

OLA CORE COMPETENCIES

CORE COMPETENCIES FOR READERS' ADVISORY
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RA COMMITTEE (OLA)

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WHAT IS READERS' ADVISORY (RA)?

Perhaps you've heard this before: "The right book in the hands of the right reader at the right time." From the foundations laid by Joyce Saricks, Nancy Brown, Catherine Sheldrick Ross, and other professional and academic voices, this overarching goal of RA has echoed in the countless matches made by readers' advisors everywhere. In 2024, based on the literature found in the bibliography of this document, we can say that:

RA is a library service offered by trained professionals that uses specific tools and techniques to match books with people of all ages, identities, and backgrounds according to these readers' personal taste and current desired reading experience.

WHY DOES RA MATTER?

The fact that reading is an asset to society has been documented in many ways. It is the foundation of most literacies and contributes to a more informed citizenship here and elsewhere in the world (Moussa & Koester, 2022). It can help heal (Reading Well—The Reading Agency, 2024). It supports caregivers and fosters understanding (Association des bibliothèques publiques du Québec (ABPQ), 2024). It helps people navigate the world as it evolves. It can also make a beach holiday even better.

The key to achieving all these things? Taste. Reading is personal, individual, contextual, and cultural. Understanding this is understanding the mission of readers' advisory. Advocating for RA is advocating for the right of readers to make their choices – and voices – heard.

Understanding why RA requires training means understanding that "[...] RA is as much art as science, and multiple perspectives are needed"(Schwartz, 2021).

COMPETENCIES

A set of core competencies for RA is defined as the attributes, skills, and outlooks that enable library staff to effectively deliver relevant reading suggestions in direct and indirect ways. It reflects the service's mission and leads to actionable goals as well as sustainable professional practices.

We believe these competencies should be explained in a way that makes them understandable and fun to read—hence this booklet, aimed at empowering you to become a confident RA advisor.

Let's break it down.

ATTRIBUTES

Attributes should not be confused with personality. Whether you are an introvert or extrovert and whether you read only romance or accounting books for pleasure doesn't matter. Being a good listener, being capable of empathy, being welcoming, and being respectful of otherness are attributes that are innate to some people, but can also be learned.

THE CAPACITY TO UNDERSTAND OTHERS

This is the foundation for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and other tenets of social justice and social impact. Culture, background, education, taste, experience—all these things shape who we are as well as what we choose to read for pleasure. Biases are real for readers, but also for readers' advisors (Fesz & Orr, 2023, p. 319), and it can mean hard work to overcome them: "We all have bias, we all come through life with trauma, and it is hard to do E/D/I work from a place of pain or cynicism" (Bratt, 2022, p. xv).

Awareness of oneself and an openness to be truly aware of others is an attribute that can be learned, fostered, and reinforced throughout a career; it means "[...] unpacking your own identity so that you know who you are and can always be conscious of others and their identities and lived experiences" (Bratt, 2022, p. 28).

Awareness helps us understand our limitations as well as our position of privilege—even if just as educated experts working in formal institutions. This is important when we engage with other readers and their intersectionality on a professional level: "It is a truly beautiful thing to see all parts of society coming together around reading and learning. It is one of the ways that libraries are actively righting wrongs that we were a part of creating" (Bratt, 2022, p. xvi).

Humility is not shame, just like service is not servitude. Awareness and the understanding of otherness develop empathy, which tends to make for a better human experience and which can also be learned—so long as we are willing "to listen to experiences outside [our] own" (Bratt, 2022, p. 19).

Listening is, in fact, one of the key skills of a readers' advisor, so more on that later.

BEING A DUAL READER

Readers' advisors tend to be people who have two readers inside of them. The first is a passionate reader with an infinite "to read" list (and suitcases that are always too heavy). That's the inner reader, and it usually translates into being a strong advocate for the importance of reading in the human experience.

The second is a professional reader. This side is passionate about other people's reading. This translates into providing great service, continuously gaining well-rounded knowledge, honing our skills, and being strong advocates for reading as a pillar of societal welfare.

These two readers coexist and complement each other, yet they remain distinct in how they manifest and act.

The best way to think about it is this: when your inner reader engages in reading for pleasure, it's all about you; when your professional reader engages with readers, it's all about them.

WILLINGNESS TO EXPLORE BEYOND YOUR OWN TASTE

You hate horror and love romance? What, then, do you say to the Stephen King fan who wants something "just like that but not as gory—it's the suspense that I like, and the penmanship"? Feel like a deer in headlights? Just keep reading—we've got you covered.

Being well versed in reading habits isn't just about genres, tropes, characters, or familiar plot lines; it's also about voices, culture, diversity, representation. As Bratt puts it, "To be an agent of change for the world, you have to start with your own self" (Bratt, 2022, p. xv). Find those "diverse spines" (Harper & Mount, 2021), listen to the voices of Indigenous youths who yearn to be heard and represented (Ellis, 2018). You can grab a reading challenge that speaks to these issues, like a list of banned books from websites like Freedom to Read in Canada or Banned Books Week (ALA), or treat yourself to a journal curated by the ALA—they publish them regularly and some even have stickers (bonus!). The NovelList 2024 challenge (Sabat, 2023) included ideas like "Read a romance or love story starring Asian characters," "Read a novel by an Indigenous author," and "Read a book set in Australia or New Zealand."

Even just exploring reading challenge lists will make you see where you, as a professional reader, can expand your knowledge. You might soon be on your way to setting up your own challenge—for yourself, other RA staff, or readers.

SKILLS

Skills are things you learn to do, in an ever-evolving way. You once learned how to read; you can learn how to build a great display and how to find books that are "horror but not gory and with a 'diverse princess who kicks ass' type of main character, possibly illustrated."

MASTERING THE ART OF CONVERSATION BY LISTENING

“The key to interviewing is listening”; so says RuPaul Charles in Ru Paul’s Drag Race Season 15, ep. 10. This applies so well to the RA interaction that “interviewing” is often replaced by “conversation” to describe the interaction between an advisor and a reader (Fesz & Orr, 2023, pp. 318–319). And for good reason: this interaction is akin to the reference interview, yet different: “But unlike reference, readers’ advisory often takes place in the context of an ongoing conversation that can last for decades, as regular patrons drop by in passing, sharing reading impressions and suggestions with staff, in what feels like a mutual exchange” (Lockley et al., 2021, p. 191).

We’ve all heard the question, “Can you recommend a good book?” The instinctive answer is, “Sure! How about this book I love?”

We know by now that this is the inner reader talking. But what if the reader’s reaction is, “meh” or “gosh, anything but that!” The term “good” is relative and individual. “Good” to one person might be a novel by John Grisham, and to another, a classic by Charles Dickens.

