Getting Started: A Step-by-Step Guide

1. **Identify the need for an early literacy program and incorporate it into your existing mission.**
   This program does require a significant amount of initial effort, and you will need support from within the library. If your library doesn’t already have a year-round literacy program for ages birth to 5, then it should not be hard to identify a need. A vast amount of research details the effects early literacy interventions can have on a child’s life. Marge Loch-Wouters, former Head of the Children’s Department at Lacrosse (WI) Public Library, has curated many resources that can support your proposal for a 1,000 Books program. To learn more, visit:
   www.pinterest.com/lochwouters/let-1000-books-bloom
   http://tinytipsforlibraryfun.blogspot.com/2013/01/1000-books-before-kindergarten-is-still.html

2. **Develop your program structure.** In this step, you will decide on a program theme and select methods for registering participants and tracking their progress.
   a) Will you have a theme, and, if so, what will it be? There are a multitude of themes that could be used with a 1,000 Books program. Some libraries choose “animals” as their theme and then include animal facts with their materials. Others use something that goes along with their overall library theme and logo; for example, the Monroe (WI) Public Library’s tagline is “A place to gather and grow,” and their 1,000 Books program is called “Grow a Reader.” Other possible themes include bugs, bubbles, bees, ice cream, popcorn, and trains. If you do pick a theme, keep it consistent throughout your printed materials, online, and in your displays.
   b) How will you register and track participants internally? For a small library with a limited budget, tracking participants in a notebook or using an Excel spreadsheet can work. Larger libraries may wish to use...
an online tracking tool, which also gives parents the benefit of logging entries themselves. You can set up a simple Google Form or create a group with a web-based program (e.g., Reading Rewards, Shelfari).

c) How will participants track books read? Will you require families to record each title or to check a box for each book read? Some libraries have decided to mix the two options by offering reading logs that have a checkbox for each book read and an area where parents can write down the child’s favorite titles. The 1,000 Books Foundation has released a free app (iOS and Android) that families can also use to track their progress (http://1000booksbeforekindergarten.org/1000-books-before-kindergarten-iphone-app/). If possible, you may wish to offer options for both a digital reading log and a printed log to serve all families’ needs.

d) How will you organize your materials? Decide what information and incentives you will give to families when they sign up for the program. Keep a stack of registration folders at the circulation or information desk at your library. Train staff on how the program works and how to register participants.

e) How will you promote the program? Place signage promoting your 1,000 Books program in your children’s area and throughout your library, including at self-checkout stations. Create a special display titled “Read to Me! 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten” with information about the program, facts about early literacy, and recommended books to share.

3. Offer incentives. Decide how often you want to reward your readers and what incentives you will give them. Incentives and prizes will be a large portion of your budget and will most likely dictate how much money you will need to support the program. You also can tailor your incentives to fit your budget.

Most libraries recognize readers and give a prize for every 100 books finished; others just give a prize at 500 books and at completion. Some libraries also give an incentive at sign up.

A folder filled with reading logs, booklists, and early literacy information is a good low-cost option to offer at registration. At each 100-book milestone you can do something simple to reward the readers, such giving them as a sticker displaying the number of books they’ve read. Depending on how many kids you have signed up, another low-cost option could be a small toy.

Even if you aren’t giving out prizes, you may want to recognize readers as they reach milestones. For example, you can display a tree with branches labeled for each 100 books. Keep a supply of paper leaves on hand; have children add their names to a leaf and place it on the display as they reach each milestone. Some libraries have a “wall of fame” with pictures of the kids participating in the program. Creating a display limits your costs to those associated with the paper and printing.

Tote bags with the program’s logo on them are a great incentive for caregivers and young readers; they can keep their reading logs and library books together.

Reaching 1,000 books deserves a special reward! You can host an invite-only graduation party once or twice a year for children who have finished the program. Depending on your budget, you can decide how elaborate you want the party to be. If your budget is limited, you can hold a small gathering for families that includes light refreshments and a “graduation” ceremony, during which you recognize the successful readers with a certificate of completion and a free book.

Make sure to contact local news media to cover the event, including newspapers, radio, television. You may also wish to post photos from the event on your library’s website and social media pages, but be sure to obtain parent permission first. Get a sample permission slip for photography/video at www.demco.com/webprd_demco/html/landing_pages/1000_books/PhotoVideo_PermissionSlips_English-Spanish.pdf.

Of course, the greatest incentive for completing the program is the pride that the children will feel as they accomplish each goal!

4. Raise funds. If you plan for activities that require more funds than what is available in your existing programming budget, then the next step is fundraising. When planning your budget, consider the costs of promotional materials, prizes, and printing. To keep your program economical, you could do all printing in-house, keep your incentives small, and offer a certificate as the completion prize.

