Let's Talk About It!
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Introduction

Libraries represent many things to the communities they serve.

They offer the practical information people need to improve the quality of their lives and increase their options in a complex society. Libraries also provide something less tangible, yet just as essential to a satisfying and productive life—a place for people to discuss big ideas about the world and their place in it.

Programs that encourage people to think about literature, history, ethics, music, visual art, and human values are essential to the educational mission of libraries. Humanities-focused programs, such as reading and discussion series, stimulate public interest in the world of ideas. Such programs can be both an opportunity for continuing education as well as starting points for substantive discussion, study, and programming.

Let’s Talk About It is a reading and discussion program model launched for libraries by the American Library Association (ALA) in 1982. The original development, design, and production of Let’s Talk About It was made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

The program model involves reading a common series of books, selected by national project scholars, and discussing them in the context of a larger, overarching theme. Working with a local humanities scholar, libraries lead a series of reading and discussion programs to explore the theme through a humanities lens.

In a typical Let’s Talk About It program, a discussion group comes together for a five-part, scholar-led series. The group meets every two to four weeks, depending on local preference. During each meeting, the group discusses a theme-related book they have all read. The local scholar opens the program, bringing the book to life, provoking the group’s curiosity with insights and background on the author and the work. At the same time, the scholar relates the reading to the theme, raising questions and sparking discussion. The audience breaks into smaller groups to talk about the book, share ideas, and raise more questions. The large group reconvenes for a closing conversation.

Let’s Talk About It has many incarnations. In addition to national program themes developed by ALA over the years, several state libraries and humanities councils have developed their own themes and programs and applied them to the Let’s Talk About It framework. The hallmark of the series is to add depth and value to the discussion through exploration of themes and scholar-led discussion. We invite you to use this model in your community, either by selecting one of our existing themes at ala.org/ltai or by developing your own Let’s Talk About It resources.
About
This Guide

This guide has been created to make it as simple as possible for you to implement a *Let’s Talk About It* series in your library. As such, the guide is flexible enough to be used with any of ALA’s existing *Let’s Talk About It* themes.

The guide is divided into five sections:

1. **Getting Started: Planning Your Program Series** covers theme selection, goal setting, timeline development, library staff roles, scholar selection, establishing community partnerships, and fundraising.

2. **Implementing Your Project** includes an outline for a typical *Let’s Talk About It* series, as well as tips for librarians and scholars who will work with program attendees.

3. **Promotion** provides guidelines for defining your audience and reaching them through a variety of communication methods.

4. **Evaluating Your Project** helps you keep your finances on track and offers tools to measure program effectiveness and impact.

5. **Supplemental Programming** offers supplementary programming ideas that can help your library make the most of its *Let’s Talk About It* series.
Getting Started: Planning Your Program Series

Planning is critical to the success of your Let’s Talk About It program. Before diving into distributing books and hosting discussions, it’s important to consider the logistics of implementing the program, what you hope to accomplish, and how best to engage the community. In this section, we will walk you through how to set goals, select a theme, develop a timeline, set staff roles, locate a local scholar, find funding, and form community partnerships.

Setting Goals

The first step to any Let’s Talk About It series should be to consider your goals. Determining what you hope to accomplish can provide clear direction that will help as you create a program plan. Having clear goals can also help you make decisions later in the project, such as what theme to use, how/where to promote your series, and what types of metrics or feedback you will want to collect.

Below are some questions you may want to consider while setting your goals.

**LIBRARY**

- What do you want this Let’s Talk About It program to accomplish?
- Is there an area of the library collection or a programming series that you want to emphasize or build up that might influence what theme you select?
- How will the library benefit from a Let’s Talk About It series?
- What future activities might this series foster?
- What kind of metrics or feedback do you want to collect to assess program outcomes?

