Readers' Advisory Services
in Public Libraries

LIBRARYJOURNAL.

Responses from 694 public libraries surveyed in November 2013

EXISTING READERS' ADVISORY (RA) SERVICE POINTS: One hundred percent of libraries surveyed conduct personal RA in-house, most often at the reference or circulation desk. Self-directed RA is also widespread (99%), with book displays utilized most often. In addition, nearly all libraries provide book-oriented programming (98%) and digitally-based RA services (93%).

Small libraries hold their own with respect to providing personal and self-directed RA opportunities, however their digital offerings lag behind those of larger libraries.

At what points of service does your library currently provide Readers' Advisory?

|	Total	Population Served			
		< 25K	25K – 99K	100K – 499K	500K +
Personal RA in-house (Net)	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**
At the reference desk	85%	71%	91%	93%	92%
At the circulation desk	59%	81%	53%	48%	43%
Roving librarians	42%	37%	41%	48%	53%
At Readers' Advisory desk	9%	4%	11%	13%	8%
Self-directed RA (Net)	**99%**	**100%**	**100%**	**99%**	**100%**
Book displays	94%	90%	95%	97%	97%
Printed resources (e.g., book lists, genre guides, etc.)	75%	67%	79%	80%	83%
Spine labels	66%	68%	64%	69%	62%
Arrange collections by genre	56%	46%	56%	65%	67%
Shelf talkers	39%	35%	38%	47%	45%

At what points of service does your library currently provide Readers' Advisory? *continued*

continued	Total	Population Served			
		< 25K	25K – 99K	100K – 499K	500K +
Book-oriented programs and events (Net)	**98%**	**95%**	**100%**	**100%**	**98%**
Book discussion groups	89%	82%	93%	95%	95%
Author visits	86%	76%	89%	95%	95%
One Book, One Community programs	54%	38%	57%	71%	67%
Outreach to community book discussion groups	45%	42%	47%	53%	45%
Digitally-based RA (Net)	**93%**	**86%**	**95%**	**95%**	**98%**
Resources on website (e.g., book lists, read-alikes, etc.)	79%	69%	78%	87%	97%
Book recommendations via social media	49%	38%	53%	55%	65%
Read-alike recommendations in catalog	41%	30%	45%	47%	50%
Librarian blog	32%	21%	27%	37%	58%
Patron book ratings in catalog	31%	26%	31%	29%	48%
Form-based RA	19%	14%	20%	21%	33%
Librarian chat on website	19%	9%	20%	20%	52%

EXPANSION OF RA SERVICES Digital and self-directed RA services will be the greatest focus of RA expansion in the next year, particularly by the smallest libraries. Larger libraries are planning to expand digital and personal RA.
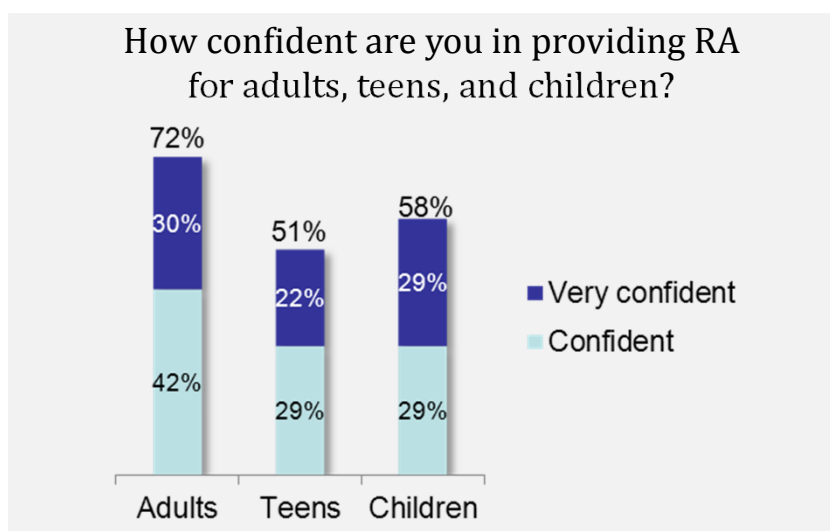

