Field Guide:
Educator Programming at Your Library

Welcome!

This guide is a framework for libraries to develop programming in order to strengthen relationships with community educators. The following strategies have shown to be effective in connecting the public library with PreK-12 classroom teachers, school librarians and freelance educators.

Teachers and the Library

Schools are busy places, and building relationships with a school community takes time, energy and commitment. In all our efforts to connect library services with students and families, it's worthwhile to focus on teachers, too.

The public library is a place for lifelong learning. Library services meet the needs of many adult learners, like business owners, English language learners and older adults. Libraries of all types can offer programming which meets the needs of another adult audience: educators. Types of PreK-12 educators include:

- Classroom teachers
- School librarians
- Paraprofessionals
- Substitute teachers
- Freelance educators
- Future teachers (current education students)
- Administrators (school or district)

Professional Development Programming

In fact, educators have an ongoing need for professional learning, and to earn continuing education credit hours. Libraries can meet this need by offering programming designed to help educators learn, while helping them to earn professional development credit in doing so.

- Teachers, administrators, school librarians, paraprofessionals, after-school program providers, and teaching artists (like music or art teachers) are required to meet state-mandated professional development criteria in order to stay licensed in their content areas.

- State Board of Education departments often require that educators acquire a set amount of credit hours over a designated period of time. For example: educators licensed in New York

State must complete 100 credit hours over a five-year period.

- Educators may have limited options for earning professional development credit hours, especially in non-urban areas.
- Quality professional development often comes at a cost. Classes, conferences and workshops are expensive, and many teachers pay out-of-pocket to access them.

The Role of the Library

Libraries, as trusted places of learning, are a logical place to help teachers in this way. Libraries can channel their space, connections, staff, and monetary resources (however minor) to meet this need, but have may not have previously felt they could operate in this learning space. Truthfully, there are some clear boundaries to keep in mind when offering programming to this audience:

- Libraries can help teachers to learn without telling teachers how to teach. It is possible to avoid pedagogy while still offering valuable learning opportunities for educators.
- Libraries can offer educational programming for teachers without infringing on the work of other institutions offering professional development, such as school districts, universities, and third-party providers. The library is simply adding more opportunities for teachers to learn.
- Librarians have unique professional expertise and knowledge to share. In fact, teachers are generally not familiar with the many resources and services available at the modern library, and may have not been regularly exposed to a librarian as an educational partner.
- Similar to other adult programming, libraries leverage partnerships to connect educators with outside knowledge and expertise, bringing subject matter experts of all kinds into their space.

Why Teachers?

Classroom teachers are busy, stressed and overworked ... but their opinions about the library have such an influential reach within a school building. It's critically important that teachers know what's available to them at the library, how to access and use those services, and what librarians (of all types and specialities) can do for them.

Professional Development Certification

The terms for certifying your library's professional learning programming will vary. Requirements will depend on your state and local school district or Department of Education.

In some states, learning providers can simply issue a certificate of attendance stating the topic, location, date, and clock credit hours earned; the educator can then have the learning activity validated by their school district. In other states, learning providers must be certified at the state level to offer continuing education credit hours.

School libraries, university libraries, or special archives and collections housed in an institution of higher education will in many cases already be validated by their association.

To begin the process of learning how your library can offer professional development credit for educator programming, you can:

- Inquire with the local school district
- Google “[state] department of education professional development”
- Ask teachers in your library the criteria they must follow to earn credit

What Knowledge Do Teachers Need?

When planning your library programming, there are a few ways to determine what topics will be of most interest and use to this audience.

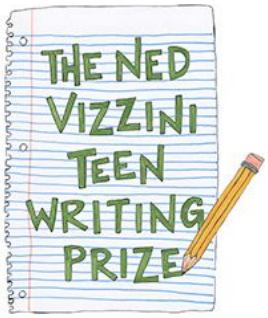
Several years of targeted school outreach and professional development programming for teachers in Brooklyn has revealed common library and information-related topics that teachers need most desperately in their classrooms:

Modern Library Topics

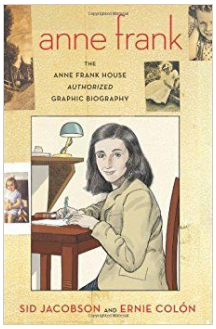
- What is the modern library? (public or school?)
- What can you do there? What is it like?
- Who works there? What is a librarian? What do they “do all day”?
- What kinds of things are (and are not) on the shelves?
- What’s in the collection? Why or why not?
- How to use the catalog: place holds, read a catalog record ...
- How to get and use a library card: terms and conditions ...
- What is a database and why should they care?

