



Motivating Parents to Attend MFB Early Literacy Events

The majority of My First Books families are “underserved” library patrons, which means that for various reasons they are not likely to attend library events or programs. In order to motivate them to come to your event, here are some tips and recommendations:

Planning and Promotion

- Collaborate with your community partner to plan and promote the event and encourage your partner to attend. If possible, survey parents or ask partners to find best times and dates. If you are working with a Head Start site, ask to co-host one of their monthly parent meetings. Work with the Head Start agency to see what works best within their guidelines.
- Personalize invitations to families. Let them know you have planned a special event just for them. If confidentiality is an issue, ask partners to help address invitations.
- Make your event as comfortable and welcoming as possible, and provide incentives for attending: food, door prizes, etc. Find a “hook” for your target group and use it in promoting the workshop.
- Carefully consider the timing of the event: month, day of week, and time of day. What will work best for your target group?
- Consider the needs of your target group: childcare, transportation, work schedules, family responsibilities, etc. Is there any way to address these needs in planning your event?
- Make sure you give families plenty of advance notice and put it on every calendar you can, especially those going home from your community partner. If the parents see the information several times and, in several places,, they will be more likely to conclude that the event is important to attend.
- Put reminders in “The Bookworm” and at least one other postcard, invite, or flyer.
- If you can, set your date far enough in advance that you can include the date in your first letter, handout, or bookmark that goes with their first Book-of-the-Month.
- Put a sign on your partner’s door the week of your event.
- If possible, do a reminder phone call the day before or the day of your event, or ask partner to put reminder stickers on children’s shirts or coats.





- It works well to involve the kids-- from displaying their artwork in the library to involving them in a group activity that you can highlight during your event. Include child's first name and age on the art and mat it with construction paper or tagboard frames.
- After your event thank your partner for their support. Consider following up with a thank you to families and an invitation to participate in other library programs or services.

Family Events

- Costumed book characters seem to always be a big draw for families (see Resources below).
- Bring local "celebrities" on board, such as the school principal, classroom teachers, high school or college athletes, authors/musicians/artists, political figureheads, etc.
- Literacy or Learning Stations: Consider setting up stations for your family event. Begin with a 10-minute Early Literacy Skills introduction, then turn families loose to experiment and interact for 40 minutes or so. If possible, pull everyone back together for 10 minutes at the end to debrief and share experiences. Use a passport or menu card to keep track and offer rewards for completing at least two stations. Or leave stations set up for a week or two and allow families to come back in to complete the passport/menu for prizes.
- Many libraries have called upon teen volunteers to help with the family event. Teens can prepare and facilitate activity stations, man the refreshment table, and other tasks that free the librarian to work with parents.
- Put the emphasis on fun!



Parent/Caregiver Workshops

- Hold the workshop in a convenient location. Ideally this would be the public library, but you might want to consider a Head Start center, school library or classroom, or other location where parents are a "captive audience."
- Find ways to offer reliable childcare on-site: other library staff, community partner staff, local Girl Scouts. Plan structured activities for the children, such as storytimes, craft activities, snacks, games, etc.
- Consider co-presenting with other library staff or with your community partner.

- Make the participants comfortable in attending. Promote as an informal affair and encourage participants to bring a friend or family member. Provide an ice breaker activity so attendees get to know one another.
- Model the behaviors you are trying to teach.
- Set clear objectives and share those, along with the agenda, at the beginning of the workshop.



- Make your workshop interactive. Break up lectures or Power Point presentations with hands on activities:
 - Think / Pair/ Share (see Resources section below)
 - Small group discussion activity
 - Hands-on look at books or other materials
 - Make-and-take activity
- Consider partnering with partner, United Way, school district, etc. to host a Ready!™ for Kindergarten workshop: <https://idahoaeyc.org/ready-for-kindergarten>

Resources

Planning:

- **Calendar** - Compare library calendar with the following: school district calendars (Back-to-School/Open House Nights, parent-teacher conferences, holidays, special events); partner organization calendars (monthly parent meetings, events, holidays); community calendars (athletics, festivals, fairs, holiday celebrations, special events).
- **Location** - If space is not available at your library, alternative sites could include: your partner organization site, local schools, churches, community centers, Elks/Rotary/other membership organizations' sites, and Boys and Girls Clubs.

Promotion:

- **Incentives to attend:**
 - **Paperback books**- leftovers from summer reading or previous First Books, low-cost orders from First Book Marketplace (www.firstbook.org).
 - *Read to Me* occasionally has overstock books that could be given as incentives or door prizes on a first-come, first-served basis. Contact a RTM coordinator at least one month in advance of your event to determine if overstock is available.
 - **Rewards** from partner organization
 - **Meals/snacks:** Contact partner organization, Friends of the Library, local grocers/restaurants, or the school district
 - **Title One Schools:** If your partner is a Title One school (over 50% of enrollment qualifies for Free and Reduced Lunch) there may be funds available to support your event if the focus is specifically on family literacy. Contact your school principal to discuss this possibility.

- **Costumed Book Characters:** Having a favorite book character at the event has proven to be an effective way to bring families in to the library. Costume Specialists, Inc. in Ohio is one company that provides children's book characters on behalf of several publishers. The only cost is second-day air shipping to send the costume to its next event. The company has a great selection of storybook characters. For more information about booking a costume visit www.costumespecialists.com/index.html.



Family Event/Parent Workshops:

- **Read to Me's Idaho Family Reading Week:** A special week in November each year to celebrate and emphasize the importance of family reading time.

A toolkit will be uploaded to the ICfL website: <https://libraries.idaho.gov/rtm/idaho-family-reading-week/>. ICfL typically provides books and resources to libraries that register their events on our website. More information can be found on the Read to Me website each year.

- **Support Materials:** *Read to Me* has a wide variety of publications and support materials to distribute to parents and children during your events. Ordering is easy and free: <https://libraries.idaho.gov/rtm/> - select "Free Outreach Materials – Online Order Form" button on the right-hand side of this page.



- **Jump Start Kindergarten:** If you are working with preschool families, you can use this event to participate in RTM's Jumpstart program, in which you can distribute the Jumpstart book, Bingo cards, and more: <https://libraries.idaho.gov/rtm/jumpstart/>
- **Early Literacy Skills Crafts/Activities:**
 - *Read to Me* has an overstock of the blank door hangers used for Every Child Ready to Read. Libraries can request these on a first-come, first-served basis.
 - Libraries participating in a *Read to Me* program qualify for a 50% discount card from Quality Art Supply Store in Boise. See Staci for more information.
 - Offer families/parents a free writing kit, pre-assembled from a variety of old unused greeting cards, writing utensils, stationery, stickers, stamps, etc. and placed in ziplocked baggies or unused pizza boxes.
- **Translation header:** Boise School District's website has a link to two Word files that border the page with the following phrase: "This is very important. Please find someone to translate." It is in these languages: Arabic, Bosnian, Burmese, Chinese, Chuukese, Czech, Farsi, French, Gujarati, Japanese, Karen, Kirundi, Kizigua, Korean, Lao, Mai Mai, Nepali, Oromo, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Thai, Turkish, Uzbek: https://www.boiseschools.org/parents_patrons/parents/english_language_learners/resources/translated_forms

(or go to boiseschools.org, Parents & Patrons, Teaching & Learning tab, English Language Learners page, Resources page, Translated Forms.)