Is your library considering expanding or adding any Readers' Advisory services in the next year?
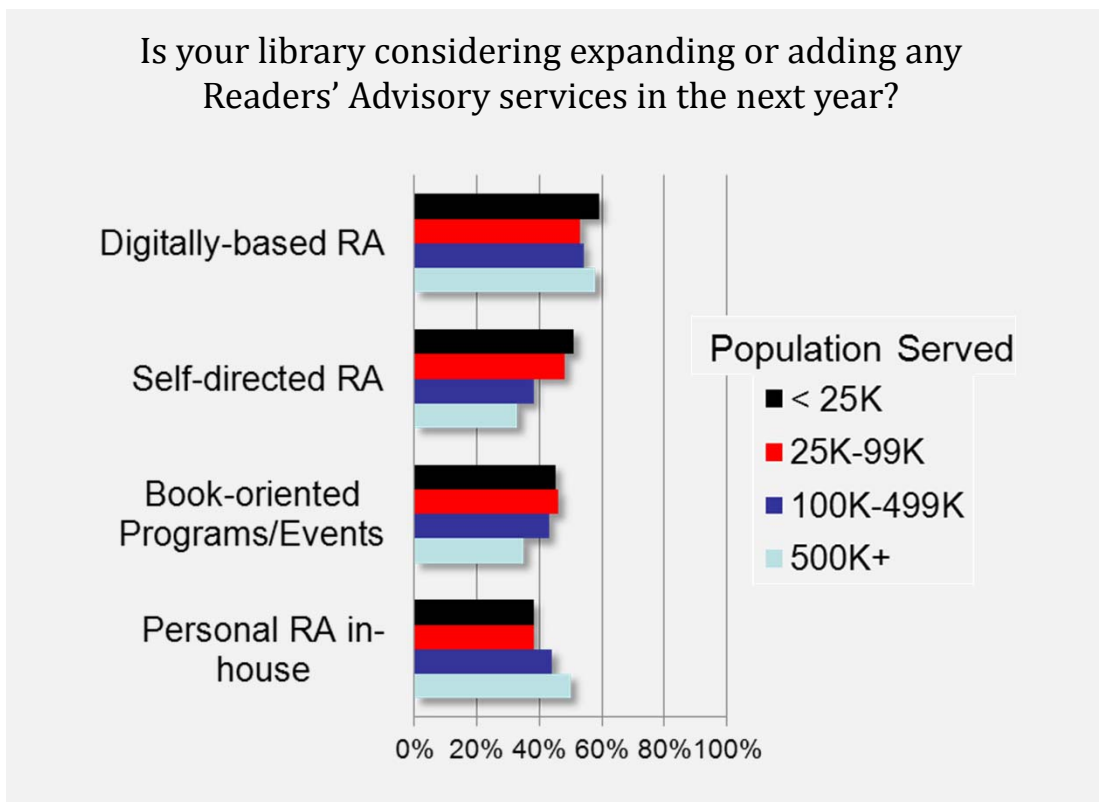
IMPORTANCE OF READERS' ADVISORY Half of survey respondents (51%) feel the importance of RA has increased over the last three years, and 54% agree that RA will be even more important in the coming three years.

51%: "Importance of RA has increased in last 3 years."

54%: "RA will be more important 3 years from now."

2010   **2013**   2016
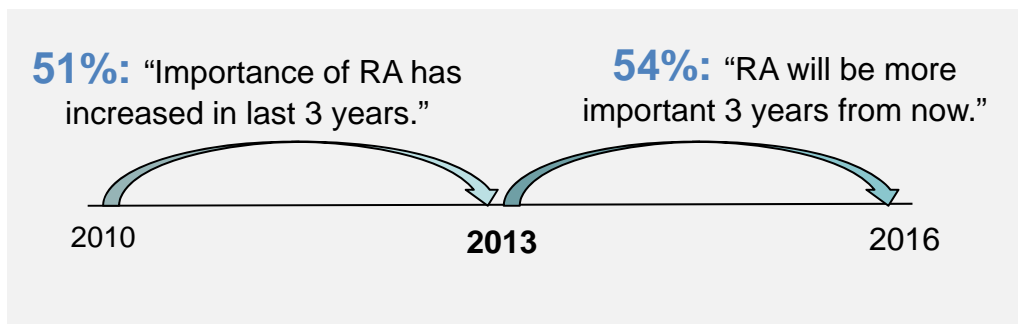
CONFIDENCE IN MATERIALS SUGGESTIONS Almost all respondents (97%) personally provide RA services to adults, 76% make recommendations for teens and 59% for children. Over half (55%) do RA for all three groups. Confidence is highest when making adult materials recommendations. Three-quarters of respondents (72%) are either confident or very confident in making suggestions for adults. Confidence deteriorates among those who provide RA for multiple age groups, however. Just over half of librarians making materials suggestions to children and teens are confident doing so.

