

FACT SHEET

READER'S ADVISORY in the LibRARY:

Putting the "RA" Back in Library

BACKGROUND

Over the past few years when the MBLC has conducted focus groups with users and nonusers across the state, numerous people have commented that they "used to rely on the library for reader's advisory services" but now they were more likely to go to a bookstore or to Amazon.com as a source for finding something to read. While the library community has spent the past decade or longer wrestling with issues of new technology, many traditional services, such as reader's advisory services, have gone by the board. Moreover, many library staffs do not feel confident in their abilities to match a person with the right book. While new databases such as "Novelist" and "What Do I Read Next?" are now available, many staffs have not received training in their use, nor do they feel secure in their ability to help a patron use these new electronic tools.

There is clearly sentiment within the library profession that we are losing "market share" to other entities for a service which was once so basic to our mission. Communication from librarians at site visits and meetings supports the need to offer training for both professional and paraprofessional staff, particularly in light of the new electronic tools which are now available. The Massachusetts Library Association conference has also begun to feature RA in response to professional requests, and PLA continues to offer a pre-conference devoted to the subject every two years.

This project will provide funds for training staff in the use of electronic and print reader's advisory tools. It will enable libraries to purchase popular reading collections in multiple formats. To enhance staff members' ability to match the appropriate book with the reader, libraries receiving funding will be requested to study one selected genre during the course of the project year. This staff development activity can focus on a genre of the staff's choice but it should reflect genre's identified in Sarick's Reader's Advisory Guide to Genre Fiction. Libraries in the metro Chicago suburbs have been conducting these studies for many years with excellent results. The Adult Reading Round Table (ARRT) group includes both professional and paraprofessional librarians who have honed their reader's advisory skills by meeting every other month to discuss selected genre literature. Through the "praxis" of engaging library staff in a genre study, their skill level has greatly increased.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Public or institutional libraries will be selected to receive grants of up to \$7,500 to plan and implement a project designed to train a staff in the techniques of Reader's Advisory. Grant funds may be used to support a limited number of staff hours as well as program materials and outreach to communities. This project has the following goals:

- Improve the skills of library staff in the use of print and electronic resources related to reader's advisory services;
- Use electronic services, including web sites, listservs and chat, as an aid in collection building and reader guidance.

- Also please note the target group is library staff serving adults. This is not intended for YA or Children's Services.

Suggested activities include:

- Staff will participate in an in-depth examination of a staff-selected single area of genre literature, e.g. mysteries, historical fiction;
- Contract with regional and outside Reader's Advisory specialists to offer workshops and training to library staff;
- Investigate marketing RA services as a strategy to attract potential customers in the community-at-large in order to make better use of library materials and services;

MASSACHUSETTS LONG-RANGE PLAN GOAL

Goal 6: Massachusetts residents, regardless of age, will have access to lifelong learning resources and programs through their local libraries.

ELIGIBILITY

Any public or institutional library that meets standard eligibility requirements for Direct Grant programs is eligible to apply. Libraries should:

- Have identified a focus on reader's advisory or customer service in their long range plan;
- Arrange for all staff to attend an all-day training session in the fall. Grant participants will reunite at the end of the grant to discuss what they learned during the course of their study;
- Be prepared to work with MBLC staff on outcomes evaluation for the project.

INTERESTED?

Applicants must submit a **Letter of Intent** form with the "Reader's Advisory" option checked off under **TYPE**. For additional information about this program, please contact Shelley Quezada at the MBLC at 800-952-7403, ext. 235, or e-mail at shelley.quezada@state.ma.us.