NoveList

RAx:
Readers' Advisory Prescriptions

> **Books can transform lives.** But those of us who work with readers have to trust that what we're doing today is planting seeds for the future. The book you help put in someone's hand today might one day play a role in who they become and what they do.
>
> — *Danielle Borasky*
> *Vice President, NoveList*

Introduction

This booklet builds on and incorporates the new ways your staff can provide outstanding customer service to readers through top-notch reading recommendations. Think of this guide as a jumping-off point for the question, "How can we do readers' advisory better?" with suggestions, ideas, and reassurance for anyone working with readers.

If the last few years have taught us anything, it's the need to be flexible and change quickly. Libraries went from mostly walk-in traffic, flyers, and physical book displays to curbside service, email, and online book browsing. Readers' advisory (RA) moved from the reference desk to social media. In fact, 64% of libraries reported their demand for readers' advisory went up during the pandemic, according to the 2021 Public Libraries Readers' Advisory Survey run through Library Journal and sponsored by NoveList with input by Library Reads, ARRT, and RUSA CODES. During a time of questions, your community turned to you for answers.

In the decade since this guide was first published, how you connect readers with books may have changed, but the fundamentals of RA remains the same. It still starts with knowing how to identify different types of readers, developing strategies to help them, and discovering the different strengths your staff bring to RA and how to maximize their effectiveness. Connecting readers with books they'll love is essential to providing exceptional customer service. This guide will help you do that.

We have plenty of tools available for you in the **NoveList Idea Center** to help you improve your RA, connect with your community, promote your resources, evaluate your services, read inspiring stories from other libraries, and get ideas to help educators.

If you have something you'd like to share with us, please email **novelist@ebsco.com**. We'd love to hear from you.

- The NoveList Team

Evaluate Your Readers

As a reader, how do you like to engage with books, reading, and other readers? Do you join book clubs and participate in online chats? Or maybe you're more introspective in your reading, preferring instead to keep a private journal with your thoughts about books. What about your friends and family? Do you have someone who loves to get recommendations from you and someone else who just wants to know where they can go to learn the kind of information you know?
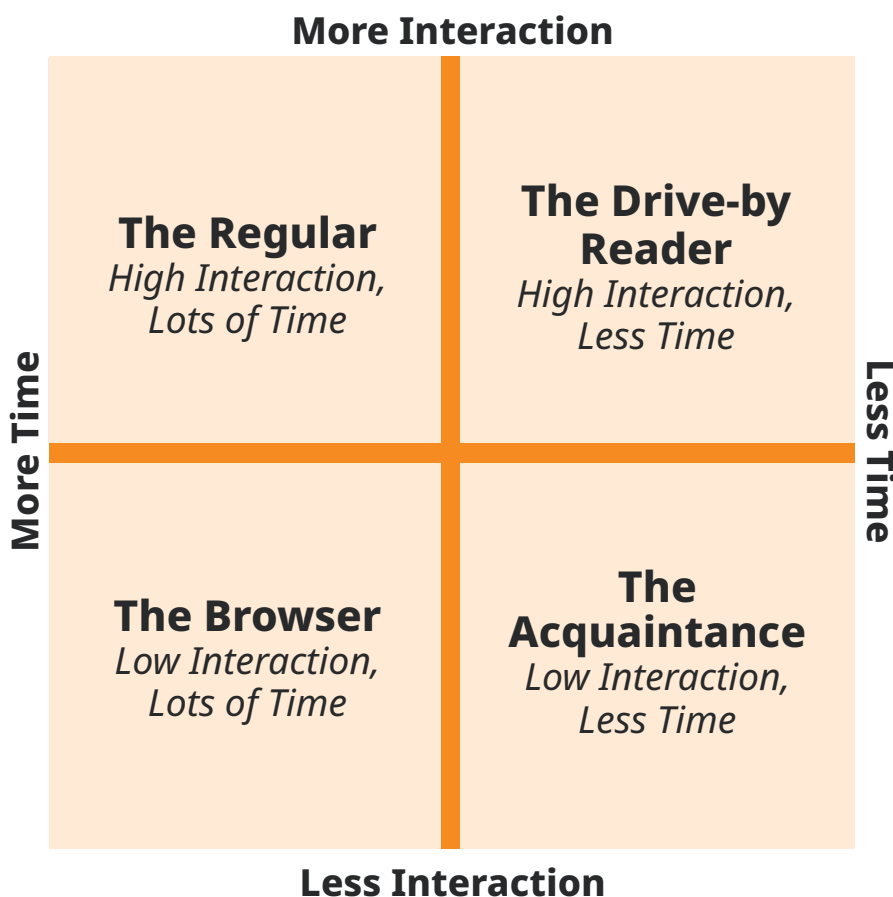
Now think of 10 library "regulars" — people you see at least once a month. Maybe you know the names of two of them because they say "hi" every time they come in; you know that another has two young children, and you guess that he's a painter based on the clothes he wears as he runs in to grab picture books from the holds shelf. Now think of that person who called to ask about ebooks; you likely emailed information about getting a library card but you're pretty sure you've never seen them in the library.