How confident are you in providing RA for adults, teens, and children?

	Very confident	Confident
Adults	30%	42%	(72%)
Teens	22%	29%	(51%)
Children	29%	29%	(58%)

FREQUENCY OF PROVIDING RA We asked respondents who provide RA services just how often they make materials suggestions for a variety of formats. Readers' advisory of book titles occurs on a daily basis for 46%. Audiobook and DVD suggestions are also made fairly regularly.

How often do you make material suggestions for each of the following formats?

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Less often	Never
Books	46%	38%	11%	5%	0%
Audiobooks	14%	34%	24%	25%	3%
DVDs/Movies	15%	32%	22%	27%	4%
Music CDs	5%	14%	19%	42%	20%

RA CHALLENGES "Staying up to date on new materials" and feeling confident recommending books they have never read are formidable challenges to librarians providing RA. Librarians do not always "know what other staff's interests are" to refer users to a relevant staff person. Determining a patron's preferences "takes further questioning, and sometimes the process can be difficult." Training to learn "how to conduct a good RA interview" would build confidence. "Having enough time to give a good suggestion while dealing with hectic desk hours" and "impatient users" are added challenges, especially in large libraries.
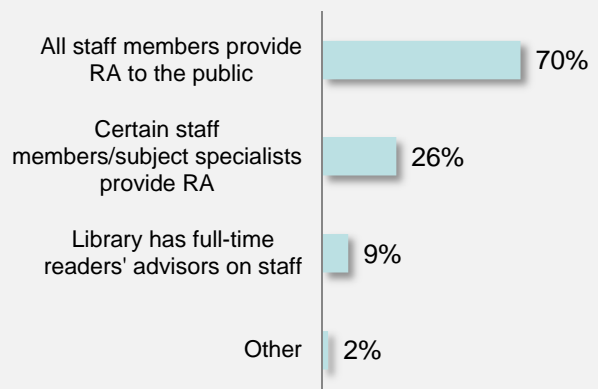
What is the biggest challenge faced by staff with regard to providing RA?*

	Total	Population Served			
		< 25K	25K – 99K	100K – 499K	500K +
Keeping current with books, authors, and genres	21%	23%	22%	20%	10%
Knowing books in all genres, or for all age groups	17%	17%	20%	17%	12%
Time to train/prepare for RA/Read	14%	15%	12%	18%	14%
Lack of confidence	10%	8%	12%	7%	16%
Determining the readers' preferences	10%	10%	11%	9%	4%
Time to take info from reader to do RA effectively	7%	4%	7%	6%	20%
Lack of training	6%	4%	5%	10%	6%

* open-ended question

RA STAFF At 70% of responding libraries, the entire staff provides RA to the public. Only certain staff members, usually trained librarians, are responsible for Readers' Advisory services at a quarter of libraries. Nine percent of the total sample, and upwards of 20% of the largest libraries, have full-time Readers' Advisory staff.

Who is responsible for providing readers' advisory in your library?

|	
All staff members provide RA to the public	70%
Certain staff members/subject specialists provide RA	26%
Library has full-time readers' advisors on staff	9%
Other	2%

TRACKING OF RA SERVICES Overall, 59% of responding libraries track some measurement of RA services, most commonly quantitative measurements such as usage of RA e-resources or the number of RA questions received from patrons. More difficult tracking to implement, including figuring the rate of return business based on RA assistance or allowing patrons to rate the quality of recommendations, are in place at fewer than ten percent of libraries.

## Does your library track any of the following measures?

	Total	Population Served			
	Total	< 25K	25K – 99K	100K – 499K	500K +
Usage of RA e-resources such as NoveList	38%	23%	40%	50%	54%
Number of RA questions received	24%	19%	25%	32%	23%
Whether book displays increase circulation of titles	20%	19%	23%	22%	14%
Amount of return business (e.g., returning for additional RA assistance)	9%	11%	9%	7%	4%
Quality/rating of library recommendations	4%	6%	3%	2%	5%
No Tracking	41%	52%	41%	29%	32%

EFFECTIVENESS OF RA About half of respondents (54%) feel that overall, their library effectively or very effectively makes materials recommendations to users. The perception of effectiveness drops to 44% among those respondents whose libraries do not track any measures of RA performance.