**AUDIENCE**

- Who will your program serve (ages, demographics, library use)?
- Why this audience?
- What are the interests of this audience?
- What are the needs and aspirations of this audience, and how will they benefit?
- How many people in this audience do you hope to reach?
- How will you collect feedback from this audience to know if your goals are being met?
COMMUNITY

- How could you incorporate broader community issues into your Let’s Talk About It theme?
- What local organizations might be interested in the Let’s Talk About It theme you select?
- What other library or community programming could you tie into a theme?
- How will you reach underserved or marginalized community members and draw them into the programs and discussions?

Choosing a Theme

ALA has a variety of Let’s Talk About It themes available. All ALA themes were developed by national scholars and library workers to speak to adult audiences. Each theme includes the following support materials:

- Summary of the theme
- Humanities scholar essay
- Book list
- Annotations of the book list
- List of supplementary texts

National project scholars have written thoughtful and reflective essays that inform each theme. These essays are discussion tools and guideposts for local scholars and participants alike. Each Let’s Talk About It participant should be given the essay appropriate to the program theme in advance of the first discussion session.

A full list of the available themes can be found on the ALA website at: programminglibrarian.org/ltai.

PRO TIP!
Consider creating program kits that participants can check out. Kits might include the first book and a participant folder (containing the essay, a bookmark, a brochure, local scholar bio(s) and a flyer with meeting times and dates). For future sessions, participants can trade in the title discussed at a program for the next title in the series.

NOTE: If you are choosing a theme that deals with history, the library may need to be prepared to deal with the impact of discussing historic memory and harm.

Gathering the Books

There is no magic number for how many copies of each Let’s Talk About It book you should have available for patrons; that number varies from library to library. The best way to estimate how many copies of each book you should acquire is to look at program attendance numbers for other reading and discussion events you have held. This should give you a good estimate of how many attendees you can anticipate.

Note that some patrons may be interested in reading the books but may not be able to attend the discussions. It’s a good idea to look at circulation statistics for books featured in similar events to get a better idea of how many people may want to check out the titles but not attend the discussion portions.
Once you have calculated how many copies of each book you will need, the next step is to start gathering them. There are several strategies you can use to gather the necessary titles, including:

- Purchase multiple copies of each title in addition to any already in your collection
- Collect copies of the books from other branches within your system or through interlibrary loan
- Collaborate with nearby libraries to work out a book sharing, buying, or exchange arrangement for the series

**Creating a Budget**

Once you’ve determined how many books you need, it’s time to calculate other program expenses. This will help you to determine how much funding you need to raise or decide where things could be scaled back to stay under budget. Below is a simple table with common program costs that you can use to calculate your project expenses. To use the table, you can either print it out or recreate it in a spreadsheet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books (# of copies X cost per copy)</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholar Honorarium</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholar Travel Expenses</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Staff Time</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity and Marketing</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Material Expenses (postage, catering)</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing and Photocopying</td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL EXPENSES</strong></td>
<td>$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PRO TIP!**

Work with your local bookstore! Even when books are available through the library, participants may want to purchase their own copies to annotate as they go along. It can be helpful to contact local bookstores to let them know about the Let’s Talk About It series in advance so they can stock up on copies of the books. Bookstores may also be willing to help promote the series by creating a book display, hanging a flyer, or offering discounts.
Creating a Timeline

After you’ve set your goals, selected your theme, created your budget, and begun gathering copies of the books, you should construct a practical timeline. The table below will help. To use it, read the list and consider the timing that would work best for each item. To keep track of your timeline, you can either print out the table below, put the items in a spreadsheet, or use a project management tool such as Trello.