Why think through how all these people engage with books, reading, other readers, and the person helping them at the library? Because all these people love and use the public library, but they have different needs.

Different Kinds of Readers

At NoveList, we think of readers falling along a grid of high-to-low interaction and lots-to-little time. Readers who love to comment on your library's social media posts have different needs than readers who read all your book newsletters but don't interact when they pick up their holds. The readers who stop at the desk to chat have different needs than the readers who moved to ebooks because they never have time to pick up their holds.

More Interaction

The Regular
High Interaction, Lots of Time

The Drive-by Reader
High Interaction, Less Time

More Time / **Less Time**

The Browser
Low Interaction, Lots of Time

The Acquaintance
Low Interaction, Less Time

Less Interaction

Evaluate How Your Services Match Your Readers

Make a list of all your readers' services and think about them on the scale of how much interaction they require from your readers, how much time they take to produce, and how much book knowledge they require to create along each step.

Ask coworkers to make a list as well and think about all your readers' services, not just your "traditional" ones. If you have book rivers of staff picks on your website, those are part of your RA; if you post engaging book questions for your community on Facebook, those are part of your RA; if you have NoveList Select in your catalog (read-alikes), that is a part of your RA.

The Regular | *High Interaction, Lots of Time*

These readers love to chat with you when picking up their curbside books. If they are on social media, they are probably the ones who responded to all your book-focused Facebook posts, liked the posts of what other people are reading, and encouraged you to move book clubs to a virtual space. They aren't just interested in what they are reading; they are interested in what other people are reading and want to talk about it.

Some of your services that might fit here:

✓ Face-to-face RA

✓ Book clubs (virtual or in-person)

✓ RA on social media

✓ Author programs (virtual or in-person)

✓ Staff picks on your website

✓ Newsletters

The Browser | *Low Interaction, Lots of Time*

These are your readers who roam up and down your stacks and stop by your book displays waiting for the right book to "speak" to them. For these self-directed readers, the library is a place to discover books so it's important to have an array of materials and options available to help them explore on their own.

Some of your services that might fit here:

✓ Book suggestions in your catalog

✓ Newsletters

✓ Author events

✓ Book displays on your website

✓ Bookmarks, book flyers, and other "consumable" or readable book guidance like genre guides, spine labels, series information, and shelf-talkers

The Drive-by Reader | *High Interaction, Little Time*

These readers work hard to find a place in their busy lives for their next book. They spend less time in the library and are frequent users of your online catalog and holds system. While these time-strapped users want the quickest library visit, they are still eager for their next great read. They like to wave as they swing by, grab bookmarks of staff recommendations, and comment on a display. They want to feel like they are connected with the library, even if they don't have time for a chat.

Some of your services that might fit here:

✓ Form-based RA
✓ Print suggestions by checkout stations
✓ Book suggestions in your catalog
✓ Newsletters
✓ Staff picks on your website, in your building, and on social
✓ Short, recorded book talks

The Acquaintance | *Low Interaction, Little Time*

These readers are focused on getting exactly what they need as quickly as possible — and it might not be a book to read for pleasure. They may be looking for information on how to find a job or nutrition suggestions during cancer treatment. These situational users are infrequent visitors to the library — only using it when they feel the library can help them.

Some of your services that might fit here:

✓ Book suggestions in your catalog
✓ Focused emails that suggest "hidden" resources (digital magazines, health databases, career guides, etc.)
✓ Book carousels hosted on library partner websites like museums, daycares, garden clubs, etc.
✓ Flyers and other materials hosted by partners, including "how-to" guides for ebooks

Book displays, flyers, bookmarks, signs, emails, and website widgets are all excellent ways to share the latest in readers' advisory, program information, and initiatives at your library

