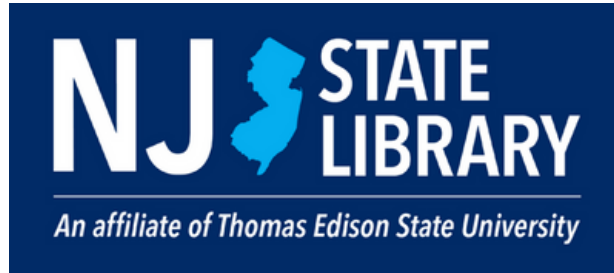


Promising Practices

Resources and tips for projects in
technology, workforce, health, and
education





New Jersey State Library Promising Practices

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01

About

About the Promising Practices

Designed to support New Jersey State Library grantees as they navigate the process of launching their new or reimagined spaces, this resource offers practical templates, tools, and tips to help make the most of this exciting space transformation.

Rooted in real-world examples and backed by professional insight, this resource outlines strategies for anticipating user expectations, engaging the community, and fostering flexible service models that adapt over time. Whether your team is preparing for a grand opening, moving into a newly renovated space, or expanding its physical footprint, we hope this makes the community and stakeholder engagement process a little less daunting. While we hope you'll enjoy the full report, we know some readers will jump directly to the resources and templates at the end, which is okay, too.

Accessibility note: In an effort to lead by example, we did our best to make this resource as accessible as possible by designing with accessibility needs in mind. This report meets Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards. We chose an accessible typeface, accessible color combinations with proper contrast, included alt text, and have proper tagging of headings. Additionally, we tried to use Plain Language whenever possible and put the information in a logical order.

Hyperlinks are designated as underlined blue text. Click on any of these links or scan the corresponding QR codes to access the resources in the document.

Definitions

This list is designed to provide clear, accessible definitions of commonly used terms and support a shared understanding among staff, partners, and community members. Save this list, edit it, and add on as needed.

Note: Most organizations have a typical way of referring to their service population, such as patrons, customers, or clients. If an organization has a strong preference for a certain term, it is a good idea to establish the term and the reason up front.

Community Engagement	The process of actively involving local individuals, groups, or organizations in shaping and participating in services, programs, and priorities.
Stakeholders	Individuals or groups with a vested interest in the community-based organization's work, including patrons, staff, funders, customers, clients, government entities, and community leaders.
Outreach	Efforts to connect the organization's services with the broader community, especially underserved groups.
Programming	Events, workshops, or series hosted by the library or affiliated organization to educate or engage the public.
Digital Literacy	The ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, and create information.
Community Health Hub	A model in which an organization acts as a connector to local health services, offering health screenings, informational sessions, or visits from healthcare professionals.
End-Users	These are the individuals who will be directly benefiting from the product, service or resource. End-users may include patrons, students, or community members.
Group Think	A psychological phenomenon that occurs when the desire for conformity and neutrality within the group or community leads to an irrational or dysfunctional decision-making outcome. Community engagement and active listening are tools to minimize group think and help customers inform your decisions.

02

Community Engagement





Why Community Engagement Matters

Interacting

Connecting

Communicating

Through regular, two-way conversations with community members, your organization builds trust, gathers timely feedback, and maintains the participation of the people you serve. Given that many organizations lack dedicated staff for outreach and events, getting multiple staff aligned and involved in the process is critical. So, how do you tackle something as important as community engagement? Start by talking to your team and assigning roles and tasks. Staff participation not only provides great ideation, but generates buzz and investment in your strategy, too.

In this section, we help you navigate through the basics of focus groups, surveys, and more. Need extra guidance? US-based, global, nonprofit library cooperative and research group OCLC partnered with Dr. Audrey Barbakoff, EdD, MLIS, Founder & CEO of Co/Lab Capacity, to offer practical co-creation strategies to maximize the impact of community engagement. To access this [online resource of on-demand webinars, panels, blog posts and article](#), scan the QR code below.





Stakeholder Mapping

Mapping the full landscape of a project's key players can help you understand who needs to be involved. Start by analyzing the most effective ways to engage these various groups at key intervals. Remember, people may move in and out of roles and positions over the course of your project, so good documentation is essential for continuity. Take a realistic view of the minimum level of coordination required to ensure a well-managed and smoothly run program. Then, you can begin building long-term awareness, relationships, and trust to support ongoing success. See page 39 for the full stakeholder mapping table.

Types of Entities/Audiences to Include in Your Stakeholder Maps

- Service delivery partners
- Municipal and County government contacts
- Main users groups (i.e. Latinx new immigrants, the disability community, veterans, at-risk teens)
- Other agencies with vested interest and/or relationships with user groups
- Internal staff team
- General public

Sample Strategies for Engagement:

Local Advisory Group - Assemble a small team of advocates who come together regularly to help champion the project. They function as a “friends of the project.”

Listening Group: Partners and Potential Partners - Consider community leaders, non-profits, or churches who already have trusted relationships and insights into various groups.

Listening Groups: End-Users - It can be hard work to recruit these groups, but worth it to hear about their lived experience, goals, and barriers to participation. The best practice for engaging with end users, particularly new end users, is to identify organizations that have trusted relationships (i.e. non-profits, churches) and enlist their ideas and support to get started. Current end-users are also a valuable resource for reaching out to people in their extended network.