There’s also the fact that you will sometimes feel that readers know more than you do about certain genres or topics. Here’s a big secret: that’s inevitable. But think of this: in reference, a user can already be an expert on sailing and still need your help navigating (see what we did there?) the local laws about mooring or docking or any of those other terms they will provide you with and that you will translate into an appropriate query. In RA? Same skills. There will be readers who know more than you do about paranormal romance, biographies of famous art collectors, or how many Star Wars series have been published. That’s fine! Learning how to communicate with them is the key.

The best part? It can be learned. It can be practised with family members, friends, colleagues. Another best part (why not, let’s forgo logic)? Once mastered, this conversation can build relationships for life. Duncan Smith, founder of NoveList, has been an advisor to certain readers for decades. Decades. Why not you?

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

A trained RA professional is easy to spot: they know how to listen to the answers provided by the right questions. They understand that, as Paulette Rothbauer says, “Readers (and nonreaders) direct the readers’ advisory transaction: so that they determine what counts as reading, and what counts as a good read to them at the moment of the transaction” (interviewed in Flaherty et al., 2021, p. 183).

Of course, there are subtleties to the RA conversation, and in-depth training is highly valuable in gaining confidence. Nevertheless, the following examples illustrate how classic RA questions are all about the answers.

Scenario 1: A person asks, “Can you recommend a good book?” The underlying question to this is “Can you suggest a book I will like in my current state of mind and circumstances?” If you keep that in mind, you are halfway there.

The Saricks method, tried and true, is to open with “Tell me about a book you have enjoyed” (Wyatt, 2021, p. 29). This redirects the focus on the reader.

Follow-up questions can be:

- “What did you like about this book?” By answering this question, the reader will provide you with clues as to what matters more to them—characters, setting, style, genre, tropes, humour... all things you can translate into search terms (more on that later).
- “How did this book make you feel?” It has been said time and time again that the mood of a book is a key entrance point to understanding the reading experience.
- “What aspects of this book would you like to find in your next read?”

You will notice that these are open questions—they give the reader room to speak and for you to gather clues, yet use everyday language.

You can then home in on specifics:

- “Is there anything you don’t like and would like to avoid?”
- “Is there anything different you would like to try?”

Scenario 2: Someone asks, “Can you recommend cozy mysteries like those chocolate chip books by Joanna Fluke, but not set in the States?”

How is this different from scenario 1? (Drumroll) It’s not.

While it may seem overwhelming because of the phrasing, it’s actually a partial answer to the first question, “What did you like about this book?” You don’t know this series? That’s fine! Instead of starting with “Tell me about a book you have enjoyed,” you can say, “I don’t know that series, but I am intrigued—tell me about it!” And you are back on track.

It’s been said time and time again that RA is an art and not a science. Conversations will veer off track, some readers will regale you with details and others will only provide droplets of information. Whatever happens, getting them to lead the conversation will allow you to hear what you need to make suggestions.

Just like in any service situation, you should be aware of your body language, of cultural sensitivities, of being welcoming, of following-up and closing the interaction, etc.

This approach works for in-person or form-based RA, which can be online (but make it dynamic or easy to send) or available as a print form. You can also conduct the RA interview by phone, a more inclusive hybrid method (Knotts et al., 2021), namely since some people may have limited or no Internet access (Lockley et al., 2021, p. 192).

MASTERING THE RA VOCABULARY

The current practice of readers’ advisory is built on a tradition that was founded by librarians in the United States in the 1980s. It is well established and hinges on two key concepts: genres and appeal elements. This is what we call the RA vocabulary.

Why are there so many different lists of genres? Periods, contexts, authors, subgenres, genreblends, genre boundaries, hybridity... all these things contribute to the rich possibilities of understanding what, in a genre, makes readers happy. So no, there is no ultimate genre list—and there never will be. But having knowledge of traditions, tropes,

and the changing textures that are the building blocks of genres is essential.

The second key concept is the vocabulary known as appeal elements. Even though lists vary by era, tool, or authors, this is a cornerstone of the readers' advisory practice. Appeal elements tend to describe books in terms of such things as:

- mood
- pace
- characters
- settings
- plot
- writing style

Just like subject headings, appeal elements bring together books that have similarities. But where subject headings indicate the topic(s) of a book, appeal elements describe what aspects of the book appeal (yep!) to certain people and make for a certain reading experience — “the ‘feel’ of a book,” as Joyce Saricks put it (Saricks, 2005, p. 41). That is why, as often stated, “mood” is “by far the most specific appeal term used to open a conversation” (Wyatt, 2021, p. 29). So let's use mood as a starting point.

Say our controlled vocabulary of appeals has the following possible qualifiers for “mood”:

- tense
- terrifying
- cozy
- luminous

Try to identify how to translate what a person tells you they felt while reading the book to a description of the mood:

Example 1: “I was scared out of my wits through the second half of the book—and loved it.”

Which qualifier from our list best describes the mood? “Terrifying”.

Example 2.: “I felt like the author was giving me a massive hug and it just made me smile.”

Mood? Perhaps “cozy”—or “luminous”—or both!

Keep this in mind: appeal elements are powerful allies. As Saricks and Wyatt write in their introduction to their genre series, “[...] appeal crosses genre, subject, and format [...]” (in Bradford, 2023). Indeed, you can find terrifying or luminous moods in sci-fi, in books about life in medieval Paris, and whether you read electronically, in large print, or by listening to an audiobook. You can even turn them into “Non-appeal” (Bessman Taylor, 2007) or “rejection factors” (Fesz & Orr, 2023, p. 318), when you are “asking about books readers did not enjoy” (Wyatt, 2021, p. 29). In the same way, while these lists are often built around the characteristics of fictional works, most have been adapted or tweaked for non-fiction, poetry, or even exported to other forms of entertainment.

Again, no definitive list of appeal elements exists—hence the idea of mastering the vocabulary, not learning it by heart once and for all. But whether you use NoveList's or Wyatt and Sarick's list (Wyatt & Saricks, 2019), integrating this type of vocabulary in your practice will serve as a common language with your colleagues (and therefore make it

easier for you to ask them for help!) It will also help you query the tools that are developed for readers' advisory professionals. The idea is to get to the point where your brain translates descriptions of books into appeal elements automatically.

MASTERING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GENRE AND FORMAT

Formats are also an ever-evolving phenomenon and can have deep cultural roots. Sequential art is a good example, because syndicated cartoons, bandes dessinées, and different traditions of manga do not necessarily equate genres. It would be reductive to think that Calvin and Hobbes, Astérix, Speak, Sailor Moon, and Drops of God have the same readership.