Learn more about how NoveList can help you starting on page 10.
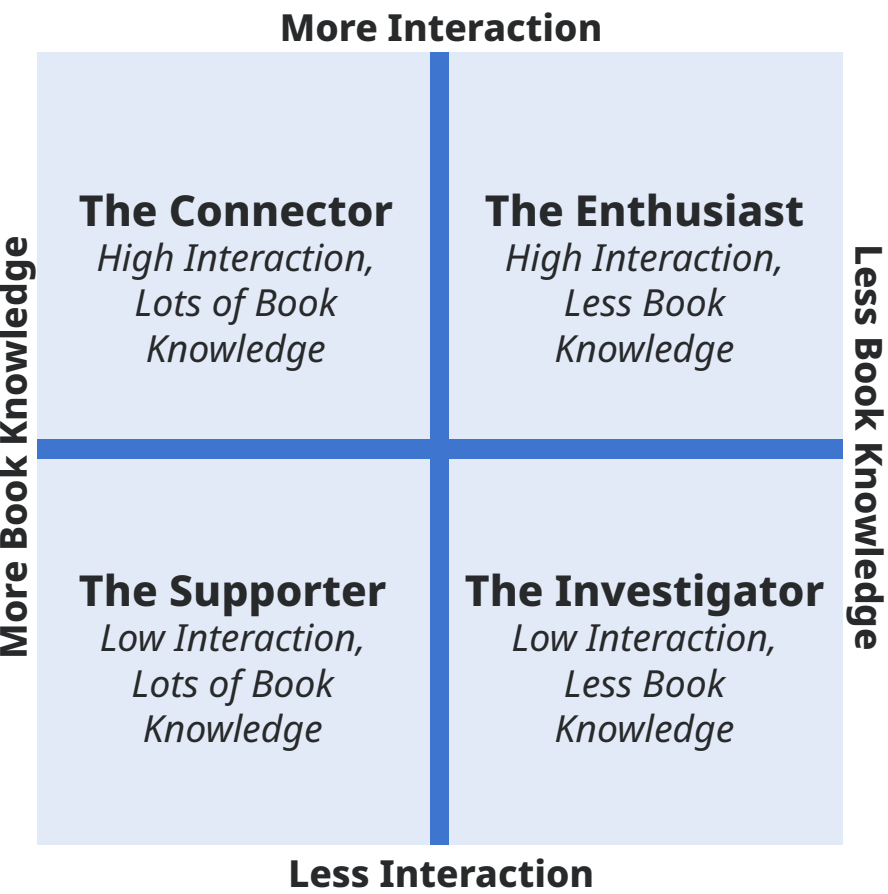
Evaluate Your Staff

Think about yourself and how you like to engage with books, readers, and reading. Do you love long chats with readers in the stacks? Do you remember every book you've read and ones you've read reviews of, or do you have a system to help you remember "that book with the yellow cover and maybe it had knife in the title" that would be perfect for a display? Again, think about the people you work with. Include everyone from the person who staffs the desk to the person who selects fiction materials to the shelver who is your go-to for movie recommendations.

Like readers, library staff all have different comfort levels with interaction and different levels of book knowledge. Readers' advisory service isn't limited to the gregarious children's librarian or the reference assistant who's quick on #AskALibrarian. From making sure displays are full to slipping bookmarks into books on hold to writing annotations for book newsletters, everyone at the library can play a role in helping readers. The goal is to the maximize how your library uses each person's skills to engage with readers. When that happens, your staff will be positioned to provide good customer service for all kinds of readers.

Different Kinds of Staff

> Like readers, library staff all have different comfort levels with interaction and different levels of book knowledge. All your staff can help provide readers' services.

More Interaction

More Book Knowledge

The Connector
High Interaction, Lots of Book Knowledge

The Enthusiast
High Interaction, Less Book Knowledge

The Supporter
Low Interaction, Lots of Book Knowledge

The Investigator
Low Interaction, Less Book Knowledge

Less Book Knowledge

Less Interaction

Evaluate How Your Staff Match Your Services

Much like your readers' advisory services match the needs of different readers, staff members bring different, complementary skills to your services. It's good practice to see if you've got staff whose skills are underutilized in how they are currently serving readers and see if there are ways they can help your library do more. 19% of public libraries say they have a dedicated readers' advisory staff. Connecting readers with books is one of the best ways to create repeat library users. **There are ways all staff can participate.**

The Connector | *High Interaction, Lots of Book Knowledge*
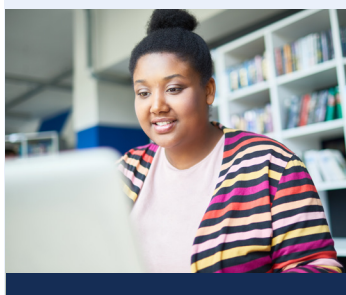
This is the staff member who loved their roving reference schedule (pre-COVID of course). They remember a wealth of book information and have a book suggestion for any and every reader in their head. They also love talking about books with patrons, friends, family, etc. They aren't just interested in what they are reading; they are interested in what other people are reading and want to talk about it.