Elevator Pitches - Have the project team get comfortable with an elevator pitch for the project, then divide up the people who you want them to connect with.

Pulse Questions / Just-In-Time Engagement - Develop a short list of questions that you want feedback on and attend an already scheduled event or place where people gather to collect feedback.



Listening Sessions

Listening sessions offer a powerful way to gather in-depth, qualitative feedback directly from the communities they serve. Unlike surveys, which capture broad trends, listening sessions create space for deeper conversations, allowing you to explore motivations, concerns, and ideas in more nuanced ways. This section provides guidance on how to plan and facilitate effective listening sessions.

A Guide to Hosting Listening Sessions

- Determine your goals and purpose:
 - What is this information for?
 - Are you looking for a definitive answer?
- Think through potential participants and recruitment.
 - Are you aiming for a diverse group of participants?
 - How will you connect with these individuals?
 - Will you incentivize participation in any way?
- Don't wait: start planning around six weeks before the session date.
 - Get dates on the calendar and issue invites.
- Be intentional when selecting a location.
 - Does a virtual meeting make more sense?
 - Is the space compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and meet the accessibility needs of participants?
- Keep privacy in mind when considering the use of AI, recording, or other transcription services.
- Assign a facilitator - this should be someone on your team who is good at holding space for conversation and moving it along at the same time.
- Assign a notetaker.
- Consider any materials needed during the session such as markers, sticky notes, white boards, etc.
 - If the meeting is virtual consider using Microsoft or Zoom Whiteboard, Miro, Canva, or FigJam to engage with your audience.
- Develop a script. We suggest starting with an outline, which will help lead you to the outcome you are looking for.



A Few Tips

- Invite around 8-12 participants.
- Over-recruit in case of drop-outs
- Plan for sessions to be about an hour long.
- Piggyback off other events.
- Incentivize with food or childcare. Gift card raffles are a popular incentive, but double check to make sure this is legally allowable by the funding source first!
- Keep things clear - send a reminder around two weeks before and an agenda a few days before the session.

Consider Your Questions

Keep them

- Open-ended
- Short and concise
- Avoid bias
- Keep your goal in mind
- Consider who you're talking to
- Use tools - sticky notes, chat responses, whiteboards, virtual tools
- Summarize and follow-up

The Facilitator

This is your conversational shepherd and their main role is to keep the conversation going. Start off with an ice breaker. Plan for flexibility in the conversation and avoid group think by asking questions about what others think when statements and assertions are made.

Listening Sessions make Mini Communities

Think of listening sessions as a small, temporary community, where you are learning together, coming up with solutions together, building good will together.

Get to Know Your Community!

Understanding your neighborhood and patrons helps you tailor programs, collections, and outreach to meet real needs. Use online resources like [United for A.L.I.C.E.](#), the U.S. Census, and other data dashboards to gather information and demographics about your area.



Debrief

- Get it done as soon as possible, so you don't forget what happened.
- Jot down hunches and theories.
- How was this similar or different to other groups or sessions?
- Any surprising replies or great quotes?

Synthesizing the Data

Deliver an accessible report featuring

- Key findings
- Themes
- Recommendations
- Infographics
- Quotes (without identifying information)

Judy Sharken Simon has worked with non-profits for over ten years. Her guide "[How To Conduct Focus Groups](#)" was a great inspiration in the shaping of our own guide. View her guide by scanning the QR code below.



Surveys

Surveys can be useful tools for providing direct insight into the needs, preferences, and experiences of local communities. Surveys help identify gaps, measure satisfaction, and track changes over time, ensuring that offerings remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive. They also may result in compelling testimonials and quotes. Use free online tools like GoogleForms, Jotform, or Typeform to make hosting an online survey easy and accessible.

That said, surveys are not always the best approach. Consider whether the information gleaned from the survey will offer diverse perspectives and new insights. Avoid the survey trap; Don't just survey the usual suspects — broaden your outreach to include underrepresented voices. Thoughtful timing and inclusive sampling lead to more meaningful, equitable insights.

Survey tip from a pro > Rather than starting your research with a survey, consider using a survey to test assumptions and emerging ideas. You will have more specific questions, which allow for more concrete and actionable feedback.

Your survey will be customized to your specific needs. For a few examples, see our list of basic sample survey questions on page 39.



Building and Sustaining Buy-In

Building on the work from your stakeholder map and initial research, you may want to consider developing an outreach action plan to guide your engagement efforts over time. (Not everything has to happen right away. You can activate this step at an appropriate point in the process.) If you think about buy-in like the rings of a tree trunk, your efforts today will set the stage for building layers of trust and support over time. A short written outreach plan will help staff stay organized and connected to longer term goals. An outreach plan is also a measure of respect. If you ask for people's time and input, you'll have strategies to circle back and let them know how you are incorporating the information. The results don't have to be immediate. People generally understand that things take time and just like to know what's going on.