Note: Some of these steps may not apply to you, or you may come up with other steps that are not suggested below. Tailor the checklist to fit your library’s needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Person Responsible</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure buy-in from library leadership and stakeholders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prepare a project budget</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Research and recruit local scholar</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select program dates and times</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reserve meeting space for programs</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruit program partners</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alert library staff, board, and Friends of project</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create marketing plan</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create social media posts</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order books, alert local bookstores</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Publicize series and programming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Put together staff planning and recruit discussion group leaders</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Order refreshments</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribute program materials (e.g. books, essays, bookmarks, etc.) to scholars and participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confirm scholar and partner organization attendance of programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Send reminder to scholar about program one week before event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Send final check-in to scholar one day before event</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hold discussion program</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor book circulation following program</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribute evaluations at each program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect evaluations from participants and scholars at each program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyze evaluation results and share with library leadership and stakeholders</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Trello
Assign the Project Director

You'll want to have someone on staff who is assigned the role of project director for the series. The project director manages the series from beginning to end and makes sure things stay on track. This may seem like a large undertaking, but with adequate planning it can be quite manageable. Depending on your library’s staff capacity, you may wish to assign a team to work with the project director on the series. The project director can then delegate some activities to other team members to share the workload.

The responsibilities of the project director include:

- Selection and coordination of the local scholar
- Reservation and preparation of the meeting room
- Distribution of program materials
- Publicity and outreach
- Recruiting and working with community partners
- Preparation of the budget, payment of bills, honorarium
- Management of programs
- Coordination of assisting staff and/or volunteers
- Evaluation and reporting

Choosing a Local Scholar

Working with a local scholar is a critical part of any Let’s Talk About It series. Their expertise with the subject is a valuable asset that deepens the discussion. The role of the local scholar is to help facilitate discussion and encourage critical reflection on the materials. Scholars should be prepared to lead the conversation.

FINDING A SCHOLAR

If you have never been through the process before, finding the right scholar (or scholars) might be one of the more challenging parts of the process. Remember that your hard work will pay off; building connections with local scholars will strengthen your library’s programming for this series and in the future.

For help identifying scholars, we recommend reaching out to the following institutions:

- State humanities councils
- Colleges
- University humanities departments
- Community or junior colleges
- Museums
- Historical societies

After receiving the names of potential scholars from these sources, you might ask members of other organizations who have heard them speak to give you an evaluation of their work. You might even simply sit in on a lecture or two by the candidate, or watch one of their lectures online, to get a feel for their presentation style.
SCHOLAR QUALIFICATIONS

After compiling a list of possible scholars, talk to them. Explain your series in a concise, appealing way. Then listen to them to determine their understanding of what is involved and to be certain they are sincerely interested, as well as qualified. To be qualified, scholars should:

- **Possess appropriate academic qualifications** to speak on the program themes and have teaching or other experience relevant to the selected titles.
- **Be engaging, comfortable, and experienced speaking** before and facilitating discussion with adult audiences in non-classroom settings.
- **Have an advanced degree** in literature or other related humanities subject (preferred).
- **Be adept at facilitating discussion with adult audiences** on themes related to the human condition, and in particular, the theme of your library’s series.

Below are a few questions you may wish to ask potential scholars:

- “[Library] is interested in hosting a discussion series about [Theme]. Can you briefly tell me about your work on that topic?”
- Potential follow-up question: “I think our audience would be very interested in [Topic or work that the scholar mentioned]. Can you tell me a little more about that?”
- “Do you have experience leading discussions with adults outside a classroom setting?”
- “Our program space is open to the rest of the library, so there may be some background noises. Would that be a problem for you?”

SCHOLAR RESPONSIBILITIES

Be clear in communicating to the scholar what their responsibilities will be. This will help them decide if they have time to dedicate to participating in the project and manage their expectations. The responsibilities of the scholar are to:

- Thoroughly and thoughtfully review the chosen theme, related materials, and overall Let’s Talk About It approach to reading and discussions.
- Prepare and deliver an opening presentation on the material to be discussed (typically about 15 minutes).
- Provide their autobiographical information (1 paragraph, max) for the project director to use in introducing the scholar at the start of the programs.
- Prepare opening discussion points to be used as a basis for group or small group discussion. (Ideally, these should be sent to the project director at least one week before each program for distribution to discussion leaders.)
- Facilitate or co-facilitate group discussions, including listening to comments, answering questions, and highlighting the important ideas expressed during discussion.
- Complete program evaluations about their experience for the project director.