The same goes for audiobooks, that can have music and sound effects or not, and read by a full cast or one trusted narrator who lulls you to sleep in the best possible way. Be aware that they may also be read by AI technology.

Digital formats vary, as do paper formats. Adapted technologies and formats can be chosen or used by different people for different reasons—like large prints books for reluctant young readers (Thorndike Press & Booklist, 2020). Keeping in mind that these formats are part of the reading experience and offering them as options in your suggestions will also broaden your own horizons.

SUGGESTING ITEMS FOR READING

The RA conversation leads to the advisor making suggestions. The most frequent numbers are 2-3 titles, as this provides options without being overwhelming. Obviously, if the reader wants more... let loose!

Thinking of titles as suggestions rather than recommendations is helpful in a few ways.

It helps readers' advisors refrain from openly emitting judgment on books or their readers and vouching for a book whose content or worldview may hurt or insult someone else. Your opinion is legitimate, of course, but that's for your inner reader to own, rather than for your professional reader to flaunt!

Situation: someone "recommends" a book—it's the bee's knees, the best thing since sliced bread, the cat's pyjamas. By page 13, you are shaken to the core—you find this book just plain boring, or worse, culturally insensitive or triggering. How do you then view the professional who recommended this book?

It is important to understand that what affects, hurts, or uplifts one reader may have the opposite effect on another. Judging a book as "good" and "recommending" it, in a professional setting, can be detrimental to relationships as well as to the service—not to mention that it can reinforce the unconscious biases that all readers' advisors should strive to be aware of in themselves and in their workplace.

Suggesting creates a dynamic of trust. As the reader senses that their taste is honoured and respected, they are more likely to feel welcome and entitled to dislike a suggestion.

It also helps both advisors and readers stay in the realm of possibilities. Suggested books

are just that, suggestions—not an end-all-and-be-all list. They can be a starting point towards other, better suggestions.

People might reject your suggestions—and that’s fine! Keep listening to those cues; they will help you find other avenues. People will forgive human error from advisors with whom they have a good relationship, but they may not come back to see a competent advisor by whom they felt judged. It’s a basic human reaction.

Invite people to give you feedback on suggestions, to tell you whether they finished/enjoyed them... or not! That will help you fine-tune your skills and help you keep that open attitude. A suggestion that doesn’t work out is not a “mistake” so much as a chance to learn why.

AWARENESS OF YOUR COLLECTION, ACCESS TO TITLES, AND ACCESSIBILITY OF TITLES

Suggesting items that readers can’t access through your system can get frustrating. It’s therefore important to be aware of the limitations of the physical collection, how holds can be placed (and what delays that might entail), what can be ordered through inter-library loans, what’s available for access in digital/audio/adapted collections (and how holds work there too!).

In other words, how can readers access your suggestions in time frames and formats that are optimal for them?

When you are providing suggestions, they should include available formats, as well as how to access them. If you are providing a list electronically, you can include links. Obviously, if preferred formats are mentioned by the reader, you should focus on those.

OUTLOOKS

Believing in reading as a pillar of societal welfare, believing in freedom of expression, believing that people should choose what they read, believing in the multiplicity of viewpoints, believing that representation matters, and believing that readers’ advisory is about people rather than books—that’s the readers’ advisory outlook.

RESPECTING THE MANY AND DIVERSE REASONS WHY PEOPLE READ DURING EVERY INTERACTION

People read...

- because their parent said they should;
- when they are on holiday (and don’t care about sand in the pages!);
- to expand their worldview;
- to deal with challenging times;
- to keep up with trends or buzz and be in the know;
- anything that emulates their favourite author’s style while waiting for the next volume in the series;
- just because.

All very different reasons. All valid.

It should become instinctual to understand that not everyone reads what you do, for the reasons you do, with the baggage you have. The more interactions you have with readers, the more knowing how to interact with the infinite range of readers will come easily to you.

Having the confidence to know that you can be of service to anyone who wants to read is the best outlook you can have.

STAYING RELEVANT

This speaks to the motivation to keep learning about reading and readers, not just books. This outlook helps you engage with the readers in the moment, in every conversation, for every suggestion. And it will likely add to your to-read list (sorry! Or... yay!)

Staying relevant means believing in the importance of being:

- keen to update your knowledge;
- eager to keep your skills and practices current;
- aware that cultural and social issues affect readerships;
- curious about how reading practices and experiences evolve for other readers.

ADVOCATING FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE FACE OF RISING CENSORSHIP

This fight is never-ending even as contexts change. Asheim offered a framework to librarians in 1953, arguing that censorship is about limiting access, whereas librarians should make selections based on “the earned confidence of those it serves” (Asheim, 1953, p. 67).

In Canada, the post-pandemic, socially contextualized distress of many library workers has been highlighted in in-depth journalism (Hune-Brown, 2023) while protests against and support for drag storytime has made its way to mainstream media (King & Femia, 2023; Roy & Izri, 2022) as well as academia (Chabot & Helkenberg, 2022).

Censorship demands in school and public libraries in the United States have reached record highs and shifted from single titles like Canadian author Gravel’s *Pink, Blue, and You* (Nerestant, 2023) to whole lists (Garcia, 2023).

Given these tensions, it’s understandable to want to throw in the towel at times and make the easier choices.

We can’t.

On the 40th anniversary of Freedom to Read Week, the Book and Periodical Council has partnered with Libraries and Archives Canada, the Canadian Urban Libraries Council and OLA—because libraries play a part in advocating that reading should not know the types of boundaries censorship imposes.

As Kirby McCurtis writes, “One of the biggest ways that racism shows up in our own institutions is through silence” (in Bratt, 2022, p. ix). The same can be said of other ugly

“isms” and attitudes that marginalize otherness. Bratt explains that “By not focusing on diversity, by being part of and primarily associated with the dominant culture, librarians can quite easily select materials with limited representation. This is how bias prospers. A lot of times librarians do not realize that the books they choose consistently emphasize a single way of life” (Bratt, 2022, p. 9). As of 2021, the problem of representation was perceived as systemic in libraries in the USA: “As it stands now, RA is not meeting the needs of patrons from marginalized groups who seek representation of stories like their own, nor those of patrons from any background who want to read about a diverse range of experiences” (Wyatt, 2021, p. 28).

As a readers’ advisor, you have a voice and the privilege of expertise. Let’s think about this in terms of outlook, then, and positive actions: if you are happy to be a loud activist, you can engage in intellectual freedom campaigns, show your colours, advocate for reading rights in everything you do. If you are quieter, then just keep this in mind: freedom of expression also happens one reader at a time, one conversation at a time, one suggestion at a time. So, too, do inclusion, equity, representation, adapted access, and respect.