Outreach Action Plan

Here are a few key steps to ensure meaningful and intentional community engagement:



Define Your Goals

Clarify what you hope to achieve by raising awareness, increasing participation, building partnerships, or gathering input.



Identify Your Audience

Determine who you're trying to reach (e.g., teens, seniors, underserved groups) and understand their needs and preferences.



Choose an Outreach Model

Select the best tools and strategies like events, social media, partnerships, or community meetings to connect with your audience.



Organize Your Team

Outline when each activity will happen, who is responsible, and what resources are needed.



Measure and Reflect

Track progress using surveys, attendance, or feedback. What did you learn? Was something less than perfect? Adjust your plan as needed to improve future outreach efforts.

Keep Every Audience in Mind

Truly inclusive community engagement means reaching out to every audience with intention and awareness of their diverse identities, languages, and lived experiences. English Language Learners (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL) Learners, and migrant community members face unique barriers to access, but with thoughtful outreach, clear communication, and responsive design, organizations can create spaces where everyone feels seen, invited, heard, and supported.

Tips for Helping Those with Language Barriers

- Identify staff with approved language skills and others who can support the process.
- Use translation tools such as Google Translate or AI.
 - If your website has a chat function consider seeing if a translate function is part of that service.
- Provide visual aids with your words.
- Work with bilingual community partners to translate flyers, documents and signage.
- Encourage staff to be patient and slow down when working with someone who does not speak English.



The American Library Association (ALA) created a toolkit to help libraries serve multilingual communities, but its information is applicable to any community-based organization. The Engaging Multilingual Communities and English Language Learners in U.S. Libraries Toolkit features key elements of service, and real-life examples of programs and services built for the community. Scan the QR code to browse the [full PDF](#).



03

Partnerships





Why Partners Matter

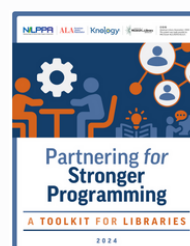
Collaborative

Strategic

Supportive

Partnerships are vital for any community organization. Partnerships expand resources, expertise, and community reach far beyond what a single institution could achieve alone. Through collaborations with schools, local non-profits, cultural institutions, and businesses, coalitions can offer richer programs and create more inclusive and innovative services. Partnerships also help to stay up to date with community needs, helping to strengthen their role as dynamic, connected hubs of learning and growth. We like to think of this as an ecosystem mentality, where partners work together to identify win-win opportunities and achieve shared outcome goals for their communities.

In 2024, the [American Library Association](#) (ALA) [created a toolkit](#) to help library staff create, grow, organize, and maintain successful partnerships. Made up of five different tools, the toolkit can be used in any or all types of partnerships, at any stage of the relationship. The website also features short video tutorials. While created with libraries in mind, this toolkit can easily translate to any community organization and will aid in identifying key impact areas, goals, and mutual contributions. Scan the QR below to learn more and download the toolkit.





Talking Points

Talking points with partners, potential partners, and staff are an important way to provide a clear, consistent message that helps guide conversations, build trust, and point out common goals. They ensure that key ideas and expectations are communicated effectively, making it easier to answer questions, address concerns, and highlight shared benefits. Well-prepared talking points also help partners feel more confident and engaged, laying the groundwork for a strong and productive collaboration.

Possible Talking Points:

The following examples can be adapted to fit your mission and values. Do your research and find commonalities between you and your partners, including specific examples of how and why you are a good match for one another. Take these talking points and customize them to ring true for you and your partners.

On Supporting Literacy and Learning: "Our organizations both champion health literacy/digital skills/lifelong learning. This partnership allows us to reach more people with programs that support their development."

On Expanding Community Services: "Through collaboration we can offer expanded services like workshops, virtual services, and technology training that meet urgent community needs and draw in new audiences."

On Sharing Resources and Expertise: "Our partnership allows us to combine our respective strengths, including knowledgeable staff and welcoming spaces, to provide a positive experience for users while meeting a variety of important needs."

On Strengthening Community Connections: "Our organization serves as a trusted community hub. By partnering together, we can build even deeper relationships across the community."

On Mutual Visibility and Impact: "Our partnership will increase visibility for your agency as a key contributor to community wellbeing and innovation."

On Accessibility and Equity: "By involving multiple stakeholders across many different backgrounds and experiences, we will foster more equitable experiences and understand areas of growth and barriers in our programming, policies, and physical spaces."



Partnership Agreement

Partnerships are most successful when everyone is aligned from the start. A partner agreement helps clarify roles, responsibilities, timelines, and mutual goals, ensuring transparency and reducing confusion down the line. This section provides a simple framework to guide productive collaboration, so each partner can bring their strengths to the table and move forward with confidence. Browse through some examples in our resource list on page 33.