Once you have spoken with a few scholars, it is time to invite your top choice. Depending on how many scholars you are considering, this can be a difficult decision. When in doubt, go with your gut. Which scholar’s work do you think would resonate best with your audience? Who was the most engaging during your brief conversation with them?
Tips for Working with the Scholar

- Try to talk with potential scholars before deciding who to work with. It’s a great opportunity to gauge their interest in the theme, learn about their experience, and get a feel for their speaking style.
- This is not a college-level class; people participate for the pleasure of reading and talking about what they’ve read. Make sure your scholar understands this and has experience working with general adult audiences.
- Make some educated guesses about the characteristics of your audiences (e.g. age, interests, education) and share that information with the scholar.
- Be clear about the format. Make sure the scholar understands that opening remarks from them are only 15 minutes and that the majority of the program is dedicated to discussion.
- Be clear about the scholar’s role. They are not only to take the lead in the opening remarks, but also to help facilitate the group discussion portion of the program.
- Outline the commitment from the library and the scholar in writing. Include any honorarium to be paid, expenses to be covered (e.g. travel), and a schedule of all programs the scholar is expected to attend. Typically, libraries should expect to pay a speaker’s fee of between $150 and $500, depending on your geographic location and the scholar’s experience.
- Provide the scholar with any background materials you feel will be helpful, including the theme essay, copies of the books, related articles, discussion questions, and copies of PR materials.
- If you’ve held Let’s Talk About It programs before, share a few of the comments from participants’ evaluation forms to give the scholar an idea of what to expect.
- Ask the scholar if they would be willing to participate in publicity, such as an interview with a local newspaper.
- Encourage the scholar to promote the series to their own network. Make it easy for them to distribute the information on social media by providing pre-written posts and registration links for them to share.
- Keep the scholar informed throughout the process. Let them know how publicity progresses.
- Share any feedback from participants with the scholar after each section.

 Recruiting Community Partners

Local community partnerships can be a huge asset for your Let’s Talk About It series. Partner organizations may be able to assist with marketing and outreach efforts; recruiting volunteers; providing financial support; donating goods or services, and more.

The best partnerships are ones where both organizations gain something from the relationship. As such, it’s important to share your project plans with potential partners and make sure that your goals resonate with their mission, interests, or intentions for the community. A wide variety of organizations
may find partnering with the library on a *Let’s Talk About It* project beneficial. Below is a list of common *Let’s Talk About It* partners:

- Community centers
- Senior organizations
- Area churches, synagogues, and other religious organizations
- Social justice agencies
- Other libraries in the area or neighboring communities
- Arts and humanities organizations (e.g., historical societies, museums, cultural centers)
- Professional associations
- Community colleges and universities
- Local high schools
- Literacy organizations
- Literary magazines
- Book clubs
- Writers groups and poetry guilds
- Fraternal organizations
- Local businesses
- Councils on Aging/AARP groups
- Ethnic associations
- Local chapters of national organizations (e.g., Rotary, Lions Club, ACLU, American Legion)

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**Applying for Humanities Programming Grants**

You may want to seek funding to support your *Let’s Talk About It* series. Outside programming support (perhaps to match expenses covered by the library foundation or Friends group) can expand the budget for your project and increase its potential reach and impact.

ALA occasionally offers funding for libraries to host *Let’s Talk About It* series on specific themes. Current opportunities will be listed at [ala.org/apply](http://ala.org/apply) and [ala.org/ltai](http://ala.org/ltai). To be informed when new opportunities become available, sign up for ALAs Programming Librarian newsletter at [programminglibrarian.org/newsletter](http://programminglibrarian.org/newsletter).

Many state humanities councils award “mini-grants” or “resource grants” to support free-admission public humanities programs of short duration. Application deadlines for short-term grants vary from state to state. Contact your state humanities council for information on available grants, their guidelines, and application requirements.