Some places this staff member might shine:

✓ Face-to-face RA
✓ Leading book clubs (virtual or in-person)
✓ RA on social media
✓ Book talks online
✓ Staff picks on your website, in email newsletters, and displays

The Enthusiast | *High Interaction, Less Book Knowledge*

Like the staff member with lots of book knowledge, this staff member may have also loved their roving reference shifts, but they relied on NoveList Select in the catalog while helping readers. They love the interaction but need reference material at hand to remember titles. These staff are great at showing a resource like NoveList Plus or Select to your readers because they use them all the time. They are also a good source of information for questions like, "Where else can we add reading guides?" since they are looking for quick reminders of book information as they are walking the stacks.

Some places this staff member might shine:

✓ Leading book clubs (virtual or in-person)
✓ Face-to-face RA
✓ Phone RA
✓ Book talks online
✓ Staff picks on your website, in email newsletters, and displays
✓ Form-based RA
✓ Newsletters
✓ Rethinking your browsable collections strategy

The Supporter | *Low Interaction, Lots of Book Knowledge*

These staff members don't always love talking with people, but they do love books and they know a lot about them. All those places where your library provides indirect readers' advisory are also areas where staff members who love books but prefer less interaction can provide opportunities for readers to engage with recommendations on their own terms.

Some places this staff member might shine:

✓ Finding linked data widgets for library partners to put on their websites
✓ Answering form-based RA requests
✓ Creating in-library and online book displays
✓ Creating print materials to promote RA like bookmarks and flyers
✓ Strategizing ways to promote books in non-book programs, like gardening mysteries in a gardening program

The Investigator | *Low Interaction, Less Book Knowledge*

Not everyone likes talking to people and not everyone knows a lot about books. Your library may have shelvers who fit in this category, or maybe staff who help process new materials. These staff members are often working in areas where they can see opportunities for promoting your collection in ways the more patron-facing staff don't. Use their different views of the library to your advantage and listen to where they see your collection can be promoted.

Some places this staff member might shine:

✓ Rethinking your browsable collections strategy
✓ Filling displays and stocking print RA materials
✓ Preparing book bundles
✓ Adding collection promotion to holds

Staff Picks flyers, displays, and web posts are great ways to involve all staff, no matter their interaction preferences or book knowledge. Staff are always eager to share their favorite titles, and your readers love seeing what their local library staff suggests!

Evaluate Your Services

As you reevaluate your readers' needs and your staff's abilities, it's also a good time to review how well you're providing RA services.

Readers' Advisory services by theme	Doing a great job with these services	Expand these services	Consider offering these services	Not currently on our radar	On hold	New service ideas to explore
Personalized suggestions (one-on-one conversations, #AskALibrarian on social, form-based RA, etc.).						
Displays on the library website or elsewhere online						
Digital staff suggestions (newsletters, book-themes emails, library/librarian blogs or podcasts, video book talks)						
Catalog enrichment (patron ratings, read-alike suggestions in the catalog, etc.)						
Printed staff suggestions (bookmarks, booklists, etc.)						
Book clubs						
Book programming (author visits, genre festivals, etc.)						
Personal shopper/book bundle services						
Other:						

Try These Ideas at Your Library

Personalized suggestions
(one-on-one conversations, #AskALibrarian on social media, form-based RA, etc.)

Personalized suggestions are often what people think of when they think of readers' advisory: book suggestions based on a particular reader's expressed desire of what to read. A staff member with a lot of book knowledge who loves talking to people will excel at providing this service.

How we can help:

NoveList Plus

Our database can help both the reader browsing for something and the librarian searching for the perfect book to answer a question. Check out:

- ✓ Curated read-alike information
- ✓ Unique recommended reads lists
- ✓ Signature story elements

NoveList Select

Select features NoveList's read-alikes and metadata right in a library catalog, ideal to:

- ✓ Help the gregarious, but less book-focused staff member answer RA questions while in the stacks
- ✓ Create quick access to fast answers for RA on social media
- ✓ Give readers an avenue for quality RA while browsing the catalog from any location

BookChat

This NoveList Plus add-on provides on-the-spot help for library staff and readers.
It works by:

- ✓ Providing fast and easy real-time suggestions
- ✓ Powered by humans with expertise in reading recommendations
- ✓ Perfect for patrons who don't like to ask for help or prefer engaging online.