One word that sums up this attitude is one of Jessica Anne Bratt’s favourite: “intentional.” Make suggestions and curate lists:

- that go beyond the readily available lists of prizes and bestsellers;
- that match appeal and genre with new and rarely heard voices;
- that contain characters and discourses meant to empower the socially unseen;
- that are available in alternate formats and adapted technologies—and indicate it on the lists to make them visible.

Hear and honour the hurt and anger in the phrase “representation matters” and then be intentional in learning about it and making it happen. And if you need a more complex catchphrase, try these on for size: “Diversity is a good thing. Diversity provides a richness a monolith cannot. Diversity expands experience. It’s something worth fighting for” (Bratt, 2022, p. 38).

And if someone contests this, know that “It is important for library leadership to have a strong education in intellectual freedom rights and core library values so that they are capable of distinguishing between voices that align with the mission of the public libraries and those that do not” (Chabot & Helkenberg, 2022, p. 5). Respect that this patron’s current point of view will not change in an instant, state that they are heard, and that you will happily find something that suits their needs as well. Shaming is not the way forward, but standing your inclusive ground is.

Someone asks a question about a culture you don’t know? Say that. Say, “I don’t know”—but follow it up with using your skills as a library staff member and finding out, just as you would in reference. You may end up adding to your own diverse reading list.

You make a mistake? You say something and someone points out that it’s insensitive? Say you’re sorry. Simply, and mean it. And then ask if the person is willing to help you make it better.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This section outlines strategies for developing the attitudes, skills, and outlooks that are fundamental to becoming a readers' advisor. Learning what methods work for you in terms of expanding on your personal tastes and keeping current on how readerships evolve is the key to keeping your knowledge relevant, and help you engage with a wide and varied range of readers and non-readers. If something doesn't work for you, you likely won't do it—or do it reluctantly, and that's not the point!

While each of these “how-to’s” can be explored and developed over a career, here are some nifty (we think) starting points.

HOW-TO: KEEP YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF READING TRENDS CURRENT

What are young audiences gravitating towards these days?
Who are the most popular audiobook narrators?
What's the latest trend in high fantasy?
What are the most awaited titles due to be released in the fall?
What's the next Oprah selection?
And how on Earth can you stay aware of all this?

Social media fiend?

Find podcasts, blogs, influencers, critics, media posts, hashtags. Make reading about reading part of your daily scrolling, keeping in mind that “An important skill in being able to adapt to the changing landscape is to recognize that the current app may not exist in a year or another one is likely to replace it, and the knowledge, skills and tools acquired in using and researching one can be applied to the next. It is important to be aware of trends within social media to decide which apps to explore and embrace” (K. E. Anderson, 2021, p. 7).

Like flipping through catalogues?

Create or join the collection management routing list for publishers' catalogues—or sign up for their newsletters.

Like browsing in brick-and mortar settings? Go to other library branches and bookstores. Pick up books and learn how to do a “minute read” by:

- looking at the cover (front and back, imagery, blurbs, reviews, bios, indication of series, editor);
- reading the inside flaps;
- reading the first page, the last page (sorry!) and somewhere in the middle.

It's amazing how much you can glean from that with a little practice (Moyer, 2010).

Like doing mini courses on your own?

If your library subscribes to specialized databases, such as NovelList, you can access their toolbox. If not, the RA community can direct you to specific types of tools and training opportunities.

This brings us to the most effective how-to: networking! Workshops and conference attendance foster and renew the shared passion for reading and we all greatly benefit from hearing what other library staff are doing. Publishers' representatives can spark interest and enthusiasm as well (and sometimes give you freebies!) Attend RA in a Day, participate in book clubs, ask your colleagues where they build their "to read" list. Join discussion groups and forums, like ours.

Trends may come and go, popularity has ebbs and flows, and sites will go "404 not found" on you, but the RA community will always guide you to another resource just waiting to be discovered!

HOW-TO: LEARN TO READ (AND SHARE) PROFESSIONALLY

It's easier said than done to forgo sharing opinions about books. The best way to achieve that shift is to continue to use the books we love as a starting point and expanding from there.

READING JOURNAL

No, no "dear diary" here. We're talking about a professional log, written in RA vocabulary by the professional reader in you. The entry should, at least, give the author and title, genre labels, and appeal elements. That way, whether you liked the book or not, you can transform any entry into an online query.

The best part? Once you have a few titles in there, you can see what your own biases are, where your knowledge might need a boost or refresh, and which appeal elements might help you explore new genres.

You can also create reading lists, maps, displays, or even learning tools for your colleagues based on what you find out about yourself. Expertise? Check!

SHOW AND TELL

How do you share your love of reading if you can't give an opinion about a book? Here are a couple of options:

- 1) "Currently reading" or "Just finished" titles included in your email signature—it doesn't state whether you liked the book or not, just that you are reading it (which is, well, your job!) Want to go the extra mile? Add a little annotation or a few appeals and genre terms in there.
- 2) Have a staff share—share with your colleagues. You can be a little freer, here, and perhaps get another viewpoint on the book—like triggers or a different interpretation. Again, don't forget to bring the RA vocabulary to the party, as this may be helpful to others as well.

STAFF BOOK CLUBS

Staff book clubs offer great opportunities for staff to learn about RA. We suggest that the person hosting the activity be more experienced and able to provide training on the spot. We also suggest that book clubs happen during work hours, accommodating different people at different times. Some time should be allocated for staff to at least skim the book(s). This will ensure that people who have no affinity with the book will still be motivated to prepare.

Here are a few examples that provide progressive training through book clubs.

1) A title event—everyone reads the same book. This works well for beginners, namely, to workshop the vocabulary of appeals with concrete examples.

Key takeaways:

- How to describe the book(s) in RA vocabulary—appeal elements and genres or genreblends.
- Questions or discussion prompts that could go in a book club guide about this title, author, or genre.
- Creating read-alikes from this book from a multitude of angles: genre, appeals, topics, author, etc.
- How to create an inclusive and welcoming environment, including: how to redirect a sensitive discussion; how to make sure all voices that wish to be heard can be; making sure that those who prefer not to speak are also included, through non-verbal cues, for example.

2) A genre dive—different people read different books. Good for intermediate-level staff who have basic training in the RA vocabulary and genres.