A full list of state humanities councils can be found at: [neh.gov/about/state-humanities-councils](http://neh.gov/about/state-humanities-councils).
Implementing Your Project

Each *Let’s Talk About It* discussion program should be approximately 90 to 120 minutes long. This provides enough time for opening remarks from the scholar and for participants to have a meaningful discussion.

Each program should focus on one of the titles in the theme, and participants should come after having read the book and the theme’s essay. (However, it is OK if a participant has not fully finished reading the book beforehand as they may still add value to the conversation.) You will want to make sure that participants have access to the materials *at least* one month before the program to ensure they have ample time to read (or start reading) everything.

**Program Format**

The following is an outline of a typical *Let’s Talk About It* program that can be used in a physical or virtual setting.

**Welcome and Introductions**

*Time:* 5–10 minutes  
*Lead:* Project Director  
*Activity:* Project director welcomes participants and introduces themselves and the local scholar. Thanks participants, library, funders, and partners. Goes over format and lets people know what to expect. Provides necessary information regarding program materials and schedule for the rest of the series. Leads applause for the scholar to come up and start their section.

**Opening Remarks/Presentation**

*Time:* 15–25 minutes  
*Leading:* Scholar  
*Activity:* Scholar presents on the book, the author’s background, the work in context of the theme and essay, salient points made by the book, and other relevant matters.

**Group Discussion**

*Time:* 45–60 minutes  
*Leading:* Scholar facilitates, Project Director may co-facilitate  
*Activity:* Using discussion questions related to the book and theme, facilitator(s) lead the group in discussion of the materials. If the group exceeds 20 people, you may wish to split into small groups. In
this case, the project director should recruit discussion leaders to help facilitate breakout discussion while the scholar floats between groups. After the discussion period, the larger group reconvenes to share what was discussed in each breakout and hear closing remarks.

**SCHOLAR CLOSING REMARKS**

*Time:* 5–10 minutes  
*Leading:* Scholar  
*Activity:* Scholar provides closing comments and shares insights they gleaned from the conversation.

**WRAP-UP**

*Time:* 5–10 minutes  
*Leading:* Project Director  
*Activity:* Project director thanks the participants and scholar, acknowledges funder (if applicable), distributes and collects evaluations, gives instructions for next session, and makes any other final announcements.

**Group Size**

There is no limit or best practice for the size of the group participating in the discussion. You want to make the program available to the largest number of people who will be able to commit to reading the materials and participating in the conversation. If the group is large (more than 20 people), you can break into smaller groups for discussion after the opening remarks and reconvene as a larger group near the end of the program. Under this format, staff or experienced volunteers should serve as discussion leaders in each breakout, and the scholar should float between groups. Upon reconvening as a larger group, ask one member of each breakout to share what was talked about in their group.

If you have concerns with being able to handle a large group or would like to get an idea of how many people plan to participate, you can require pre-registration for the programs. This allows you to cap the number of attendees, gives you a firmer idea of group size, and enables you to easily send reminders about the event.

**Tips for Facilitators**

The following are some useful do’s and don’ts to keep in mind when preparing to facilitate the group discussion.

**DO**

- Ask that everyone wear a nametag or, if virtual, update their name on the screen to help participants become acquainted.
- Suggest that the group(s) form a circle, if possible, so everyone can see each other.
- Make sure everyone has an opportunity to speak.
Help guide the conversation back on track if discussion starts to deviate.
Aim to be the “leader” as little as possible.
Accept and acknowledge the ideas of all group members.
Look mainly at the overall group atmosphere. Don’t overreact to the needs of specific individuals.
Listen attentively to what each member has to say.
Encourage wide participation by occasionally asking if there are alternate points of view.

DON’T

Don’t require members to ask for permission to speak.
Don’t require members to speak only to you.
Don’t preach or teach.
Don’t take sides or argue on any issue.
Don’t manipulate the discussion or inhibit its flow.
Don’t push people to participate before they feel ready.
Don’t embarrass any member.
Don’t hog the spotlight.