A Few Tips

Highlight positives of both associations and what they bring to the table. Your partnership is a win-win arrangement. Use logos or funding attributions accordingly. Clarify the limits of what the partnership entails:

- **Space use**
 - Expectation of time used: i.e. 40 hours a week from 10am-6pm.
 - Responsibilities: i.e. cleaning, room set up when not in use.
 - On-Site Point of Contact: who to direct concerns or problems to.
 - Shared Communication Expectations: who to communicate to and what needs to be communicated. i.e. monthly statistics or changes in schedule.
- **Programming Responsibilities**
 - Expectations: i.e. Number of programs a month.
 - Responsibilities: i.e. Checking in before and after.
 - On-Site Point of Contact: Who to direct concern or problems to.
 - Shared Communications: i.e. ex. where the event schedule will be published, approved languages and text.
- **Partnership Length**
 - Setting up an expectation of when the parties will review the current agreement. i.e. every two years.
- **Legal Review**
 - It is important to make sure that any agreement is reviewed by your legal representative prior to presenting to the partner organization.



Continued Communication

Regular check-ins, updates, and opportunities for feedback help ensure that everyone stays aligned and engaged. It also helps to address any challenges early on. Consistent communication builds trust, strengthens relationships, and keeps the momentum of shared projects moving forward.

Keep Everyone in the Loop:



Regular Check-Ins: Set up a monthly check-in meeting to share updates, pinpoint and resolve any issues, and plan upcoming activities together. Put it on the calendar now.



Shared Planning Documents: Maintain a shared calendar and planning document so both teams can easily see deadlines, event dates, and key responsibilities.



Shared File Servers: Start an app or cloud-based shared folder where documents can easily be shared and read. Consider granting access to a unique work management channel such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, or Dropbox. Tip > Think about your documentation from the standpoint of a future employee. Keep an eye on your file organization and structure so they could easily get up to speed.



Feedback Loops: After major programs or events, gather feedback from both partners and participants to reflect on what worked well and what we can improve. Not only does this promote progress, it also offers insight to how the rest of the team is feeling and what they think is important.



Email and Newsletter Updates: Send brief quarterly updates highlighting partnership milestones, upcoming opportunities, and ways to stay involved.



Open Invitation for Ideas: Welcome and encourage ongoing ideas and suggestions from your partners. Urge them to reach out anytime.

04

Marketing





Why Marketing Matters

Connect Promote Engage

Good marketing builds awareness by reaching new audiences, helping boost attendance and strengthening the organization's role as an essential community hub. It also helps community institutions highlight their impact and demonstrate their value to funders, stakeholders, and the public. Without effective marketing, even the most thoughtfully designed programs may go underutilized.

Marketing may seem overwhelming, but luckily many talented people share various templates for different platforms for free online. At [Overdrive Resource Center](#), you can browse through a growing list of flyers, newsletter templates, social media posts, and even copy ideas. Some downloadable templates can be easily edited and most are ready to be shared as-is on your social channel of choice. To access this resource, scan the QR code below.





Marketing Starter Guide

Think of your new service or space as an idea that you have to sell to the public. Build awareness and excitement around your service and invite participation. The goal is to create clear, engaging messaging that not only launch the idea effectively but also keep people informed and inspired throughout its duration.

Note: Some organizations are lucky enough to have an in-house marketing team or access to PR professionals who specialize in these sorts of campaigns. If that's not the case, think about whether there is anyone in your orbit who works in the marketing industry who might be willing to review your plan over a cup of coffee.

STEP 1:

Get the Word Out

- Start in-house. Talk to staff. Fill them in on the game plan. What are your goals? What can they do to help? Leverage in-house talent to your advantage; good writers, talented photographers, and tech savviness are all pluses!
- Send a press release to local media and appropriate community partners (e.g. schools, arts institutions, local businesses, community institutions). Ask them to share through their networks and channels.
- Email, call, or meet with support groups and other community agencies.
- Get collaborative by checking your messaging and design ideas with patrons to hear what they find compelling.

STEP 2:

Start in Your Organization

- Put up colorful flyers in high traffic areas like by the printers, computers, water fountains, and inside bathroom stalls. That said, you have to balance this strategy by avoiding visual clutter and remembering that less is more. Ask your staff to do a “fresh eyes sketching” activity where they walk into your location as a new customer with a distinct persona. What do they see?
- Talk to patrons. Inform them of upcoming events or programming. Ask them what they would like to see in the future and what they are passionate about. Does any of it align with current or future programming? If so, let them know what's already available! Acknowledge other types of organizations and tools that may be available. Broaden the conversation by asking what would be useful to their family and friends.

- Add campaign messaging on your official website and incorporate into all of your social networking sites.

STEP 3:

Hit the Pavement

- Inform influential community members and your city or county boards about your campaign. Don't be afraid to reach out to local influencers!
- Email, call, or visit community partners (e.g. local businesses, schools, and institutions) to introduce your campaign.
- Find existing events in the community to take part in.
- Talk to the community. Let them know what your plans are, remind them of your impact, and ask for input.
- Remember that even with all the most thoughtful accommodations and event planning, some people still won't be able to physically get to a space due to physical barriers, transportation barriers, and barriers associated with caregiving. Provide multi-modal forms of participation, such as hybrid meeting options, and an email contact so that people can share their thoughts at their own pace.

This guide was adapted from a [webjunction.org template](https://webjunction.org/template).

Note: While some of the suggested activities in this section mirror the community engagement strategies, we pulled them together here for the purposes of designing a campaign. In reality, they will reinforce one another and are not mutually exclusive.