Added takeaways:

- Understanding the tropes of the genre and what has historically defined it.
- Getting an overview of the traditional as well as emerging subgenres and genreblends.
- Learning about key authors, prolific authors, beloved authors, and new voices.
- Understanding what attracts readers to the genre, as well as what might repel others.
- Understanding any issues that may be associated with the genre—as society evolves, some genres can be perceived differently.

3) An author profile—different people read different books. This works especially well for authors who write in different genres. Best for advanced readers' advisors who can navigate multiple genres and appeals in one go.

Added takeaways:

- Understanding why author read-alikes and title read-alikes can be vastly different.
- Getting a perspective on how authors' careers evolve.

4) An appeal dive—different people read different books that share, say, “an evocative style”. Best for advanced readers' advisors who can navigate all aspects of RA.

Added takeaways:

- Harnessing the power of appeal across genres.
- Understanding the limitations of the various lists of appeal elements and qualifiers.
- Evaluating the importance of a given appeal element over others when describing a book.

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

This section will provide an overview of the tasks and activities a readers' advisor may be asked to perform outside of the conversation, as well as tasks that we feel are best left to RA experts.

WRITE-UPS OR THE ART OF ANNOTATION

Whether you present a book in person, to a reading club, at show and tell, in a reading list, or to a reader as a suggestion, knowing how to describe it in RA terms is an art in itself—the art of the annotation. We'll skip over the metadata—we know you already know how to do a bibliographic reference. This is about replacing the publisher's marketing blurb with a short text that describes the book in a way that – you guessed it – focuses on appeal. The point here is not to sell the book to any reader, as marketing would; it is to match the book with the right readers.

If you've read the book and used a log to note appeal factors, triggers, and other key points, you can use those; if not, you can do a 1-minute read, go online, and check reviews.

Here's a quick and dirty method to learn how to do a state-of-the-art annotation. We call it the jab-jab-jab-punch, as it was inspired (true story!) by watching the boxer Laila Ali on TV.

Let's try it with the book *Someday, Maybe*, by Onyi Nwabineli (Graydon House, 2022).

Jab 1: focus on the most important appeal element.

- Appeal: character; qualifiers: strong female character; complex
- Sentence: Eve was a strong and happy woman before she imploded into shards of glass in the wake of her husband's suicide; as she says herself, "Bonus fact: No. I am not okay."

Jab 2: second most important appeal element

- Appeal: Writing style; qualifiers: strong signature; humour
- Sentence: Yet Nwabineli's easy and witty imagery turns raw emotion into an often-funny page-turner.

Jab 3: third most important appeal element

- Appeal: Plot; centred on one character; surprising
- Sentence: What first presents as one woman's journey is in fact an intricate plot where improbable twists become possible and believable.

Why three? Because if you try to put any more, the annotation starts to read like a marketing blurb, where there is something for every taste; we are trying to match people to books, so creating annotations consisting of key characteristics is the most efficient.

You'll notice that in the jabs, we are unapologetic about using appeal elements: stylistically, we are sticking them as the subject of our sentences. It's a bit rigid at first, but it works! Master this, and you'll be writing about any book in not time.

And finally, in the last sentence (the punch), you put any other information you feel is relevant, like triggers, diversity, place in a series or an author's career, etc. If you are doing a booktalk, you might add a cliff hanger to keep the audience engaged, or end on a question, or even a readalike.

- We feel it's important to mention, if space allows:

- o Accolade: Good Morning America
- o Triggers: suicide, language
- o Diversity/own voice: Nigerian-British
- o Place in author's career: debut novel

- Sentence: This debut novel, a Good Morning America Book Club Pick, contains trigger language and is not for the faint of heart as it tackles suicide from the point of view of the person who finds a loved one unexpectedly lifeless; but the way Eve navigates the strong bonds of her Igbo-British family as well as the kindness of strangers envelops the reader in the most uplifting of human experiences.

Put it all together and...

Eve was a strong and happy woman before she imploded into shards of glass in the wake of her husband's suicide; as she says herself, "Bonus fact: No. I am not okay." Yet Nwabinelli's easy and witty imagery turns raw emotion into an often-funny page-turner. What first presents as one woman's journey is in fact an intricate plot where improbable twists become possible and believable. This debut novel, a Good Morning America Book Club Pick, contains trigger language and is not for the faint of heart as it tackles suicide from the point of view of the person who finds a loved one unexpectedly lifeless; but the way Eve navigates the strong bonds of her Igbo-British family as well as the kindness of strangers envelops the reader in the most uplifting of human experiences.

Jab, jab, jab, punch. Annotation.

This one is 134 words. You may need to reduce it to 100, 75, or even 50 words depending on context—and that's fine! The prep is similar; the rest is practice. Again, this is an art, not a science.

To edit down, you can remove a "jab," but that will take away one of the appeals. If you shorten the sentences, you'll keep your chosen appeals present. And fun fact: the more you edit down, the more you see if your representation of the appeals is correct.

So let's set a few targets and see where we get.

100 words? Eve was strong and happy before she imploded into shards of glass in the wake of her husband's suicide. Yet Nwabinelli's easy imagery turns raw emotion into an often-funny page-turner. What first presents as one woman's journey is in fact an intricate plot where improbable twists become believable. This Good Morning America Book Club Pick contains trigger language and is not for the faint of heart; but the way Eve navigates the strong bonds of her Igbo-British family as well as the kindness of strangers envelops the reader in the most uplifting of human experiences. (95)

75 words?: Eve was strong and happy before her husband's suicide. Nwabinelli's imagery turns her raw emotion into an often-funny page-turner. What presents as one woman's journey becomes an intricate plot where improbable twists become believable. This book contains trigger language and content, but the way Eve navigates the strong bonds of her Igbo-British family and the kindness of strangers envelops the reader in the most uplifting of human experiences. (69)

50 words? Eve was strong, happy; then her husband died. Nwabinelli turns raw emotion into a witty page-turner. One journey becomes an intricate plot. The way Eve navigates the bonds of her Igbo-British family and the kindness of strangers envelops the reader in an uplifting experience. Triggers: language; self-harm, mental illness. (50)

Whatever version you read, the key points are there.

What isn't there, however, is whether we liked the book or not, or how much. Or even if we finished it. We will keep you guessing on that one...

From a technical point of view, the idea is this: write the jab-jab-jab-punch version, focusing on appeal elements, with the "punch" being all those extra bits that can be useful. Then you have your canvas to do all the booktalks and lists you want.

A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND IF YOU ARE WRITING ANNOTATIONS FOR SPECIFIC FORMATS

Whether you are giving a book talk, sending a list over email, or creating a list of read-alikes, making sure you honour the specificity of certain formats will also ensure you are not equating that format with genre. Here are some key examples.