More tips and best practices for facilitating a conversation, including how to manage challenging participants, can be found in this free facilitation guide from ALA.
Promotion

Promoting your Let’s Talk About It series is key to recruiting participants and raising awareness. The following guidelines are intended to help you successfully promote your series.

Getting Started

To meet media and other deadlines, you will need to start promoting your series about two months in advance.

First, determine your target audience, goals for audience size and the communication methods you wish to use for this project. Try holding a brainstorming meeting with your fellow staff members to start determining these things and foster new ideas. During the meeting:

- Emphasize the potential for recruiting new users and building support for the library
- Communicate the goals for your program: what audiences you wish to reach, what you hope to accomplish
- Determine which communication methods (social media, print, etc.) will work best to reach your intended audience
- If possible, assign staff with various interests and talents to work in small groups to carry out the goals

Additionally, share your program plans with library leadership, your board, Friends, and other library support groups. Invite them to contribute ideas and help with marketing the series.

Communication Methods

As part of your planning process for the project, your primary audience for the series has been decided. Now, you need to focus on how you are going to reach them. Most communication methods fall into these five categories: social media, public relations/publicity, direct marketing, personal contact, or advertising.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Using your library’s existing social media pages is probably the easiest and most budget-friendly way to reach a wide audience. You can use social media to get the word out about your project to your entire base of followers, or you can target social media posts to reach the specific audience you are looking to attract:

PRO TIP!
Be sure to include acknowledgment of the funder(s) supporting your Let’s Talk About It series on promotional materials.
Decide which social media platforms you will use. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are popular with many libraries, but use what works best for you.

Utilize the platform your library typically posts to. This is where your patrons are used to looking for your updates. You don’t have to create a new profile to add to the mix.

Use your “voice.” Keep posts casual, easy to read, and to the point.

Use calls-to-action to make your social media posts interactive. Encourage people and partner organizations to like the post, tag a friend in the comments, or share the post. These actions will help your social media posts reach more people.

If you want to spend a little money, boosting posts can be a solid investment, especially if you are looking to target a specific group of people. Learn more about boosting a Facebook post.

Hashtags can help people find you and learn more about your Let’s Talk About It program. For this project, you can use #LibraryLTAI. Hashtags can be used on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, and other platforms.

Writing out posts ahead of time, either using a spreadsheet to organize dates and text or using a paid program like HootSuite or SproutSocial, can help you keep track of posts and schedule them in advance.

PUBLIC RELATIONS/PUBLICITY

Your local media is still an effective—and generally cost-efficient—way to publicize your event. Your local community connections like partners and local influencers are also a useful outlet for publicity. Here are a few tips.

Email a press release announcing the event to your local newspapers, radio stations, and television stations at least two weeks before the event. If you have regional magazines or talk shows that list upcoming events, send a release to them as well. Since these media outlets often have longer lead times, send these press releases four to eight weeks before the event. Some news outlets will not open press releases sent as attachments to an email; to be safe, paste the copy of the press release into the body of the email, as well.

About a week before your event, send a follow-up via email. Provide specific information about the date, time, and location for reporters and photographers who may be interested in attending the series, reporting on the series, or including the information in an “Upcoming Events” section.

Be prepared in case a reporter is interested in visiting the library for a program in the series, a related event, or an interview. Make sure you know who is able and willing to be interviewed, or provide written quotes, on behalf of your library. Have a brief (one paragraph) bio for your scholar(s) available. If you are comfortable, you could even ask one of your more active program participants if they would be willing to speak to the media (but don’t pressure them).
Your local stations may be willing to air a public service announcement (PSA) about your *Let’s Talk About It* series. A PSA will advertise your event but is donated airtime, so there is no cost to your library. Check your local stations’ websites to see if they have instructions posted about how to submit a PSA; if they don’t, email or call the station to inquire.

The web is useful for getting the word out about your event through other organizations’ websites. Your partner organizations, city, community centers, and chamber of commerce may post information about community events on their websites or social media.

Check local online events calendars. Many local media outlets have local event calendars on their websites. You can post your event there for free.