LibraryAware

Do you do form-based RA? LibraryAware can help you send suggestions by email quickly and easily — the book cover, annotation, and a link to your catalog are there waiting for you.
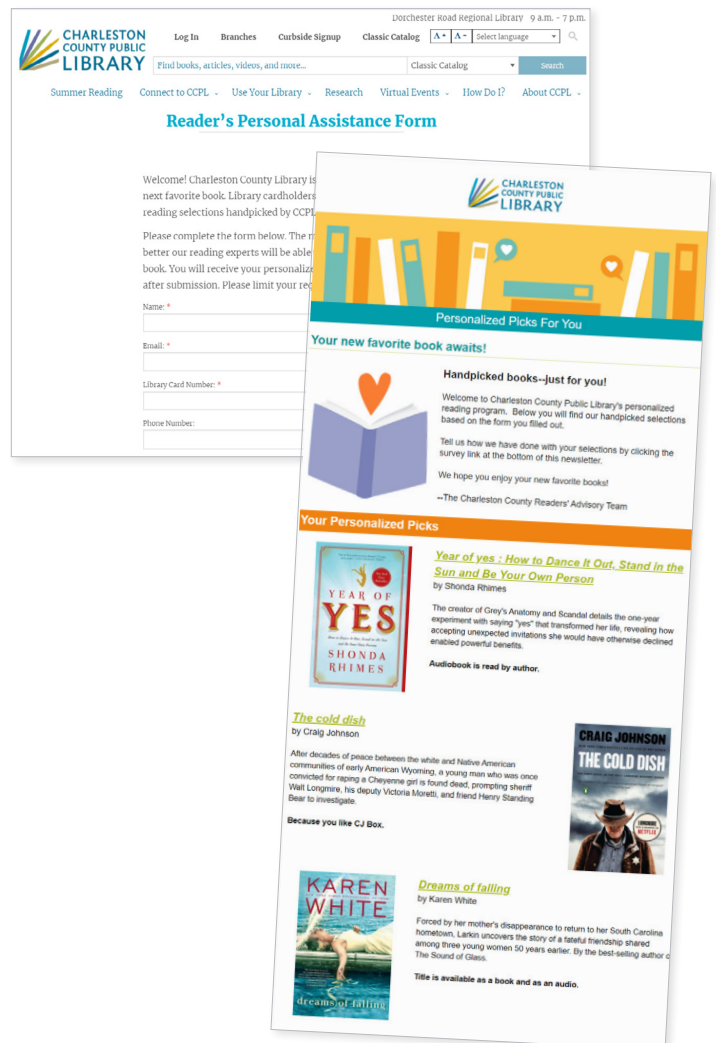
Try These Ideas at Your Library

Displays in the library, on your website, or elsewhere online

Displays give your readers a chance to look for books at their own pace and to explore their changing reading interests. Displays also give the library a chance to bring attention to some beautiful reads lingering on shelves because they aren't new anymore, to combine a bunch of different formats together for some cross-suggestions, and encourage serendipity in someone's reading.

Mix it up! Whether it's sitting on a shelf or in a carousel of titles on your website, a display can often include nonfiction, fiction, movies, audiobooks, and titles for all age levels. Expanding your displays to feature everything in the library also provides a great way to get participation from lots of different staff members, including the movie lover, the podcast listener, and the audiobook fan.

Above: A book display at Hershey Public Library that highlights the top 10 most searched book titles in the library catalog.

**Below:** Sample book display flyer like the one Hershey Public Library used, created in LibraryAware.

How we can help:

NoveList Plus

NoveList's unique story elements like appeal, genre, and theme make it easy for you to create a display to help your readers to find the kinds of books they are interested in.

LibraryAware

Our graphic designers stay on top of trends in pop culture and in the public library space to create display flyers. Use the designs as they are or as inspiration to make them your own. Create visually attractive, clickable displays for your website using LibraryAware's book carousels.

Story Elements Index pages in NoveList

The index pages cover genres, appeals, and themes — three key Story Elements that help you connect readers to their next favorite book. These pages include an "at a glance" view of our metadata in these areas, along with links to other resources in NoveList so that you can explore the concepts more thoroughly.

Learn more
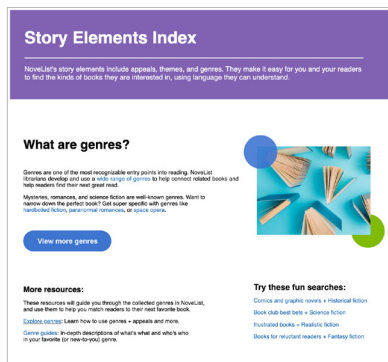
Try These Ideas at Your Library

Digital staff suggestions
(newsletters, book-themed emails, library/librarian blogs or podcasts, video book talks)

Sometimes it's easier to take a risk with a new title if the recommendation comes with a person's name attached or some compelling language about why the book is interesting.