AUDIOBOOKS

The style of audiobooks is important. Technical quality, single-narrator or full cast, the presence of music, abridged/unabridged—these things are specific to the format and should be reflected in your description. Audio is an adapted format as well as a choice and can mean different things for people who come from cultures of orality or people who have learned to read through audio methods. We should also bear in mind that for many people, reading began or improved by being read to (Moussa and Koester, 2021).

SEQUENTIAL ART AND ILLUSTRATED BOOKS

No, these are not just for kids! It is important to signal the presence of illustrations or visuals, and to identify if the story needs (or even is carried by) these illustrations—this can be important for adapted formats. Identifying types of sequential art (manga, comics, etc.) is also important, of course; but beyond that, think of describing the visual style as you describe a written one—it deserves its own appeal qualifiers, and most lists factor that in.

SHELF-TALKERS

Shelf talkers are short, individual descriptions located in the library stacks, often written on a small type of media (index cards or post-its). This is where editing down your annotations can come in handy, as 50 words might still be too much!

Any book can be featured—however, just like books on display, they may be borrowed more often, so it's important to keep an eye out for that. But if you are keeping a journal and practising your 1-minute reading habits, then you might be able to grab every opportunity and have quick turnarounds! You can also keep shelf-talkers and reuse them.

BOOK LISTS—LET YOUR CREATIVE SIDE SHINE!

Putting it all together is where it can get really fun. You can find a common theme, a common appeal, do a deep genre dive that shows the range of appeals covered—the sky's the limit. Reading challenges are also lists.

And since you are curating them, you can put into practice all the things we have covered so far, from representation to accessibility. Choosing that entry point, those connections, designing the list, choosing illustrations and colours, also gives your voice a chance to be an advocate for whatever part of the library's mission you wish to highlight.

You can put these in a book display, by the desk, make brochures or bookmarks, put them online. Just make sure to respect the copyright on the visual materials and to use whatever logos for materials created by your library for public distribution.

BOOKTALKS

Your annotations will come in handy if you are asked to give a booktalk. Show-and-tell at your staff book club may mean just one; being invited as a guest speaker may mean 5 or 6. You may be asked to give a lightning book talk (30 seconds... go!) or have time to read a (short) excerpt or two if you have 2-3 minutes per title.

It's the same content, the same outlook, the same skills, the same attitude. The only thing you need to factor in is public speaking and pacing.

Tips to keep in mind to have a positive booktalking experience:

- Search online for name pronunciations.
- Bring visuals – either the book itself, or a PowerPoint, or printout with the book's cover.
- Start strong and end strong. Take your two best booktalks and put them at the beginning and the end of your session, and consider how one title leads into the next, almost like a playlist.
- Don't pretend to have read the book if you haven't. You don't want to get caught in a lie and lose your audience's trust.

So practise in front of the mirror, and then with friends, and in time, it will become second nature—or at least, a little easier. You can find your voice and your own style.

ORGANIZING AND HOSTING BOOK CLUBS

We've seen earlier how participating in a book club can really enhance staff training, networking, and support. Being a participant is also an essential first step in understanding things like timing, dynamics, choice of books, and the types of questions that hinder ("did you like it") or further ("do you think the character made the right choice?") discussions.

Book clubs therefore go well beyond choosing a title and putting 5 copies in a cute box, although cute boxes are pretty cool, too.

CURATING BOOK CLUB KITS

For every book club organized by a library, there are many more clubs offered by community members—in their own homes, at community centres, in coffee shops, and, increasingly, online. The leaders of these groups often need guidance and support from their libraries, namely, to secure enough copies for their group, or to secure copies in adapted formats. Here are some solutions:

- Suggest a kit that already exists in your library in a cute box—they may just not know it's there!
- Use interlibrary loan services to coordinate enough copies and various formats.
- Lease multiple digital copies from a vendor.
- Develop a partnership with a local bookseller to offer discounts to club members.

Those solutions can also come in handy if you curate or participate in things like reading challenges, especially those where a whole community reads the same title at once.

HOSTING A BOOK CLUB

And then, there is the discussion guide. Indeed, no book club kit is complete without a guide. These guides help structure the conversation.

Many editors include discussion guides at the end of books; others can be found online. Whether you use those verbatim or as a starting point to curate your own, they are truly the key to making sure that multiple aspects of the book are discussed, which, in turn, ensures multiple voices and points of view can be heard.

Trust us. A discussion guide is essential. What's not essential, though, is – wait for it – to have read the book being discussed.

Since your role is not to discuss your own opinion or taste, then you do not need to engage in the discussion. You need to facilitate it. Not comparing what is said to the voice in your head means that you can focus on group dynamics. Power plays, louder voices, but also lulls and too much focus on one aspect of the book are things that make or break a book club. Watch for non-verbal cues as well as strong voices.

Read the following sentences and you will see what we mean:

- We can circle back to this later, but I'd love to hear what you have to say about this next topic.
- For this next round, I'd like to know if the people who haven't spoken yet would like to start.
- For this next round, let's do lightning talks: I'll set a timer for 1 minute per person.

- Thank you for sharing—does anyone have a different point of view on this?
- This time, let's go around the room clockwise; we'll go counterclockwise next time. Once everyone has had a chance to speak, we can open it up to the floor.
- Are we ready to move on to another topic?
- I hear you and I will keep that in mind for next time—thank you so much for that.

Another quick tip? Bring paper and pens for everyone. It helps with the burning need to intervene and, worse, interrupt. People can make notes and speak in turn.

CREATING A READING EVENT

As mentioned earlier, a trend in recent years has been for the library to promote a particular book, and encourage everyone in the community to read it over a designated period of time.

Other ideas?

- Reading across the ages—inviting teens and (grand-)parents to read the same books and then coming together to talk about it.
- Reading and watching—inviting people to read the book and host a movie night with popcorn, and then discuss which version wins (our money is on the book)
- Reading Jane Austen read-alikes and then discussing them over tea. In a Regency hairdo and high-waisted dress? Why not! Take that idea and make it sci-fi with blue drinks and antennas (and/or antennae).

There are multiple ways to revamp the book club—we've put some references in the bibliography (Alessio et al., 2020; Anderson, 2021).

Just remember that it's the skills that make the event successful; so bring out those annotated reading lists, show off those book talk skills, and have everyone leave with a few more books.

CREATING DISPLAYS

Displays are a great way to make the collection seen and for back titles to circulate. However, too often, they are based on easy targets, like holidays (which can lead to a lack of inclusivity) or genres (often led by taste).

So first question, every time: what is your objective for this display and how will you measure if it is met?

One other key thing: if you are only targeting one group or genre, ask yourself why.