Reach out to local bloggers and influencers to see if they would be willing to post or share (i.e. re-post) information about your *Let’s Talk About It* series on their social media.

**WEBSITES**

Make sure you include up-to-date information on the library’s website. If you have a “Coming Events” section, include information about the series there. Potential program participants who do not visit the library on a regular basis will look to the web for details or last-minute information, so it’s important that you make that information available.

Include your library’s website URL and social media handles on your publicity materials.

**DIRECT MARKETING (Email and Postal Mail)**

Use your library’s existing email lists for community organizations to send out an email containing all of the information they need to know. Make sure they are able to reply to the email to ask questions.

If your library has a digital newsletter, put your *Let’s Talk About It* program front and center. Include all relevant information your patrons need to attend, including time and location. Encourage recipients of the newsletter to reach out to the library if they have any questions.

You may also want to consider printing a customized *Let’s Talk About It* postcard. Postcards can be mailed to library patrons, community members or others.

**PERSONAL CONTACT**

One-on-one outreach is among the most effective promotion you can do. It can take a lot of time, but the enthusiasm that it generates can pay big dividends.

Create a list of influential individuals in your community (e.g., the mayor, city council members, business leaders) who may be interested in your series. Email them a brief description of your program, linking to your website or an article about the series. If you’d like their help with promotion, include a template email and/or social media post that they can easily share with their colleagues or followers.

Reach out individually to organizations that might be able to help you reach your goals or target audience. Briefly explain your program via email and suggest a quick phone call or coffee meeting to see if they would be willing to help out with promotion or simply participate in the series.
When contacting community groups, you may want to ask to speak for five minutes at one of their upcoming meetings or events. This is inexpensive and effective since it allows you to both deliver your message and gauge responses. At the meeting, outline your series plan and present convincing reasons why the series may be of interest to them. If you have printed materials or fun takeaways (e.g. posters, bookmarks, buttons) about your series or the library, bring them along. If possible, speak at the end of the meeting or offer to stay until the end to answer questions.

If speaking at a meeting is not possible, ask for the group’s support in promoting the program. Ask the group leaders to pass out flyers, share social media posts, or mention the program to their members and staff.

**ADVERTISING**

If you can afford it, advertising can help you reach a broad audience that might not otherwise learn about your program.

- **Promotional posters** are relatively inexpensive compared to other advertising methods; you just need to cover graphic design and printing costs, along with the labor to hang them. Hang posters at your library, community centers (e.g., city hall, post office, schools, local colleges), restaurants, grocery stores, dry cleaners, bookstores, and health clubs. Ask Friends and trustees to post them at places they frequent.

- **Paid advertising** (print or online) is another effective, but costly, method; ad space can cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars depending on the medium. Before considering paid advertising, approach local newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations about public service announcements. Some may be willing to donate or offer discounted airtime or ad space for nonprofit groups. If you do receive free advertising, acknowledge the media outlet as a sponsor on program materials. If you consider paid advertising, look to your Friends or other groups to underwrite costs.

- **Social media advertising** can be a good choice for libraries without large advertising budgets, but do your research. Boosting posts on your library’s Facebook page is a cost-effective option. Advertising on some other social media channels and Google is more costly.

- **Simple promotional items** (e.g. bookmarks, buttons, pens/pencils) can advertise your series and also double as a freebie for attendees. Hand out these items at schools, community group meetings, or other locations, or ask Friends and trustees to give them to friends.

**Putting It All Together**

The exact combination of methods you use to promote your *Let’s Talk About It* series will be unique to your library. Your choices will depend on a number of factors: your target audience, budget, and communications methods available to you, and also time, staff availability, volunteer support, and what you’ve learned from promoting past programs in your community. As you are planning, keep in mind your goals for the size and type of audience you wish to attract. If your library can only hold a group of 15, you do not need to spend hundreds of dollars on publicity. Use your resources wisely. Cost-effective methods like social media, emails, and individual outreach to local organizations might be all you need. On the other hand, if you are looking to attract people who have never set foot in the library, you will need to be more creative—and probably spend more time and money. However, this time and effort could pay off. Bringing new faces into the library for a program can result in more library cards issued and more lifelong patrons created.
Evaluating Your Project

Evaluation is essential to determining the effectiveness of your program, its impact, and whether your goals have been met.