This is where staff suggestions come in. Share them anywhere and everywhere your readers are looking for books. Put them on your website, post them on social, create a podcast, send an email — there is almost no end to where your readers are looking and where you might put the information.

From creating the booklist to doing the back-end work to make a podcast happen, there are lots of ways for all your staff to be involved.

How we can help:

NoveList Plus

It can be hard to think of way to describe a book. When posting to social media about books that are funny in different ways, it can be tough to find the right language to distinguish between two types of humor. NoveList Plus's metadata can help you here, differentiating between the amusing, the funny, and the irreverent.

LibraryAware

LibraryAware helps you take personalized reading suggestions and put them almost anywhere your readers might be looking, including:

✓ Book carousels perfect for browsable staff picks on your website

✓ Recommendation emails for form-based RA

✓ Social posts of staff picks using our widgets

BiblioGraph NoveList Enrichment

Imagine your local science museum featuring a carousel of your staff's favorite STEAM children's books, linked back to your catalog. It's possible and easy with BiblioGraph NoveList Enrichment. It's a great way to extend your outreach and show your staff's expertise with little effort.
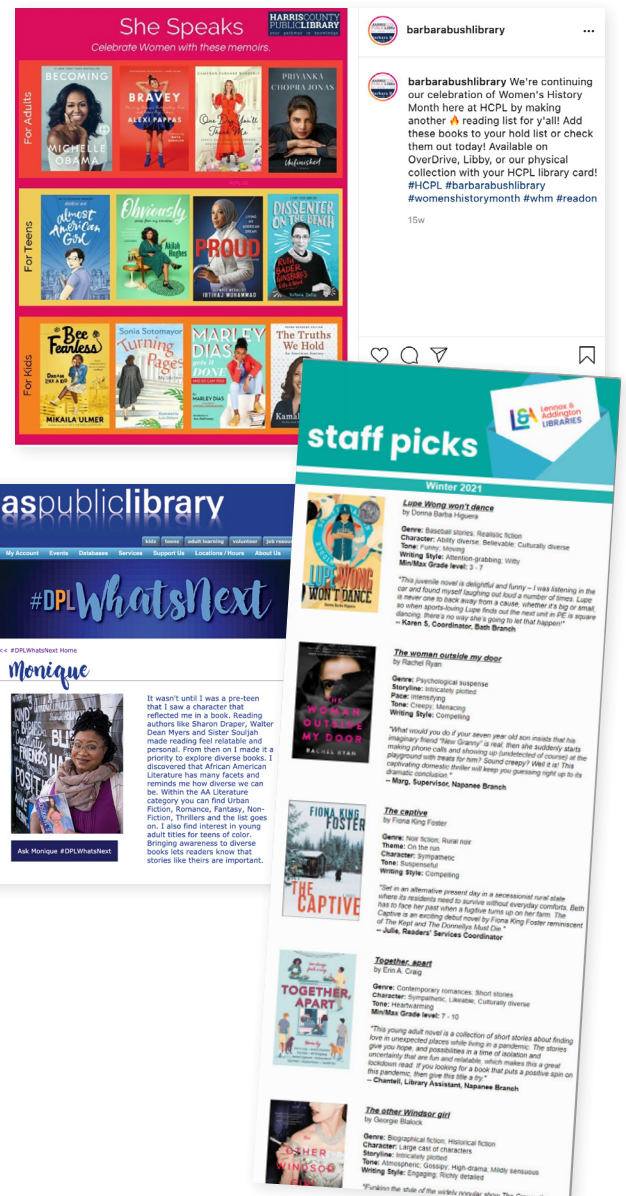
Try These Ideas at Your Library

Printed staff suggestions
(bookmarks, booklists, etc.)

The ways in which readers organize the books they might want to read are vast and varied, but one truth remains the same — sometimes it makes more sense for a reader to pick up a bookmark than to check out that book in the moment.

As with digital staff suggestions, there are plenty of ways for all staff to be involved, from picking out the titles to designing the materials to making sure relevant bookmarks are tucked into holds.

How we can help:

NoveList Plus

Our recommended reads lists, metadata, and read-alikes are all great starts for your next booklist. Use our lists as-is or start with a popular title to build up some read-alikes. Is there an upcoming holiday, event, or school project happening? Use NoveList Plus to create a list of books just for the occasion.