How effectively would you say your library currently provides materials recommendations to users?

- Very effectively
- Effectively
- Somewhat effectively
- Not very effectively
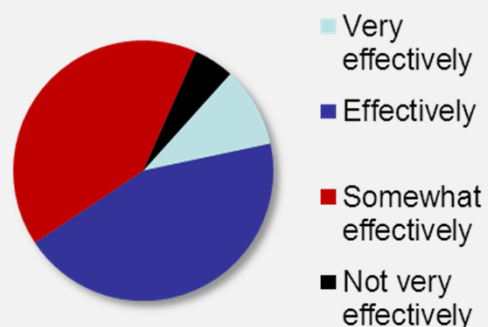
MARKETING OF RA SERVICES Sixty percent of responding libraries specifically market themselves as a place to discover books and get reading recommendations. That rises to 72% among libraries serving populations of 500,000 or more. Over 80% of libraries, regardless of size, agree that RA is either important or very important to the mission of their library.

Does your library specifically market the library as a place to discover books and get reading recommendations?
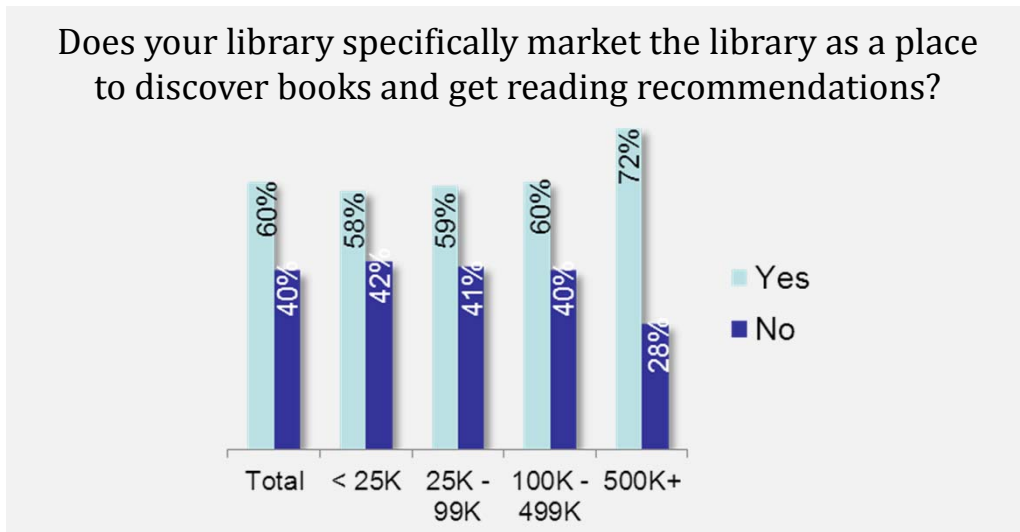
TOOLS TO HELP WITH RA Book recommendation databases are most widely used to help librarians with RA, particularly at larger libraries. Librarians also frequently turn to professional journals/newsletters and book-oriented social networking sites.

What are the primary tools you and your colleagues use to help you with RA?

		Population Served			
	Total	< 25K	25K – 99K	100K – 499K	500K +
Book recommendation databases (e.g., NoveList)	61%	55%	60%	64%	67%
Professional journals (print/newsletters/websites)	42%	44%	41%	50%	20%
Social networking sites for books	34%	29%	29%	40%	51%
Word of mouth	32%	38%	32%	29%	24%
Library catalog/OPAC	30%	26%	34%	24%	37%
Online booksellers	30%	34%	28%	24%	31%
Consumer media (e.g., newspapers, magazines, radio, etc.)	23%	25%	27%	17%	22%

RA TRAINING Support or training for Readers' Advisory is provided at 77% of libraries. The majority of training received is self-directed. Forty-six percent offer in-person instruction (either on-site or at regional meetings) and 29% offer online training.

What type(s) of Readers' Advisory staff training or support is provided by your library?

On-site training is most often conducted in a group setting by internal staff. Usage of outside instructors and one-on-one training is less common.

