

Let's Talk About It Program FAQ

1. What is Let's Talk About It Program?

The Let's Talk About It library discussion program was created to promote reading and discussion program development in America's public libraries. The program is more than a book club in that engages scholars to provide context and analysis of selected texts to frame the discussions. This program uses books, poetry and films as vehicles to explore contemporary life and culture through humanities topics. These discussions offer communities the opportunity for thoughtful dialogue and lifelong learning within the context of the humanities.

The American Library Association originally launched Let's Talk About It with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities. In North Carolina, this program is a joint project of the North Carolina Humanities Council and the North Carolina Center for the Book, a program of the State Library of North Carolina/Department of Cultural Resources and affiliate of the Center for the Book at the Library of Congress. The North Carolina Humanities Council coordinates the program administration, assigns scholars to facilitate each program session and provides access to grant funds for libraries applying to host a series. The North Carolina Center for the Book provides copies of the series texts to libraries participating in the program and curates the collection.

2. How Do I Get Started?

When applying to host a series it is important to have the support of the library staff, its board, and active library advocacy groups like, Friends of the Library. From these sources we advise creating a small planning group of five or six people. This group will serve as promoters for the program and will also provide or seek additional financial support.

The librarian or the project director should contact the North Carolina Humanities Council's Program Coordinator, Caitlin Patton at cpatton@nchumanities.org or 704-687-1521 for any questions when planning and applying for a series. A full catalog of the available Let's Talk About It series are available at: <http://nchumanities.org/programs/lets-talk-about-it>.

Please consider the following tips when applying to host a series:

- There are over twenty Let's Talk About It series offered, but because of a limited number of books, most of the series can only run in two libraries at the same time.
- Series are available on a first-come, first-served basis.
- ***Please be aware of application deadlines for the two cycles*** offered annually. The fall cycle deadline is in June and the winter-spring cycle deadline is in October. Please consult our webpage for the most current cycle deadline information <http://nchumanities.org/content/how-apply-1>.
- Employ your planning committee to determine which series will have the greatest appeal to the people in your community. Often libraries suggest 2-3 series and engage the community to vote on the series in which they would like to request.

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- If a library receives approval to host a Let's Talk About It series they should begin planning how to publicizing the event, recruit participants, contact the scholars facilitating each session, and request and distribute the books to participants.

3. How Do I Apply?

The North Carolina Humanities Council offers two annual cycles of Let's Talk About It programs; fall and winter-spring. Fall programs typically take place from September-November; and winter spring programs typically take place from January-May. If planning for a fall series some mountain communities may want to start in August to avoid bad weather.

A grant application can be downloaded from the North Carolina Humanities Council website at: <http://nchumanities.org/programs/lets-talk-about-it>, or you can request to have a copy sent to you. ***The completed application should be in the North Carolina Humanities Council office by the application deadline.*** The winter-spring program application deadline is in October; and fall program application deadline is in June. Please contact the North Carolina Humanities Council's Program Coordinator for assistance or questions when planning a series.

4. Are there financial obligations for my library?

When libraries apply to the North Carolina Humanities Council to host a series they can request grant funds of up \$1,000.00. This grant is used to cover the \$200.00 honorarium paid to each of the scholars to lead sessions. Libraries are *not required* to request funds when they apply to host a series and some libraries have independent funds which they use to cover the scholars' honoraria.

The host library pays all travel expenses of the scholar. We highly recommend that Libraries budget about \$400.00 toward covering scholar travel and lodging although the expenses could be significantly less. Every attempt is made to find scholars who will not need overnight accommodations, but this is not always possible. Libraries should also include expenses such as postage, publicity, printing, and refreshments when creating their Let's Talk About It budgets. In many cases, the Friends of the Library or other support organizations are sources of additional funding.

There is no charge for the books or films, these materials are supplied by the Center for the Book, a program of the State Library of North Carolina. The host library is responsible for the shipping of the books back to the State Library or to another library, as directed. There is no charge to the participants.

5. How Long Does a "Let's Talk About It" Series Last?

There are usually five sessions in each Let's Talk About It book series and six in film series. When scheduling sessions for a book series please remember to allow sufficient time for participants to read the book and prepare for each session. Typically in a book series a session takes place every two weeks, making the series run a total of nine weeks. Film series can be offered on a weekly basis. Please note that these are recommended series timelines and you must select a format which will work for your particular patrons.

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6. How Are the Books Provided?

The North Carolina Humanities Council asks each library to estimate the number of expected participants on the Let's Talk About It program application to ensure that there will be copies available for your library. Books and films are provided by the Center for the Book at the North Carolina State Library. Included in a library's award packet is a materials request form which must be completed and sent to the Center for the Book coordinator listed on the form.

Please submit this request a month prior to the first session to ensure adequate processing and shipping time. Once libraries receive the books they can distribute the first title to the participants as they signing up for the program. After the first session, participants return the first book and receive the second book for the next session. We recommend that libraries not give out all five books at the beginning of the series in the event that some participants drop out.