LibraryAware

LibraryAware can help you create printed book recommendations in many ways.

- ✓ Out of ideas for what to put out for readers? LibraryAware's book-focused templates are available to print and share, no extra work needed.

- ✓ Want to do a little more? Take one of our templates and add your library's own spin to it with books, colors, fonts, images, and more.

- ✓ Promote your books on social media with our templates sized for popular channels.

Personal shopper/book bundle services

The idea of a personal shopper or a book bundle service has long-existed, but it blossomed during the pandemic. These work much like form-based RA, only the books are checked out and ready for a reader to take home.

Think about these for the parents who come in for storytime. They may check out 20 picture books, and never make it over to the adult side of the library to get something for themselves! This is a great way to get lots of people in the library involved, from creating a form to selecting titles to pulling them off the shelves.

How we can help:

NoveList Plus

Much like with form-based RA, NoveList Plus is an unmatched tool for honing in on the perfect list of books for any book bundle based on anyone's reading taste.

LibraryAware

LibraryAware already includes templates to promote a book bundle service including cute flyers to tuck into bags. Promote the service in a NextReads newsletter and you're already one step ahead.
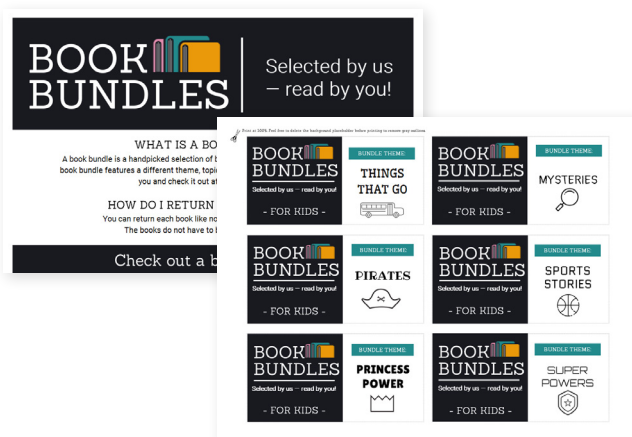
Try These Ideas at Your Library

Book clubs

Book clubs are a staple of readers and libraries alike. They are also a great way to help readers discover new and interesting books. General fiction book clubs are almost always popular, but maybe your community wants more or you have a staff member with an interest in leading something different. Think a graphic novel book club, a romance book club, a book club that reads cookbooks, or one that reads only BIPOC authors.

When a book club is based on a theme a staff member loves, their excitement often draws in readers and more people have a chance to promote reading in your community.

How we can help:

NoveList Plus

NoveList Plus is a great resource for book club reads. Check out our recommended reads lists specifically for book club best bets, which is a great way to get started. If your book club is looking for something specific, advanced search is your go-to tool. Search by the author's nationality, gender identity, and cultural identity, starred review and awards, along with theme, appeal, and genre.

LibraryAware

LibraryAware is your tool to promote your book club:

✓ Include the book club in relevant NextReads and general programming newsletters.

✓ Post book club lists and news to social media.

✓ Create flyers and bookmarks for display.

✓ Add a carousel to your website featuring a recent list of books your book club has read.

Core Collections

Core Collections recommendation levels can help your library support book clubs, both in fiction and beyond. If you have a book club interested in talking about cookbooks, self-help, finance, and more, Core Collections can help your library find essential and recommended titles to read and discuss.
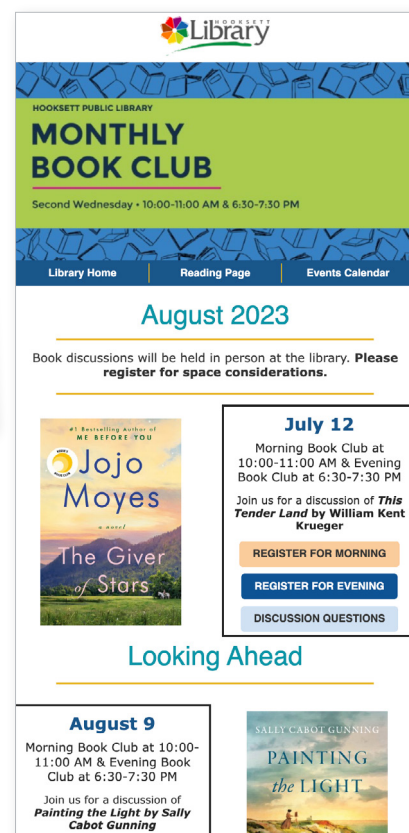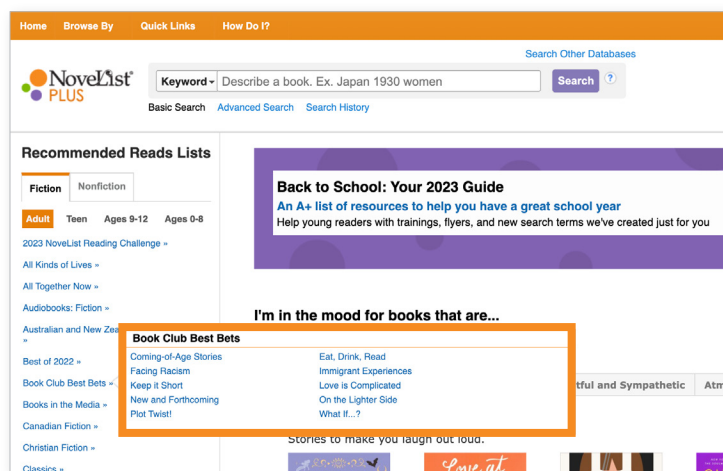
Try These Ideas at Your Library