Be Inclusive Online

When posting on social media, ensure that your content meets legal standards for digital accessibility under the ADA. Use alt text for images, closed captions and transcripts for videos, and ensure your offerings are accessible to assistive technology, such as keyboard navigation and screen reader software. Your social media platforms should be welcoming to all patrons, most especially those with access needs related to digital inclusion!



Social Media

Social media is a vital tool to connect with communities in real time. (Usually, there are a few staff members who are particularly excited to take this piece on.) More than just marketing, social media builds relationships, invites dialogue, and promotes access. With the many platforms and apps available, social media allows community organizations to reach wider and more diverse audiences than ever before. Almost everyone has used or interacted with a form of social media for fun, but learning to use it intentionally to produce concrete results may be intimidating. Like the starter guide above, start by planning your campaign, assigning tasks and roles to make it more manageable and fun.

A Few Tips

Set Clear Goals - What's your objective? Clarify if it's raising awareness, increasing program attendance, promoting collections, or simply boosting engagement.

Know Your Audience - Identify your primary users (e.g., teens, parents, educators) and choose platforms they use such as Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, or TikTok.

Create a Content Strategy - Plan content that aligns with your goals like event promotions, behind-the-scenes glimpses, staff highlights, user testimonials, or helpful tips.

Utilize Timed Postings - Use the timed post feature to consistently share content. It may take a bit of time to plan and set up the posts but it will save on stress and reduce last-minute, uninspiring content down the line.

Assign Roles - Designate who will create, post, and monitor content.

Engage and Respond - Remember that social media is all about engaging! Be active in replying to comments, resharing community posts, and encouraging conversation in the comments.

Track and Adjust - Use platform analytics to see what's working. Adjust your strategy based on performance and consider time of day, hashtags, or audience response. Consider using trending songs and sound-bytes in posts or reels for wider reach.

Note: These analytics will be great to feature in reporting for grantees.



Press Release

A press release is a great way to share your library's news, programs, or milestones with the public. It helps raise awareness, attract media coverage, and build visibility and credibility within your community. By crafting a clear, timely, and engaging message, community organizations can amplify their impact and invite greater participation and support. See page 40 for the full template.

Tips for Getting More Coverage:

Give Yourself Enough Time - Send your press release early! Most newsrooms require a couple of weeks to include your event in their media coverage.

Do Your Research - Identify your geographic area of reach. Find a reporter whose news output aligns with your goals and objectives. Send personalized emails to specific outlets to make the reporters feel like you picked them especially for your good news.

Find a Friend - News outlets get hundreds of press releases a week. If you have a connection at the news outlet, consider giving them a phone call and sharing your news that way, too. Tag news outlets in your social media posts. Samples see template

Newsletters

A great newsletter builds connection, not just awareness. Use it to spotlight staff, highlight community partnerships, feature patron success stories, or share tips and resources. Include calls to action, links to upcoming events, and calendar highlights.

Keep timing in mind as well - sending your newsletter mid-month keeps it from getting lost in the email shuffle and allows for people to plan accordingly. Generally, Tuesday through Thursday are the best days of the week for email newsletters open rates. If you have the right tools, track and log your open rates and watch for changes in consumer behavior as a result.



05

Space Expectations





Sharing Space, Strengthening Ties

Respectful

Purposeful

Collective

Clear guidelines around space usage and user expectations are important to help keep shared spaces welcoming, clean, and functional for everyone. When users understand how to properly use, care for, and reset common areas — whether it's study rooms, event spaces, or meeting rooms — it ensures that the next person can enjoy the space just as much. Setting expectations around things like tidying up, handling furniture or equipment carefully, and respecting time limits helps support a positive user experience for everyone.

The state of New Jersey is already committed to making spaces welcoming to all. [The Disability Information Hub](#) offers quick access to many resources and programs aimed at helping those with disabilities and the people that support them. The website is organized by individual needs, and even offers a quick start guide for caregivers or allies who don't know where to begin. The homepage features an instructional video on how to get the most use of the website, depending on your needs or questions. Scan the QR code below to access the official New Jersey Disability Information Hub.





Room Use Agreement

Shared spaces are vital community assets — and clear agreements help keep them welcoming and well-managed. A room use agreement outlines expectations for how library spaces are reserved, used, and maintained. It ensures fairness, supports accessibility, and helps avoid misunderstandings. This section provides a framework for setting respectful, consistent guidelines that serve both the organization and its users. See examples of existing agreements in our resource list on page 34.

A Few Tips

Research any ordinances or laws that will impact your Room Use Agreement

- General Rules of Use:
 - Number of people in the space
 - Any major no's such as open flame or food and drink
 - Types of groups that can use the space: ex non-profits, government institutions, any group.
 - Preference to home organization
 - Agency Code of Conduct
 - Safety rules if necessary
 - Check in and Check Out Procedure
 - May include information for statistics
- Consider adding reservation parameters:
 - Number of reservations per a time period per team
 - Number of hours allowed per reservation
 - How far in the future can you place a reservation
 - Cancellation policy
 - No Call/No Show Policy
- Designate a staff member to be the room-use conduit

Note: For pre-negotiated agreements with partners, your room use agreements may differ. Incorporate the elements that make sense.