	Total	< 25K	25K – 99K	100K –499K	500K +
Self-directed training	62%	57%	66%	71%	50%
On-site staff training	34%	25%	31%	46%	47%
Online training	29%	18%	32%	37%	37%
Training at regional meeting	27%	19%	30%	35%	20%
Other	6%	7%	5%	5%	10%
No RA training or support provided by library	23%	26%	26%	14%	27%

RA COURSEWORK Forty-two percent of respondents who participated in an MLS program say their studies included no coursework focused on Readers' Advisory. Fewer than one-in-five took an entire course dedicated to RA.
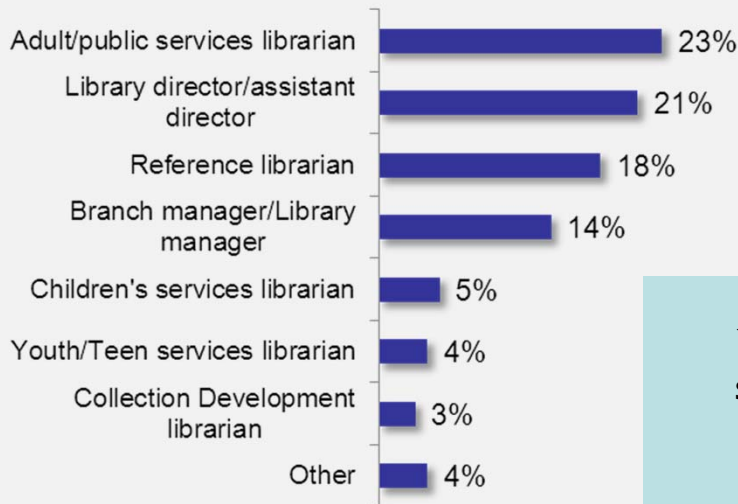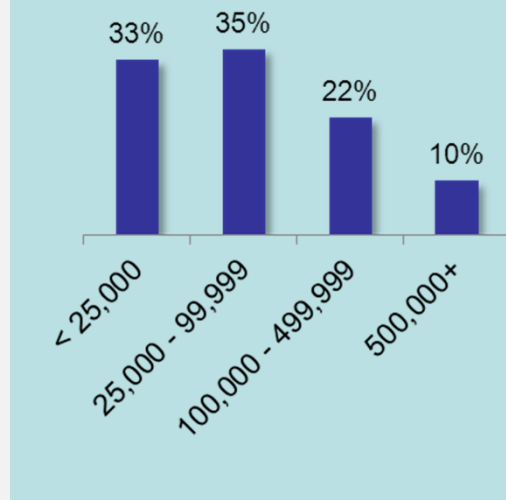
In your MLS program, did you take a class about RA?*

An entire course dedicated to RA

No RA coursework

18%

42%

40%

RA was a portion of a larger course
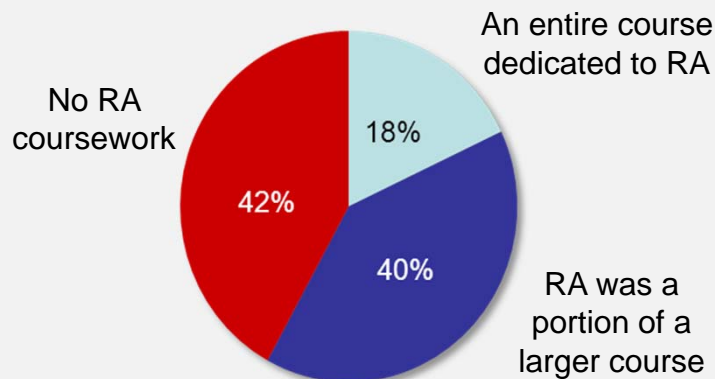
*Based on respondents who participated in an MLS program.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Which of the following best describes your job title?

Job Title	%
Adult/public services librarian	23%
Library director/assistant director	21%
Reference librarian	18%
Branch manager/Library manager	14%
Children's services librarian	5%
Youth/Teen services librarian	4%
Collection Development librarian	3%
Other	4%

What is the population served by your library?

Population	%
< 25,000	33%
25,000 - 99,999	35%
100,000 - 499,999	22%
500,000+	10%

Where is your library located?

Regions	%
Midwestern U.S.	26%
Western U.S.	21%
Southern U.S.	21%
Northeastern U.S.	18%
Canada	14%

METHOD A survey invite was emailed on November 15, 2013 to a list of over 18,000 public librarians. The survey closed on December 1, with 694 responses.

The Readers' Advisory survey was developed in conjunction with NoveList and the RUSA/CODES Readers' Advisory Research and Trends Committee. It was programmed, emailed and tabulated by *Library Journal*. Data in this report is unweighted and includes responses from the United States and Canada.