BOOK DISPLAYS

Book displays are a form of passive RA. They can be displays of books or book bundles—sets of books that meet certain criteria (Knotts et al., 2021). Prize lists can also be good starting points (Fishman et al., 2021), especially if you go beyond the prize list to include read-alikes from more marginalized voices: "Human differences are something to celebrate. We, as librarians, get the opportunity to present differences in a positive, celebratory manner"(Bratt, 2022, p. 22).

Whatever your entry point or overarching theme is, think of including:

- Books of fiction and non-fiction
- Books in various genres
- Books in various formats (or pathways to those formats), including adapted formats
- Books in various languages
- Books for various ages
- Books that vary in representation
- Books by appeal, especially mood—and here we are taking a page from Merga’s article: “Libraries can consider placing greater emphasis on displaying and recommending books in relation to emotions, such a display of books that will make you sob until you have no tears left, or kinds of characters [...] such as strong female leads. Using places as a point of appeal can also be powerful” (Merga, 2021, p. 8).

Let’s unpack this for a minute: yes, strong female leads, but let’s not forget the “such as”: it could be inspiring men, people of colour, pioneers in changing gender roles, human rights activists (Walter, 2020). “Places” in the quote is plural because if you go with, say, “Paris,” then it’s one place that may appeal to some people; if you go with “Capital novels” (with the pun if you like!) then you may touch different people and make different voices heard. Happy or uplifting or scary or funny books are also broad categories that give you loads of options.

You can also curate accompanying reading lists that show the different angles you explored while creating the display—and it will show the books that are already in circulation, inviting people to place holds.

And then make sure you have a way of replenishing the titles that are borrowed. Keep track of what is borrowed and what is not. That may lead you to your next idea!

WELCOME DISPLAYS

The reason we mention the objective of a display is this: think of the first display you see when you arrive at the library. Is it all about romance? Is it all board games? Are all the books in a language you don't speak? Is it all Colleen Hoover read-alikes? And did you just walk by thinking, “This display is not about me”?

Therein lies the issue for what we are calling the welcome display. Just like all forms of RA, displays are about people. And the first one people see, at the very least, should be about letting them know that this space is for them. Think about people who may be setting foot in a Canadian library for the first time, who may not speak the language, who may be adjusting to so many new things at once.

So when you choose the objective of your welcome display, think of “aboutness” and audience: who is this for? And while no display can ever please everyone, think about how inviting and inclusive it is: “Working in a public library, librarians do much cultural mediation and cultural translation, reconciling misunderstandings, making library approaches and practices more culturally sensitive, and taking care of the nuanced and culturally competent planning of programs and services” (Dali, 2022, p. 217).

DISPLAY FEEDBACK PROGRAM

The best way to know if a display is pleasing is not whether books circulate or don't—chances are they will. The best way to know is to ask.

Ask people to give you feedback. It can be as simple as a comment box with forms and pencil. And a little trick? Instead of a long form, you might put different questions on different little papers and let people choose—after all, it's not a test! Leaving answers blank might make people feel inadequate, whereas picking and choosing what to answer can feel more like being entitled to a choice. Bonus: this will help you know which questions work best!

You might ask:

- Did you borrow a book from this display? Which one?
- Did you like this display? Why?
- Is there another title you would suggest we add to the display? Why?
- Do you have a suggestion for a display theme?
- Is there a book you were unhappy to see in this display? Why?
- Do you have any other comments about this display?

Keep accessibility in mind with things like colour contrast, make those papers pretty and you're likely to get comments! And offer alternative ways for people to give feedback if writing doesn't work for them—just by saying they can talk to staff or engage through email or on social platforms, as always.

CODESIGNING COMMUNITY-BASED ACTIVITIES

Cooke, citing Adriana McCleer, paints this unflattering picture: "Librarians have a habit of offering services they think are best, assuming that 'the user populations would have the same interests and the same information needs as the librarians, or, through education and reading, those populations would eventually come to share the librarians' interests and needs'" (Cooke, 2017, p. 48; cited reference: McCleer, 2013, p. 264).

Thankfully, as shown in this document, the literature tells us that positive changes are being made. A lot of this has to do with community engagement. This may seem like going "above and beyond RA" but it echoes the attitudes and outlooks that are core competencies of RA: Again, RA is about people who read books: it's in the name. We advise people about books. It's not "book advisory".

Engaging with different groups that make up your community is an investment that can also have positive repercussions well beyond professional satisfaction. It can lead to an enhanced profile and cross-promotion with other organizations, which may potentially lead to improved funding—and we are all for that!

You can invite:

- local authors to speak or to attend a book club about their book;
- local leaders or members of different groups to co-curate reading lists or displays with you.

You can also facilitate peer-to-peer interactions, by mixing reading with other activities such as cooking, sewing, gardening, travelling, cosplay—through appeal, this is limitless!

Sure, you may need to adapt your traditional methods to fit the needs of a particular group or event. But that also keeps your own work fresh and can work wonders for motivation.

Here are a few ways to identify potential partners:

- Look at different organizations and groups in your community, explore their websites, and think of ways in which you might be able to incorporate readers' advisory into what they already do. It's important to approach them as experts—a partnership is also a form of conversation.
- Become involved in your various community groups; become a regular presence there, taking time to find out what they need from you. Reading the local paper and online community event boards will inform you of upcoming events that you may be able to take part in.
- Talk to your colleagues! Their own identities and intersectionality may open doors.

Just remember to remain sensitive and aware of your own place as a newcomer and learner. We are back to attitudes as core competencies: “Working with people from around the world involves serving immigrant communities, and this is the kind of work that requires genuine engagement, not just task completion” (Dali, 2022, p. 208).

HOSTING EXPERTS AND AUTHORS

As you put out feelers, you may realize that while partnerships are not always possible, inviting experts to speak or interact with your patrons in some other way might be. Conferences and workshops are two examples.

However, writers will not always come for free. After all, writing is their profession (Desrochers, 2019) and it is their right to expect compensation. The same goes for any expert. Costs vary. General expenses include speaker's honorarium, travel, accommodation, and meals for the duration of the trip. Make sure you are aware of that before confirming the event.

MANAGING RA SERVICES

Whether you work in a small system and do it all or work in a huge system with whole teams, you may be called upon to go beyond traditional RA practices. You may be responsible for staff training, accountable for programming success, etc. By setting a clear mandate, and modelling good reading behaviour, managers can impress upon staff the importance of reading and knowledge to customer service.