## Book programming
(author visits, genre festivals, etc.)

Book clubs aren't the only way to build programs around books. Readers love to ask questions of authors they've read, and to read the books of authors they've met. Depending on your community, you might have some authors nearby or you might have some authors who have written about local events, historical areas, food items, etc. If you've got a community of people interested in reading a genre like romance or a format like graphic novels, a small genre festival can give those readers a chance to mingle with each other and talk about their shared love of reading.

How we can help:

LibraryAware

Use LibraryAware to get the word out about your book programming.

✓ Include information in relevant NextReads newsletters, or create a special edition of a newsletter around the event with programming information, recommended reads, and more.

✓ Use eye-catching widgets to promote the event on social media.

✓ Print out bookmarks and book flyers with suggested reads that people can take home with them.
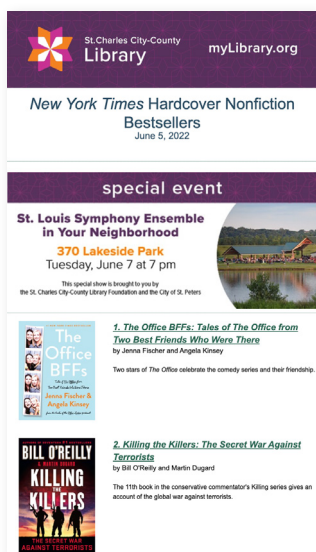
Catalog enrichment
(patron ratings, read-alike suggestions in the catalog, etc.)

Catalog enrichment is one of the easiest ways to provide readers' advisory to your readers. Reading recommendations pop up where you readers are already looking for book suggestions. Whether they need to know the next book in a series, find similar authors, or look for more titles with their favorite story elements, reading recommendations in your catalog let your readers find more books when they are looking for just one.

How we can help:

NoveList Select

Select displays all the reading recommendations, series information, and metadata that your readers love in your catalog. You can be confident your readers are getting curated reading recommendations by trusted book experts, plus your readers will be able to browse the catalog by their favorite NoveList story element or a reading level like Lexile or Accelerated Reader.
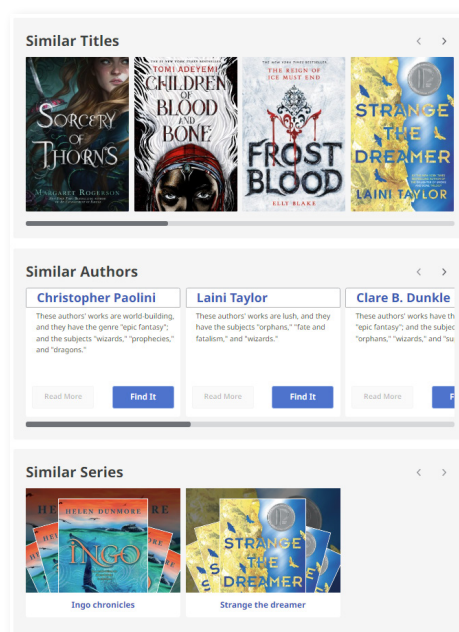
Putting it all Together

In the end, the most important services you provide are the ones that meet the needs of your community.

For more resources visit:

NoveList Idea Center
www.ebsco.com/novelist

———

Want to dive deeper into new ways to work with readers or learn effective ways to promote your collection? Check out Learn With NoveList, where you can hire a NoveList expert or take one of our professional development courses.

Learn with NoveList
www.ebsco.com/novelist/products/learn-with-novelist