ADA Considerations

Your room-use agreement should include considerations for ADA compliance, like ensuring clear pathways (aim for at least a 36 inch width), accessible seating (a variety of seating options is best, but as standard, provide average height chairs with sturdy backs and no arm rests to accommodate people of size), and proper signage (high contrast, large typeface, sans serif font, and tactile and braille if permanent).





Welcoming Spaces For All

An accessible space is a welcoming space ADA compliance isn't just a legal requirement — it's a commitment to ensuring that all community members can fully participate in and enjoy library services. From physical layouts to signage and seating, this section outlines key considerations for creating spaces that are safe, navigable, and inclusive for patrons with disabilities.

Making Compliance Easy and Manageable

We've sprinkled accessibility tips throughout this document to make sure accessibility is integral to the process without feeling overwhelming. When you break it down step-by-step, small, consistent actions make a big difference.

Start by ensuring all entrances are accessible, with ramps and automatic doors where needed. Provide clear, large-print signage and tactile indicators to guide patrons with visual impairments. Create wide, uncluttered aisles and ensure furniture and shelves are arranged to allow for easy wheelchair navigation. Consider installing assistive technologies like hearing loops or captioning for presentations and events. Remember, ADA compliance isn't just about physical accessibility — it's about fostering an inclusive, welcoming environment for all.

One free tool to keep in mind is WAVE. It offers a suite of tools to make sure your website content is accessible to all. Simply type in your URL in the search bar and get your results! In fact, we have a whole list of online tools you can use to ensure accessibility on page 37.

To access the [Wave website evaluation tool](#), scan the QR code below.





Designing Accessible Events

One in four adults in the US are disabled ([CDC](#)), which means that accessible event planning is needed and that any accommodations you create will have a huge impact on your community. The disability community is wide and varied. Disability is one of the few identities that intersects with all other identities, meaning disability occurs across all ages, races, genders, classes, and the list goes on! Designing accessible events creates equity and helps event planners create thorough plans.

Event Accommodations

Whenever possible, try to design with people from the disability community. If funds allow, we recommend hiring a disabled consultant or access worker, especially if it is your first time planning an accessible event. Remember that good accessibility is provided consistently over time; do not give up if people do not use an accommodation at first, or if the execution of it is clunky. Provide the accommodation consistently and approach it with care and a good attitude.

The following is a list of event-related accommodations that you can use. This list is meant to show the wonderful possibilities of event accessibility; do not feel overwhelmed! Choose one accommodation to try to implement at your next event. From there, seek feedback, reassess, tweak implementation, and provide the accommodation at your next event! Once you feel confident with that accommodation, pick a new accommodation to implement! Soon, you will be a pro at implementing these ideas.

Accessible Restrooms - Choose event venues that have accessible restrooms. Share previewing photos of the restrooms in event marketing materials and on social media. At the start of your event, let people know where they can find the restroom.

Accessible Seating - Supply chairs with sturdy seats and backs. When possible, provide a variety of seating, such as seating with cushions, seating with arm rests, and floor seating. Provide cushions to help people adapt their seating. Consider arranging the room in a U-shape or circle so that people have good sightlines. Aim for at least 36 inches between all paths of travel.

Accessible Transportation: Try to choose an event location that is near public transportation. Preview the public transportation options, parking options, and paths of travel between public transportation, parking, and the front door in your marketing materials and on social media.

Accommodating Food and Dietary Needs: If possible, collect people's dietary needs when planning the event. Do your best to include vegan, Kosher, and gluten-free options. Avoid providing food that contains common allergens such as peanuts, soy, and wheat. Provide ingredient lists for anything that is served.

Adaptive Equipment and Accessibility Tools: Partner with a local disability organization to borrow tools. Consider building out a toolkit of adaptive tools such as: weighted writing utensils; seating adaptations; well-fitted kn95 or n95 masks; plastic straws; fidget toys; weighted lap tools; temperature regulation tools like personal fans, etc.

Air Quality: If possible, ask people to attend the event to accommodate people with fragrance sensitivities, which impacts over 40% of the population. Provide HEPA air purifiers to help people concentrate, respond to climate issues such as wildfire smoke, and to reduce airborne spread of disease.

ADA Considerations

Diverse and inclusive content is the best way to reach and attract the widest audiences.

Accessible Social is a free online resource and education hub that shares tips, photos, and guides for creating accessible and inclusive social media content.



American Sign Language Interpretation: Provide ASL interpreters at events whenever budget allows and whenever it is requested by participants. Send scripts, key words, and event details to interpreters well in advance of the event to help them prepare.

Audio Description: Audio Description (AD) narrates visual content to give access to blind and visually impaired attendees. AD also helps with cognitive processing, which can be great for people with learning disabilities or intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Content Warnings: If the subject matter of your event is heavy, it is best to include a previewing note in your marketing materials. Additionally, give people a content preview at the start of your event.

Fragrance Free: As mentioned above, over 40% of the population is sensitive to fragrances, to the extent that it could make people sick! Ask attendees to refrain from using fragrances like cologne and perfume. Clear the event space of any plug-in air fresheners, automatic aerosols, reed sticks, or other scented products at least 48 hours before the event. Swap out fragranced handsoap for scent-free hand soap!