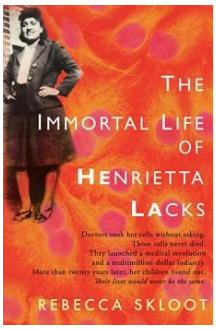
Information About Library Programs & Services

- For themselves and their own families
- As teachers to use with their students
- To pass onto the school community:
  Families (parents), students and school administration



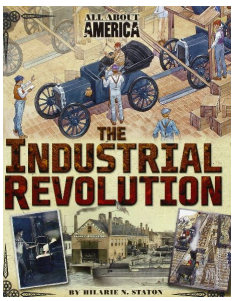
New & Engaging Books for Youth





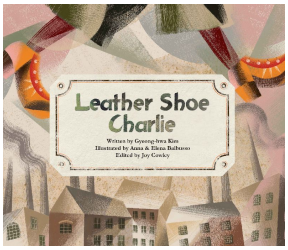
- Modern readalikes for “tried and true” classics
- Readable nonfiction across all subjects and ages
- Great book club reads
- Comics and graphic novels
- Books to build literacy and love of independent reading

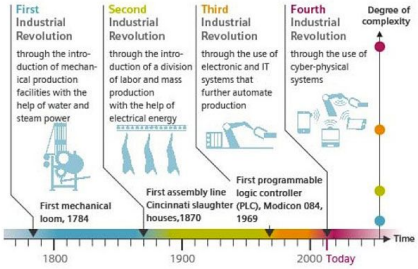
Teaching & Learning Resources



- Informational texts
- Primary sources
- Fiction and nonfiction books
- Multimedia

Essential 21st Century Information Literacy (Research) Skills





- Determining an information need
- Finding information
- Evaluating information
- Using information

Other ways to determine the learning needs of educators in your community:

Trial and Error

Begin by surveying the available expertise and teaching “talent” in your organization and/or community. Plan out available workshop content, collect feedback and adjust as you go!

Ask Them

Reach out to educators in your community. Leave surveys at the Information Desk, or schedule a focus group at your library or at a nearby school. Check in with individual teachers with whom you have a good relationship. Experiment with pre-established vs. open-ended questions to determine which learning topics educators would like to see at the library.

Traditional vs. Non-Traditional Program Content

Libraries looking to develop educator programming can also take this opportunity to be fun, inventive and creative! There are many valuable content areas for teachers which do not fall into the "traditional" scope of library and information science. Cooking, gaming, social emotional learning, and more are all valuable and legitimate learning topics for libraries to offer to teachers.

Library staff-taught (traditional topics)

- Introduction to the library catalog
- Introduction to databases
- Best new books for kids & teens
- Using Google & Wikipedia as research tools
- Introduction to archives
- Exploring the Digital Public Library of America
- Business & Career Center resources
- Using eBooks

Partner-taught (out-of-the-box ideas)

- Life in the Shelter System / Life in Prison
- Fostering Global Citizenship
- Games as Informal Learning Spaces
- Cooking in the Classroom
- Self-Care for Educators
- Open Data NYC
- Taking Virtual Field Trips
- Sexuality & Consent for Teens
- Building a Book Walking Tour

Timing & Cost

Like any other library program for adults, it can be difficult to predict the number of educators who will actually attend a program. If you choose to offer your library educator programming at no cost, make intentional timing choices to make your programming as convenient as possible for this audience, and maximize the likelihood of attendance.

Workshop Length

Educators will be most likely to attend a program if they feel they will get good "learning value" for their time. Typically a good length for a workshop will range from 1.5 - 3hrs.

When to Schedule?
To maximize attendance, schedule educator programs on the weekends, during school breaks, or over the summer. Weekday evening programs will have a much lower attendance rate, even if the topic is of great interest!

Teachers may also be willing to give up their entire Saturday or Sunday for a free, interesting, credit-bearing program. Schedule a 3-hr workshop topic in the morning (9:30am-12pm), for example, break for lunch, then schedule a complementary (or even unrelated) topic in the afternoon (1-4pm).

Cost
If you have asked educators to register up-front, a free workshop or program will always result in a few no-shows. If there is a need to guarantee attendance (a cooking class with 16 available seats) charging a small non-refundable fee (as little as $5-10) to RSVP can be very effective. Use a tool such as EventBrite to handle registration and payments.

Marketing & Promotion

"Success" with educator programming can take different forms depending on your library space, your goals, and the needs of your community. In terms of maintaining or growing attendance for educator programs, consistent offerings and regular communication about that programming will help you to build a solid audience.

Consistency
Consistency does not necessarily mean frequency. As you are building educator programming, set a realistic schedule. Can you offer one educator program out of your library every quarter?

Promotion
In addition to your regular channels for promotion of library programs, you can reach educators in the following ways:

- Create a specific mailing list of those who have attended your educator workshops, and/or those who are interested in staying up-to-date with new program offerings.
- Seek out promotional places already used by educators, like the school district's website, social channels, newsletters and/or mailing lists.
- Distribute educator-centric flyers during school outreach events.
- Leverage existing personal connections to find other ways to reach members of your local education community.

Asking eductors to register for workshops in advance will help you to determine level of interest, allowing you to work on closing the gap between those who register and those who actually attend the program when it is offered.

Aim to begin promoting your programs about 2-4 weeks prior to the event date.

Evaluation

Finally, it's important to regularly "check in" with educators attending your programs to gauge how effectively you are meetings their learning needs.

The Public Library Association Project Outcome toolkit is a good place to find simple surveys for the Adult Education / Learning audience. Post-program surveys ask attendees to rank whether:

- They found the program content helpful
- They feel more confident about what they learned
- They intend to apply what they learned
- They feel more aware of applicable resources and services provided by the library

... in addition to asking the following two open-ended questions:

- What did you like most about the program?
- What could the library do better to assist you in learning more?