CREATING, CURATING, OR MANAGING A ROUTING LIST

If you still have paper resources, such as catalogues or magazines pertaining to reading, it might be a good idea to make sure everyone who should (or wants) to see them, does. Routing lists are more efficient if they are maintained by one person, who follows up on the process. This will help ensure that they are:

- up to date: are we still “routing” that catalogue that went paperless in 2014? Are we still sending it to the person who retired that same year?
- clear and easy to use for new staff who might be interested;
- creating accountability (so the catalogue isn’t stuck under a pile of novels awaiting labelling on someone’s desk!)

And nothing precludes you from creating a routing list for online resources as well, be it a virtual platform where people indicate what they’ve consulted (and comment—comments are good!), or a shared drive everyone can access; so long as it works for you and the people you work with. Therefore, a routing list should also be:

- motivating—and make people want to consult the resources. So just like you might create annotations for books, make the list appealing;
- part of people’s day. It’s work. Allocating time for consulting resources is a good practice. That way, it’s clear that the expectations (staying current) match the resources (how much time a person has to do it). Win-win.

STAFF ASSESSMENT AND HIRING

We hope this booklet can help assess whether core competencies are mastered, and best practices are observed. An interest in reading does not a readers’ advisor make—but an interest in a wide range of reading practices helps, and mastering the tools is a must.

Here are some examples of questions you might ask when hiring or conducting staff assessment interviews:

- Tell us about a book you enjoyed by describing its appeal elements.
 - o Follow-up: Are there any triggers or warning you became conscious of while reading?
- Let me give you this book [present prop to interviewee]. I’ll give you a minute and then ask you to describe what you think are its three main appeal elements.
 - o Follow-up: If you were to build a book list from this book, how would you go about it? What aspects would you build on?
- If you were to build a display in the next few weeks, what theme or topic or aboutness

would you choose and why?

- o Follow-up: Can you name five books you would put in that display?
- Can you name three of the books you feel are the most on demand at the moment?
 - o Follow-up: Can you explain the reason for that demand for each of them?
- Can you name a local author?
- Can you name an author who, in your eyes, represents a marginalized voice?
- Can you name three adapted formats for accessibility?
- Is there a group or community that you would like to reach out to for a reading-related event?
 - o Follow-up: What would that event look like in your view?

SHOW ME THE NUMBERS

Along with staff assessment and support, you may be called upon to defend RA with numbers. Yep, statistics. They can actually be quite fun when you know your work is going in the right direction!

Collection-related numbers can include:

- turnover rates in various parts of your collection (e.g., genres);
- use of items that have been part of reading lists or displays;
- use of book club sets—internally and externally.

Content-related numbers might be:

- distribution of library-created print resources, like booklists or bookmarks;
- hits of RA pages of the website;
- number of RA queries (in person and online)
- use of databases, like NoveList;
- views and comments on social media.

Making use of statistical data is not a once-only project. Review the data and over time—make it part of your work week or it will be a tall mountain to climb when you need the numbers.

And remember user feedback, whether it's:

- follow-up conversations about suggestions made by readers' advisors;
- email/online form content;
- display comments;
- user feedback.

You can also analyze those data qualitatively. If you analyze them properly and ethically, show qualitative trends, unique voices and telling examples, they can be very compelling.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS - AND THIS TIME, WE MEAN PEOPLE

Committees get a bad rep, the one who is bringing you this content is great fun!

In order to work, a committee should have a mission and clear, ongoing, evolving goals—and those need to be realistic. Tools, resources, personnel, collections, and access all need to be taken into consideration when setting up a committee and establishing what its goals will be. The worksheet in the appendix can help with assessing the level of commitment required for each type of goal—and therefore help assess what you can dream up and achieve!

FINAL THOUGHTS ABOUT RESOURCES

Since the only constant is change, we can go forth knowing that terms will vary, contexts will differ, society will evolve, and AI will mix it all up; yet we are also pretty sure that storytelling will endure, and that people will want to read a whole bunch of books. So long live RA—and the wonderful advisors who make reading free, safe, diverse, and just plain fun.

You'll notice that we didn't list a whole bunch of resources—there are simply too many: “Tools for the RA librarian or reader now number in the hundreds, if not thousands” (Fesz & Orr, 2023, p. 322) They also change URLs, disappear, get re-edited, change platforms, require a subscription...

So instead, join us as we share our favourite resources and answer each other's questions in OLA's RA group. We can't wait to read with you.

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APPENDIX: RA COMMITTEE (RAC) WORKSHEET

	SET-UP PHASE	ASSESSMENT PHASE
MISSION & ACCOUNTABILITY	<p>What is the purpose of this committee? Why is that important? - Example: The RAC will oversee all RA services, activities, and training. It will set goals and assess said services, activities, and training. This will help ensure RA staff are trained and empowered to provide current, state-of-the-art, and inclusive services to all library users.</p> <p>Are there stakeholders or upper levels of management that committee needs to report to? What form does this take?</p>	<p>Is this still relevant?</p>
COMPOSITION	<p>Who will be a part of this committee? It's better to establish this before the goals are set—people in specific positions will contribute to setting goals.</p> <p>Who will head the committee? Who will post agendas and meeting notes?</p> <p>Are there other responsibilities to be assigned, such as head of training for new staff or liaison people with other RA committees, groups, etc.? (These people might get to participate in workshops outside your organization—yay!)</p>	<p>What kind of turnover should there be?</p> <p>How long should mandates be in specific positions?</p> <p>Should there be more/fewer members?</p>
GOALS	<p>What does the committee want to achieve? Keep the goals realistic. We will use the SMART method as one example of how to frame goals—with exciting and, well, less exciting examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specific: creating reading maps based on appeal for the large-print collection across the system; write the year-end report. - Measurable: publish the reading maps on the website and make paper copies available in adapted format in all branches; make the year-end report available to stakeholders. For any type of project, set up the assessment process at the same time—they go together. - Achievable: staff must be made available and accountable for the project – starting with a pilot map will help measure the time and any other resources needed, set people up to succeed, and estimate resources for the full project; allocate time and resources for writing and proofreading, keep clear meeting notes – memory is fallible. - Relevant: the reading maps will help make RA more inclusive for a population whose choices seem more limited and who may choose by format rather than by taste; no choice: year-end reports are due every year and they help support the allocation of resources. - Time-bound: Set a calendar for the pilot with clear dates for deliverables and assign responsibilities—and don't forget to celebrate the success of the trailblazers when assessing whether to go forward or not with the full project; set the same type of calendar and stick to it because year-end comes whether we want it or not, and year-end “emergencies” are no fun. 	<p>Goals should evolve and change—but should also build on what's been achieved.</p> <p>Finishing what you start is the best way to feel successful and empowered to set new realistic goals.</p>