Not all participants will attend every session, but it can be valuable to hear from every participant as the series progresses. By distributing evaluation forms at each discussion session, you will be able to respond to problems, address questions, and make any adjustments in format that may be necessary.

Consider in advance how you will judge the quality and effectiveness of your series. By number of participants? By their evaluations? By whether your goals were met? By the scholar’s feedback? By requests for future reading and discussion programs? Most project directors will evaluate the series by weighing each of these and other factors. Think of evaluation not only as a way to gauge the level of effectiveness of this program but also as a tool to plan future programs.

Following are sample evaluation forms that you can use for your Let’s Talk About It series. To use the forms, you can print and distribute them at the close of each session; create an online survey using a website such as SurveyMonkey, or take advantage of ALA’s free measurement platform Project Outcome.
# Local Scholar Evaluation Form

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2 Disagree</th>
<th>3 Neutral</th>
<th>4 Agree</th>
<th>5 Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The reading was the right choice for today’s program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group discussion was successful.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The essay was helpful in preparing for today’s program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The pre-program information provided by the library was helpful for my preparation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What do you feel could have been improved from today’s program?

3. What do you feel was most successful about today’s program?
## Participant Evaluation Form

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1 Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>2 Disagree</th>
<th>3 Neutral</th>
<th>4 Agree</th>
<th>5 Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The reading was the right choice for today’s program.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The scholar’s opening remarks enriched my understanding of the material.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt the group discussion was engaging.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The scholar was successful in facilitating the discussion.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to attend other programs in the Let’s Talk About It series.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What do you feel could have been improved from today’s program?

3. What do you feel was most successful about today’s program?
Supplemental Programming

The five scholar-led discussion programs corresponding to the theme's reading list are the main focus of a Let's Talk About It series. However, libraries may also opt to create programs that supplement the main reading and discussion events.

Supplemental programs can be an excellent way to engage non-adult audiences (e.g. children, families, teens). They can also be useful for broadening your project's reach to include adults who are interested in the theme but may not want to participate in a reading and discussion program.

The list below includes some ideas for supplemental programming you might consider hosting as part of your series:

1. **Host a film series** that features movie adaptations of the books or documentaries related to the theme.

2. **Create an exhibit** related to the selected theme.

3. **Invite authors** to appear and read from their works featured in the series; or invite authors, poets, or storytellers to read from works related to the theme.

4. **Work with a scholar** or scholars to present a lecture or panel discussion/presentation on the lives and times of the authors/people/cultures featured in the series.

5. **Partner with a local theater group** to present staged partial readings from the works featured in the series or other related theatrical works.

6. **Host an oral history or digital archiving event** to collect local stories/artifacts associated with the theme.

7. **Search for theme-specific ideas** for supplemental programming on ALA's Let's Talk About It website.
Acknowledgments

Material in this guide has been updated from *Let’s Talk About It: A Planner’s Manual* (American Library Association, 1984), as well as intervening iterations and programs, with input from many individuals and groups.

**American Library Association**

The American Library Association (ALA) is the foremost national organization providing resources to inspire library and information professionals to transform their communities through essential programs and services. For more than 140 years, the ALA has been the trusted voice for academic, public, school, government, and special libraries, advocating for the profession and the library’s role in enhancing learning and ensuring access to information for all. For more information, visit [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org).

**National Endowment for the Humanities**

Created in 1965 as an independent federal agency, the National Endowment for the Humanities supports research and learning in history, literature, philosophy, and other areas of the humanities by funding selected, peer-reviewed proposals from around the nation. Additional information about the National Endowment for the Humanities and its grant programs is available at [www.neh.gov](http://www.neh.gov).