, postcards, advertisements, etc. If you do get an opportunity to discuss the event with a reporter, suggest story ideas and offer to schedule an interview with your scholar and partner organizations. (First, make sure your scholar and partner organization representatives are willing to be interviewed.)
- Since television and radio stations are required to use a percentage of their airtime for non-profit and public announcements, your local stations may be willing to air a *public service announcement* (PSA) about your *Let's Talk About It* series. A PSA will advertise

your event, but is donated airtime, so there is no cost to your library. If you have the capabilities, you may wish to create taped, ready-to-air PSAs for radio and/or TV. If not, you will need to work closely with stations in your community to gain their interest in the series and help them develop the PSAs, particularly television stations, which may need images from you to include in the piece. Also, local newspapers, magazines and other publications may be willing to run a print PSA about your *Let's Talk About It* series at no cost to your library.

- In today's world, using the *Web* to promote your events is very important. If your library's Web site doesn't have a Coming Events section, talk to your Webmaster about creating one. This is the perfect place for library patrons to find out details about your series. Make sure you include as much information as possible on your Web site and keep it current. If you do have a Coming Events section, you need to include information about the series in it. Participants in the series who do not visit the library on a regular basis will look to the Web for details or last minute information and it's important that you make that information available. If you post information about the series on your library's Web site, be sure to include the Web address on promotional materials.
- The Web can also be useful for getting the word out about your event through other organizations' Web sites. Your partner organizations, city, community centers, local media outlets and Chamber of Commerce may post information about community events on their Web sites. Additionally, many major cities also have Web-based entertainment and event guides, like citysearch.com, yelp.com, and metromix.com, which provide information about events in several cities. Find out if these Web sites exist in your area and contact the site's staff about posting your event and information. Many of these sites will post information about non-profit organizations' events free of charge. Also, be sure to include links to your partners' sites and encourage them to return the favor.

Direct Marketing

Using the list of community organizations and other groups you have identified as your target audience, you can use direct marketing to contact these groups and individual members of these groups:

- When contacting community and other organizations, use a personalized letter or phone call. You can use a copy of a program flyer as an informal letter, if needed, but be sure to include a personal note soliciting support, especially if you are asking for financial or other assistance.
- In addition to contacting organizations, you may want to target individuals in your community. If you keep a list of patrons' e-mail addresses, sending a mass e-mail message about the upcoming event can be an effective and inexpensive way to get the word out to a number of people. You may also want to consider printing a customized *Let's Talk About It* postcard. Postcards can be mailed to library patrons, community members or others. Additionally, you may want to send an e-mail message about the program to community group leaders to post to their electronic discussion groups or forward on to their own address lists.

Personal Contact

One-on-one personal contact can be one of your most effective means of communicating with key individuals and groups. It can create a better understanding and create more enthusiasm than any other communication method. Some tips:

- Create a list of influential individuals in your community – the mayor, city council members, business leaders, etc. – who may be interested in your series. Send them a letter and program flyer about the series and ask to meet with them to discuss further. If a meeting is not possible, mention in your letter that you will call them within a week to follow-up. Even if these individuals are not able to participate in the series, letting them know about the program could help the library in other ways.
- When contacting community groups, you may want to ask to speak for five to ten minutes at one of their upcoming meetings or events. This is inexpensive and effective since it allows you to both deliver your message and gauge responses. At the meeting, outline your overall series plan and present convincing reasons why the series may be of interest to them. Bring flyers, bookmarks and other materials along to distribute after your speech. If possible, speak at the end of the meeting or offer to stay until the end of the meeting to answer questions.
- If speaking at a meeting is not possible, solicit support from these groups to help promote the program themselves. Ask the group leaders to pass out flyers or mention the program to their members and staff.

Advertising

Often the most expensive promotional method, advertising can also be one of the most effective vehicles for promoting your program. Here are a few advertising methods:

- *Promotional posters:* Posters that advertise your *Let's Talk About It* program should include series program times, location(s), scholar's name and title or brief biographical information, acknowledgement of local funders, and your library's Web address, e-mail address, and/or phone number people can call for more information. Posters can be posted at your library, community centers (e.g., city hall, the post office and schools, local colleges), restaurants, grocery stores, dry cleaners, bookstores, health clubs, etc. Ask Friends and trustees to post flyers and posters at places they frequent. It's easy for them to take the posters with them and won't require as much work for the project director or staff.
- *Paid advertising* in local newspapers and on local radio or television stations can be another effective, but costly method. Before considering paid advertising, approach your local newspapers, radio and television stations regarding public service announcements (see Public Relations/Publicity, page 19). Some newspapers and broadcast stations may be willing to donate or offer discounted airtime or ad space for non-profit groups. If you do receive free advertising, acknowledge the media outlet as a sponsor on program materials. If you consider paid advertising, also look to your Friends or other groups to underwrite costs.

- Developing simple, cost effective promotional items (bookmarks, buttons, pens/pencils, etc.) is another effective way to promote your event. These promotional items can also double as a “freebie” for patrons who attend the *Let’s Talk About It* series. Hand out promotional items at schools, community group meetings or other locations. Ask Friends and trustees to hand out bookmarks to their friends and others.

Putting It All Together

After reviewing the list of communication methods, spend a little time thinking about which will work best for your series, your community and your library. Consider your budget and time available. Consider your planning team – is this effort a one-man production or committee-based? And, consider your past successes and failures by taking a look at which communication methods you’ve used to promote past events. For your *Let’s Talk About It* series, you may want to combine successful methods you’ve used before with some new ideas.

