

Guidelines for Library Services with 60+ Audience: Best Practices

Library Services to an Aging Population Committee

Reference Services Section (RSS)

Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association (ALA)

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Introduction

Building on the foundation of the initial guidelines developed in the 1980's, these best practices, take into account the research and literature reflecting demographic changes that have brought the older adult population to the forefront. Notably, several generations of older adults with unprecedented cultural and linguistic diversity will broaden the nation's human landscape. This shift in demographics will have an impact on how libraries and librarians develop initiatives, programs, and services for older adults.

Adults have different needs and interests as they age, encompassing career, family, health and creative pursuits. These updated best practices reflect basic principles in library services for the 60+ population including embracing and encouraging diversity, variety and flexibility in planning collections, programs, and services.

For these guidelines, the term "audience" refers to those sixty years of age and older.

1.0 Staff Training

- 1.1 Develop the library's staff, cultivating an environment where the audience is welcomed and engaged.
- 1.2 Provide learning opportunities to build awareness about the aspects of aging.
- 1.3 Encourage staff to recognize and understand the multidimensional aspects of aging.
- 1.4 Ensure that all staff is aware of programs and services the library offers that may be of interest to the audience, such as deposit collections at facilities, lobby service, reader services, home delivery services, talking book collections, volunteer opportunities, reading aids, or waiving of fines or fees.
- 1.5 Partner with local organizations to design training opportunities for library staff.

2.0 Information Services and Collections

- 2.1 Appoint a librarian to act as a coordinator of services to the audience, ensuring that there is at least one designated staff member monitoring and developing the library's collections and services with the audience in mind.
- 2.2 Establish an advisory group that reflects the audience and the diversity of the community.
- 2.3 Identify interests through focus groups or surveys.
- 2.4 Cooperate with local Area Agencies on Aging, senior nutrition programs, senior volunteer programs, and others in the aging service provider network by advertising their services and making their publications and other information more readily accessible either online or in paper format.
- 2.5 Organize and consolidate information about government and community programs and services available for the audience.

2.6 Ensure that the library's collection includes materials that are pertinent for the audience, caregivers, and family members and for professional caregivers in the community.

3.0 Programming

3.1 Identify program and service opportunities based on interest and community need.

3.2 Select themes for programs that deal with specific interests of the audience identified through strategic planning, community asset mapping, user surveys, focus groups, and/or circulation statistics reflecting borrowing patterns.

3.3 Create engaging programs that promote life-long learning, being aware that interests and information needs greatly vary.

3.4 Plan programs for specific age groups or generations within the audience enhancing capacity to remain independent.

3.5 Offer intergenerational programs and participate in intergenerational projects sponsored by others in the community. Consider partnerships with local schools, daycare facilities or community organizations.

3.6 Pursue other opportunities for cooperative programming with partners such as community and senior centers, Area Agencies on Aging, senior employment organizations and other community agencies, as well as educational institutions offering community-based educational programs for the audience. Cooperative efforts might involve active participation in planning and delivering programs, assistance in publicizing and marketing programs, or providing displays, exhibits, and booklists in conjunction with the library's programs.

3.7 Develop technology programs specifically of interest to the audience considering potential visual, physical or hearing disabilities. Provide instruction for the use of electronic devices and social media.

3.8 Explore outreach and partnership opportunities to provide library services and programming to the audience outside the library, such as in senior or community centers, nursing homes and senior housing units. Consider offering technology training in these locations.

3.9 Promote active aging through library displays and exhibits.

3.10 Consider opportunities for the audience to volunteer in the library.

3.11 Develop and implement outcome measures for programs and services for effective evaluation.

4.0 Technology

4.1 Use electronic newsletters, the library homepage, and social media sites for the audience.

4.2 Update software on the library website to minimize accessibility issues, including the ability to increase font sizes.

4.3 Provide devices preloaded with e-books.

4.4 Provide a mobile community technology lab (similar to a bookmobile) equipped with Wi-Fi and a variety of equipment, such as desktop computers, laptops, iPads, e-readers, etc., as well as assistive technology and adaptive hardware.

4.5 Engage audience with current digital collections offering assistive technology and adaptive hardware.

4.6 Offer computer and Internet training in assisted living, alternative housing, senior day care, congregate meals sites, senior community centers, nursing homes, and senior residential or care homes in the community.

5.0 Outreach and Partnerships

5.1 Provide library information to those who serve the audience on a regular basis.

- 5.2 Participate in community activities to increase library awareness, such as community fairs and festivals.
- 5.3 Recruit volunteers who are 60 + to become advocates for the library in the community.
- 5.4 Establish an ongoing liaison partnership with local Area Agencies on Aging, as well as other agencies that serve the audience especially senior centers that employ activity coordinators.
- 5.5 Seek partnerships with health clubs, colleges, museums, cultural organizations, zoos and schools/recreational centers to offer intergenerational programming.
- 5.6 Provide library materials to assisted living, retirement and nursing facilities, as well as adult care homes and day centers, in whatever form fits their space and program.
- 5.7 Connect with diverse groups to strengthen collective impact.
- 5.8 Identify outreach and partnership opportunities to provide programming to the audience outside the library.
- 5.9 Advertise the library's services through local media, public health agencies and other agencies that work with the audience.

6.0 Services to the Homebound and Special Populations

- 6.1 Survey community needs of homebound and other special populations, such as those with cognitive impairments. Analyze community demographics, population forecasts, and housing trends to plan to meet this need effectively.
- 6.2 Offer the library's services to assisted living, alternative housing, senior day care, congregate meals sites, senior community centers, nursing homes and senior residential or care homes in the community. Also offer assistance to those confined to private residences or who are unable to carry library materials home.
- 6.3 Establish partnerships with community agencies and organizations that work with the audience to develop and present library programs and services; and facilitate access to programs and services.
- 6.4 Tailor library services to the individual, using various delivery methods, including mail, volunteer delivery and staff resources, depending on the reading needs and living situation of the patron. Use volunteers strategically to increase the capacity of outreach staff.
- 6.5 Partner with Regional Libraries for the Blind and Physically Handicapped to expand available services.
- 6.6 Evaluate your library's accessibility by the audience with physical, visual, aural, reading and other disabilities, according to the Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 6.7 Acquire and make available books and periodicals in large print.

7.0 Facilities

- 7.1 Create an area to socialize, offering an experience some the audience might not currently have in their lives.
- 7.2 Accommodate users for whom prolonged standing is difficult by placing chairs or stools near stacks, information desks, checkout areas, computer terminals and other areas. If possible, create a designated space using comfortable chairs gathered in an area adjacent to books and magazines of interest to the audience.
- 7.3 Consider placing materials frequently used by the audience on accessible shelves.
- 7.4 Ensure that spacing between shelving accommodates users in wheelchairs.
- 7.5 Ensure that signage is clear, Braille (where appropriate), and readily visible to all, including users in wheelchairs. Library brochures should be in at least 14point font type.

8.0 Funding and Budgeting

8.1 Assess funding needs.

8.2 Consider library budget planning to accommodate possible increases in demand for outreach services, such as delivery of library materials by mail and mobile library services.

8.3 Incorporate adequate funding for programs, materials, and services for the audience in the library's operating budget.

8.4 Seek supplemental funding through partnerships with other agencies, organizations, and foundations.