Hybrid Events, Livestreaming: Even with all the best accommodations in the world, some people may not be able to physically attend your events. Offer hybrid events and a livestreaming option. You will then have a recording of your event, which is great for note taking and social media usage.

Lactation Room: Provide a designated space for nursing parents to attend to their needs.



06

Resource List



Resource List

Community Engagement

[Community Engagement: Build connections, grow relationships, and increase your impact | OCLC](#)

- This site offers practical co-creation strategies to maximize the impact of community engagement, including on-demand webinars, panels, blog posts and articles.

[United For A.L.I.C.E.](#)

- UnitedForALICE is a driver of innovation, research, and action to improve life across the country for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). Their research quantifies and describes the number of households that are struggling financially.

[Engaged Libraries: Orange County Library System assembles community engagement team to break down barriers](#)

- How one Orlando, FL library built up their outreach while strengthening existing partnerships.

[How to Conduct Focus Groups](#)

- A practical and effective way to connect with the people you serve.

[Engaging Multilingual Communities and English Language Learners in U.S. Libraries Toolkit](#)

- The American Library Association (ALA) created a toolkit to help libraries serve multilingual communities, but its information is applicable to any community-based organization. The Engaging Multilingual Communities and English Language Learners in U.S. Libraries Toolkit features key elements of service, and real-life examples of programs and services built for the community.

Resource List

Community Engagement *(continued)*

For Housing Authority Organizations:

[Community Engagement Toolkit](#)

- Hud Exchange is an online platform for providing program information, guidance, services, and tools to HUD's community partners, including state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, Continuums of Care (CoCs), Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), tribes, and partners of these organizations.
- Their toolkit offers people-centered strategies and a roadmap for community needs, ideas, and visions to inform public investments.

[Building Support for Community Engagement](#)

- This page provides additional resources on how to engage communities and foster citizen participation to support the development of affordable housing.

For Healthcare Organizations:

[Mayo Clinic Community Relations](#)

- Mayo Clinic is a non-profit hospital and research organization that works with local organizations. This website highlights their community engagement efforts and lists ways they work with partners.

[A Look at Two Successful Community Development Efforts](#)

- Successful community development requires collaboration among diverse partners — community organizations, funders, government, academics, and philanthropists. The guide also features case studies that offer real-life inspiration and insights to help others fund and launch their own impactful initiatives.

[English Learner](#) and [Newcomers](#) Toolkits

- While designed for teachers in mind, these toolkits from the Department of Education are a valuable resource for any organization or group that serves non-English speaking communities.

Resource List

Partnerships

[Partnering for Stronger Programming: A Toolkit for Libraries](#)

- A free resource created to help library workers consider the big-picture goals of library programming and determine ways to begin and sustain impactful partnerships.

[Stanford Non-Profit List of Sample Documents](#)

- This site offers a wealth of well-categorized documents which are easy to browse - only some will be relevant for grantee purposes such as Collaboration MOUs, but they're worth a browse.

[Harlem Children's Zone](#)

- Harlem Children's Zone is fighting intergenerational poverty in their community. This site offers a look into their dynamic programming.

Marketing

[13 Social Media Marketing Tips for Libraries](#)

- This site offers quick tips in text and infographic formats for social media use in libraries.

[Overdrive](#)

- This site offers marketing and training tools and classes, many of which are free.

[The Power of Community Organizations and Social Media](#)

- An interesting article about how one librarian turned a viral moment into a new opportunity for engagement.

Angela Hursh - [Super Library Marketing on YouTube](#)

- Short, easy-to-follow marketing videos for libraries, but easily transferable to any community organization

Resource List

Marketing *(continued)*

[Nonprofitr.org/easy/](https://www.nonprofitr.org/easy/)

- Free online training for non-profit professionals on subjects including Fundraising, Grant Writing, Leadership, Governance, Accounting and Finance, Operations, Marketing and Communications, Volunteer Engagement, and Program Management

[Top 10 Tips for Writing Op-Eds That Get Published](#)

- Massachusetts Nonprofit Network developed a quick, concise guide to getting op-eds published that you can adapt for any press release or social media blurb.

Space Expectations

[NJ Disability Information Hub](#)

- The state of New Jersey is already committed to making spaces welcoming to all. The Disability Information Hub offers quick access to many resources and programs aimed at helping those with disabilities and the people that support them.

Library Examples of Room Use Agreements:

New Jersey State Library: [NJLA Statement on Meeting Room Policies](#)

Hoboken Public Library: [Space Use Policy](#)

Middlesex Public Library: [Meeting Room Policy & Procedure](#)

Westfield Memorial Library: [Meeting Room Policy](#)

West Orange Public Library: [Meeting Room Policy](#)

Housing Authorities Examples of Room Use Agreements:

Chelsea Housing Authority: [Community Room Use Policy](#)

Santa Barbara Housing Authority: [Community Room Use Policy](#)

Medical Organization Examples of Room Use Agreements:

Facility Guidelines Institute: [Telemedicine Room Use Guidelines](#)

Resource List

Space Expectations *(continued)*

[Best Practices for Library Furniture and Space Design](#)

- This guide takes look at the best practices for furniture use, teen and children's sections, decor, and community rooms for a library, but these ideas can be used as inspiration for any community organization.