Grants are a great way to apply for funds for your program. Your state association may have early literacy
grants you can apply for to fund a 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program. National and local associations also have applicable grants. For more resources and advice, see Demco’s article “Finding Funding for Early Literacy Programs” at http://ideas.demco.com/trends-topics/educational-resources/early-literacy/literacy-grants/, as well as School Library Journal’s list of sources for early literacy program funding (http://www.slj.com/2013/07/standards/early-learning/early-learning-grants-for-public-libraries-resources/#_).

As crowdfunding becomes more popular, libraries have found it useful for a variety of projects. Websites like IndieGoGo and GoFundMe have both been used with success by libraries. Once you have your crowdfunding page set up, you can share your campaign widely across social media and by word of mouth in the library.


5. **Reach out.** The parents and caregivers who come to the library are probably already reading to their children. The 1,000 Books program can recognize their efforts and give them even more incentive to keep up the good work. Your program will be most successful and have the most impact, though, when you reach the families that might not be reading together every day.

If you are already doing outreach for storytimes, try to think of ways to promote this program along with those efforts. You can reach more families without adding a lot of extra work for yourself. Share information with the daycare centers or preschools you visit, as well as at other community organizations you work with. Ask if they would be willing to send information home about the program.

Think outside the library!

- Display and distribute informational pamphlets, posters, bookmarks, stickers, and so forth in your library and at daycare centers, Head Start programs, and health clinics.
- Have a brainstorming session with your staff to think of other places where the library could set up a booth or table to engage more families with young children.

Some possible ideas are your local farmer’s market, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) office, or National Night Out Association.

- Promote your program online. Post information about the program on your library’s website and/or Facebook page. Make sure to advertise any special events.
- Advertise in your local media, including television, radio, and newspaper.

6. **Kick off.** How will you announce your program to the public? You can plan a soft opening at the library by promoting your program to regular patrons, or you can plan a big kick-off party with refreshments and activities for families. Perhaps have a storytime read-a-thon; families can drop in for the storytime, get registered for the program, and start counting up books!

Community support is vital for a successful library program. What better way to engage your entire community than by making this a town event? Gather support from local businesses and organizations to help you promote your event or donate toward your program.

Be sure to invite your local media to your kick-off event.

7. **Re-evaluate.** This is a step you will want to come back to about a year after you have started your program and again every couple years after that. Re-evaluating is crucial to our jobs as librarians.

Look for feedback from the families that are signed up.

- Do they find the program easy to understand?
- Have they encountered any problems with tracking and completing the program?
- What questions do your staff frequently get from patrons?

Also talk to families who frequent the library but haven’t signed up for the 1,000 Books program.

- Why haven’t they signed up?
- What can you do to encourage more families to sign up?

Finally, make sure to measure how the program has affected your library and community overall. These statistics can help you make the argument for more funding to continue and/or expand the program.
• How many families are participating? How many children have reached each milestone or have completed the program?
• How has attendance at your other early learning programs, such as storytimes, been affected?
• How has your library circulation been affected?
You can also check with local elementary schools or look for available public data to see whether test scores have increased for incoming kindergarteners in your service area since you started your program.

Get more free downloadable 1,000 Books resources, including outreach materials, book lists, tips for parents, coloring sheets, and decorative patterns, at www.demco.com/goto?1000_books.

Example Programs

Monroe (WI) Public Library: The Monroe Public Library’s 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program is called “Grow a Reader: 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten.” It is open to any child who has not yet started kindergarten, with a Little Sprouts program for infants (younger than 12 months). The Little Sprouts program was started to appeal to new families that may have been intimidated by 1,000 Books. Each family that signs up receives a tote bag and a free book upon completion. Families that sign up for Little Sprouts also get a free book at registration.

The tracking method for this program is simple: After a family has read a story, they fill in a leaf on their reading log. When they have filled in 100 leaves, they can bring their reading log to the library for a sticker and receive a new reading log for their next 100 books. The log also includes space for caregivers to write down the titles of their child’s favorite books. Holly Storck-Post, Youth Services Coordinator, started the program after realizing there was a demand for it in her community. Families were specifically asking about the 1,000 Books program after hearing about it in other libraries. Outreach for this program went beyond initial library visitors and included visits to the WIC office and the Early Head Start program in the community. The library received a LISTA grant for the program. It has seen many return visits and great success so far.

Hudson (OH) Library & Historical Society: When the Hudson Library & Historical Society began their 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program two years ago, they were met with a receptive community. New parents especially appreciated the encouragement to read with their young ones. The library received a donation from a local preschool parent group, the Hudson Preschool Parents, which was used toward starting the program. Families who sign up for the program fill out a small card and then receive a folder that contains an early literacy brochure, an overview of the program, and a reading log to write down their first 100 titles. After every 100 books, caregivers and children get a new log and a prize, such as small toys, alphabet puzzles, sticker pages, or foam masks. When a child reaches 1,000 books, he or she receives a certificate and the opportunity to put a bookplate with his or her name on it in one of the books in the library’s collection.