Also, keep in mind your goals for the size and type of audience you wish to attract. If your library can only hold a group of fifteen, you do not need to spend hundreds of dollars on publicity. Instead, use your resources wisely. Use cost-effective methods and spend the majority of your time contacting individuals and groups that you are most interested in reaching or that could benefit the most from the series.

On the other hand, if you are looking to attract an audience of people who have never set foot in the library, you will need to be more creative in your promotional activities. Most likely, you will need to spend a little more time contacting new people and developing promotional materials for new outlets and locations. However, this time and effort could pay off. Bringing new faces into the library for a program will undoubtedly result in issuing more library cards and finding new life-long library patrons.

RELATED PROGRAMMING

Programming Ideas

The five scholar-led discussion sessions corresponding to the reading list for the chosen theme are the main focus for participating *Let's Talk About It* libraries. Libraries are also encouraged to hold related programs such as film series, forums, receptions, lectures, and related exhibits, to expand the reach and impact of the *Let's Talk About It* series. Here are some suggestions and ideas for related programs:

- Host a film series, featuring movie adaptations of the *Let's Talk About It* books, or related films.
- Arrange for a photography exhibit thematically tied to the selected *Let's Talk About It* theme. Or, encourage library patrons to create their own photographs based on their own interpretations of the chosen theme, and kick off the discussion series with a photography exhibit featuring their work.
- Invite authors to appear and read from their works featured in the *Let's Talk About It* series; or, invite authors, poets or storytellers to read from works on similar themes.
- Work with a scholar to present a lecture or lectures on the lives and times of the authors featured in the series.
- Partner with a local theater group to present staged partial readings from works featured in the series or other related theatrical works.
- Visit the ALA *Let's Talk About It* online archive (<http://publicprograms.ala.org/ltai>) for theme-specific related programming ideas.

Films and Videos

Film and video showings are very popular related programming options. Here are some guideposts for good film and video programming practices:

- Each library wishing to show films or videos related to the books in the *Let's Talk About It* series to the public must arrange for public performance rights (PPR).
- Swank Motion Pictures, Inc. now offers a Movie Public Performance Site License to libraries on an annual basis. Information is at <http://www.movlic.com/library/sitelicense.html>
- The following Web sites may be useful in obtaining additional information about any films under consideration, including release dates, reviews, and distribution information:

International Movie Database	www.imdb.com
Rotten Tomatoes	www.rottentomatoes.com
AMG Film Site	www.allmovie.com

BUDGETING AND EVALUATION TEMPLATES

Budgeting Expense Worksheet

	Cash Expenses	In-Kind
Books (# of copies X cost per copy)		
Paperbacks	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____
Scholar		
Honorarium	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____
Staff Time		
Administration	_____	_____
Fundraising	_____	_____
Materials development	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____
Publicity & Marketing		
Publicity materials development	_____	_____
Press outreach	_____	_____
Community outreach	_____	_____
Web page production	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____
Related Expenses		
Postage	_____	_____
Telephone	_____	_____
Meetings	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____
Printing & Photocopying	Total	_____
Total Cash Expenses	_____	
Total In-Kind Expenses	_____	
Project Total	_____	

Revenue Worksheet

	Cash Revenue	In-Kind
Library	_____	_____
Friends of the Library	_____	_____
Grants	_____	_____
Other Revenue	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____

Sponsors

Community Organizations	_____	_____
Book Store	_____	_____
Radio or TV Station	_____	_____
Local Businesses	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____
Total	_____	_____

Total Cash Revenue

Cash expenses should not exceed cash revenue

Total In-Kind

In-Kind Revenue total should match In-Kind expense total

Program Evaluation and Reporting

Evaluation is essential for determining the effectiveness of your program, its impact and whether your original goals have been met.

Not all participants will attend every session, but it can be valuable to hear from every participant as the series progresses. By distributing evaluation forms at each discussion session, you will be able to respond to any problems, address questions, and make any adjustments in format that may be necessary.

Consider in advance, how you will judge the quality and effectiveness of your reading and discussion series. By number of participants? By their evaluations? By whether your original goals were met? By the comments of the scholar? By requests for future reading and discussion programs? Most project directors will evaluate the series by weighing each of these and other factors.

Valuable sources for feedback include:

- Participants
- Scholars
- Community partner organizations
- Project director
- Planning committee
- Library staff
- Sponsors and funders
- Library patrons

Think of evaluation not only as a way to gauge the level of effectiveness of this program, but also as a tool to plan future programs.

Sample scholar and participant evaluation forms appear on the following pages.

Sample Evaluation Form for Local Scholar

1. Was the book (or other reading selection) the right choice for today's program?
2. How successful was group discussion?
3. How closely related to the theme was the group discussion?
4. How helpful was the essay in preparing for today's program?
5. How helpful was the essay for today's discussion?
6. Please comment on the overall success of today's program.
7. How useful was the pre-program information to your preparation? Is there anything else the project director could have done to assist you?

Other comments:

Sample Evaluation Form for Participants, continued:

5. How did you hear about this *Let's Talk About It* reading and discussion program?
6. Do you plan to attend other programs in this series? *Yes* *No*
If no, why not?
7. Is the program time convenient? *Yes* *No*
If no, when would you prefer to meet?
8. Is the program date convenient? *Yes* *No*
If no, when would you prefer to meet?
9. Is the discussion group size too large, too small, just right? (circle one)
10. Are there any other topics or themes in literature that you would like to discuss?

Demographic questions (optional):

11. What is your gender? (circle)

Female *Male*

12. What is your age? (circle)

18-24 *25-35* *36-50* *50+*

13. Which ethnic background do you most identify yourself with? (circle)

African American *Asian* *Hispanic/Latino*
American Indian *Caucasian* *Multi-racial* *Other*