7. Where and when should the program be held?

The Let's Talk About It program is offered through public libraries, and it is expected that the sessions will be held on site. If a library does not have sufficient space to accommodate the program then we recommend finding an alternative public space or partnering with another community organization to host the series. This program seeks to engage communities in public discussion and the spaces must be accessible to anyone who wishes to attend. Let's Talk About It series typically run as a 1 ½ to 2 hour evening program; however, some programs are successfully held on Sunday afternoons (formatting should reflect the interest and availability of your specific patrons).

8. What is the program format?

The North Carolina Humanities Council highly recommends that scholars and librarians/project directors meet briefly prior to the session to review the discussion questions, share tips for discussion facilitation, and make any final preparations. We also recommend that scholars develop discussion questions for participants and send them to the librarian/project director two to three weeks prior to a session. The librarian can then distribute these questions to the participants so they can begin to think critically about the text as they read it independently. These questions can also serve as a starting point for discussion.

Following the scholar's introductory presentation about the text there are two basic discussion formats for this program:

Small Group Breakouts – One format for this series includes small group break-out discussions for about thirty minutes with the intention of ensuring that all voices can be heard. The small groups then reconvene and share their comments analysis with the whole group. If the group is large (30+), some participants might not offer comments or ask questions when the whole group is speaking together. By breaking into smaller groups for part of the discussion participants in a large group will have more opportunity (and often greater comfort) to express their opinions on the text. **Please note:** If there are to be small discussion groups then leaders for those groups should be arranged prior to the meeting.

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Whole Group Discussion - Many libraries, particularly those with a smaller group, prefer to remain together for the discussion. These whole group discussions can sometimes be dominated by one participant with a strong personality. Both the scholar and project director/librarian should be aware of the group's dynamics and intervene to redirect the conversation when needed so that all participants have an opportunity to share and so the discussion stays on topic.

Examples of Session Structures

Small Group Breakout Format

7:00 PM Introductory Presentation by scholar
 7:45 PM Break & Refreshments
 8:00 PM Small Discussion Group(s)
 8:40 PM Wrap-up (small groups report, final questions and responses between scholar and participants)
 9:00 PM Departure

Whole Group Discussion Format

6:00 PM Introductory Presentation by scholar
 6:30 PM Break and Refreshments
 6:45 PM Group Discussion
 7:45 PM Departure

*Refreshments can be offered at the beginning, middle, or end of the evening.

9. What is the Role of the Scholar?

The scholar is usually a professor in a university or college and has significant experience with the particular text. The role of a scholar is that of a content expert and discussion facilitator. The scholar functions to: (1) to provide a critical perspective on the materials, (2) to inspire series participants to relate their experiences and insights to the materials, and (3) to facilitate interaction as participants share their interpretations with the discussion group. The scholar should provide context and academic groundwork for the discussion text while maintaining active group discourse and preventing any one person's perspective to dominate the discussion.

Program evaluation and librarian feedback continually demonstrate that scholars are a critical element in the success of the program. They bring the book to life with insights and background on the author, raising questions and being the catalyst that sparks discussion. The first scholar sets the tone and discusses the general theme of the series. Each succeeding scholar shows how the book fits into the general theme of the series. If the group decides to remain as one discussion group, then the scholar leads that discussion. Otherwise, if there are small discussion groups, the scholar visits each group and then leads a wrap-up at the end of the evening.

Please Note: Once a library has been notified by the North Carolina Humanities Council that they were approved to host a series, it is the libraries' responsibility to contact their scholars and to arrange scholar travel (contact information will be provided) and convey relevant information on the group.

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10. How Do Project Directors Recruit Participants?

Let's Talk About It scholars often comment that they love to facilitate these discussions because of participants' eagerness and enthusiasm to learn and share. The Let's Talk About It program is designed for adult participants. The age of participants vary, but all have a common interest for reading, are eager for an experience that challenges them and are often seeking a venue in which to share ideas. Ideal participants are adults who enjoy reading and learning and are open to new and exciting ways of enriching their lives through literature.

Strategic marketing and publicity are key to attracting and sustaining participation in the Let's Talk About It program long-term. Effective mediums are social media, posters, flyers, in-house promotional displays and word of mouth. Libraries also often advertise their programs through newspaper and radio as well as with local community partner organizations. Libraries should target their active patrons, Friends of the Library group, local book clubs, centers for senior citizens, retirement homes, and teachers. North Carolina Humanities Council offers a certificate which can be used for Teacher Renewal Credit (final approval must come from individual school districts).

11. What are the reporting requirements?

As with all programs and grants offered by the North Carolina Humanities Council, we require reporting on demographics, finances, in-kind contributions as well as program evaluation. The data from these reports are used at both the state and federal levels. These reports are also critical feedback as we design new programs and advocate for legislative and congressional support for public humanities programs. We always welcome narratives and quotes from the both participants and project directors/librarians.

The concluding reports packet is sent to the participating library with their award approval notification. This report should be updated throughout the series as the project director is required to do an evaluation of each scholar's session. ***The final reports are due one month after the final program session.***

12. What is a DUNS number?

As of October 1, 2010, under the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), no organization can receive a sub-grant award without providing a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number to the awarding agency. A DUNS number is a nine-digit number established by Dun and Bradstreet, Inc. (D&B) to uniquely identify business entities. This number can be obtained from D&B through their website, <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform> or by phone at 866 705-5711.