[Meeting Rooms: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights by the ALA](#)

- A great source to refernce when discussing return of the investment of your public meeting and study rooms with your board, partners, or community at large.

Accessibility of Space

[New Jersey Disability Resources and Advocacy Organizations](#)

- A list of links to government agencies and disability rights organizations in New Jersey.

[Autism Community Services](#)

- ACS provides behavior supports, individual supports, community-based supports, community inclusion services, and supported employment services to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout the state of New Jersey.

[Autism New Jersey](#)

- Autism New Jersey is a nonprofit agency committed to ensuring safe and fulfilling lives for individuals with autism, their families, and the professionals who support them. This is a great resource and inspiration for programming.

[Disability Inclusion Toolkit](#)

- This toolkit, written and designed by key leaders in the disability community, provides key resources to help social justice organizations advance disability inclusion in their work.

Resource List

Accessibility of Space (*continued*)

[Family Resource Center](#)

- Family Resource Center’s mission is to provide a personalized, humancentric approach to helping families with disabilities find the right resources and support for every step of their journey. Bookmark this page for future reference or list as a potential partner.

[The Arc of New Jersey: Local County Chapters](#)

- The Local County Chapters provide lifelong support and services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as their families, helping them reach their full potential. Check out their list of programming, and add them to your list of potential partners.

[Accessibility in the Arts: A Promise and a Practice](#)

- While this accessibility resource is made for arts organizations, we find that it is useful for all organizations and entities.

[Plain Language Writing — An Essential Part Of Accessibility](#)

- This Forbes article delves into the topic of Plain Language and how to prevent cognitively disabled people from being left out of information most of the community can access with little difficulty - Including information vital to health, safety, legal rights and opportunities, and financial security.

[Disabled And Here](#)

- This resource provides free and inclusive stock images for your organization in categories ranging from community to nature and life

[People’s Hub](#)

- Peoples Hub is an online hub that focuses on sharing webinars, workshops, fellowships, and cohorts centered on radical hospitality, participation, and cohorts

Resource List

Accessibility of Space *(continued)*

Self-Auditing Tools

Note: Some of these apps and tools use Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology to perform their services. Their technology and privacy settings are constantly changing and updating. As always, keep user and legal privacy in mind.

[WAVE Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools](#)

- WAVE (Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool) is a free online tool developed by WebAIM (Web Accessibility In Mind) that helps individuals and organizations evaluate the accessibility of web content. It's a great first step for web developers, designers, and content creators aiming to build inclusive digital experiences.

[Cornell University Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist](#)

- This easy-to-customize event checklist was developed by the Cornell Human Resources department. Updated versions are linked as a PDF.

[3PlayMedia](#)

- This tool focuses on making video and audio content accessible through services like closed captioning, transcription, audio description, subtitling, localization, and interactive transcripts. This uses AI and automatic speech recognition with human review to produce highly accurate transcription and closed caption services.

[Audible Sight](#)


- Designed for the non-technical user, Audible Sight is a computer vision AI application for content creators that rapidly adds audio description to any video, ensuring Section 508, WCAG and ADA compliance. Individual plans are free, with discounted pricing for government and educational institutions and organizations.

07

Templates



Templates

-  **The following links take you to some of our favorite free templates online. Download, bookmark, and customize them to any project.**

[Stakeholder Mapping Template](#)

- Mapping the full landscape of a project's key players can help you understand who needs to be involved. Download this Word document and customize for any project.

Listening Session Questions Template:

[Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews](#)

- Richard A. Krueger, professor emeritus at the University of Minnesota, created his own guide for Focus Groups in 2002. While this guide was developed for focus groups, similar techniques apply to listening sessions. We especially love this tips for writing focus group questions that yield powerful results on pages 6-8.

[Sample Survey Questions](#)

- Surveys can be useful tools for providing direct insight into the needs, preferences, and experiences of local communities. Surveys help identify gaps, measure satisfaction, and track changes over time, ensuring that offerings remain relevant, inclusive, and responsive. Download our basic list of questions to customize to your specific needs.

[Canva Social Media Templates](#)

- Enhance your organization's online presence with professionally designed Canva social media templates. Perfect for nonprofits, advocacy groups, and community organizations, these customizable templates make it easy to share updates, promote events, and engage your audience. Import your group logo and Canva can color-match your organization's color scheme.

Templates

[Microsoft Newsletter Templates](#)

- Microsoft offers a variety of professional, easy to customize newsletter templates. Simply download and edit in Microsoft Word.

Press Release Templates:

[IMLS Press Release Template](#)

[Urban Libraries Sample Press Release](#)

- Whether you're announcing events, initiatives, or milestones, a press release is a great way to reach wider audiences. These are a couple of our top picks. Download the PDFs to customize as needed.



Thank You

We want to extend our gratitude to the grantees who are the inspiration and sounding board for this report.

We welcome suggestions to continually update and strengthen the content in ways that are most useful to you as practitioners.