

Discussion Program Coordinator's Guide



(revised 2/1/2016)

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Questions and Answers about Reading and Discussion Series

What is a discussion series?

A series generally has from four to six programs, each focused on a book which the participants read before coming to the program. The books are chosen for their literary quality and relevance to the theme of the series. The theme is a topic of interest or concern to the community.

What does a program consist of?

Each program usually begins with a short background talk by a scholar of literature (or other relevant humanities discipline) and continues in small discussion groups led by that scholar or volunteer leaders from the community. A concluding session summarizes the reactions of the different groups to the book and theme. The programs last between two and three hours and are usually two or three weeks apart.

Are people required to attend all the programs and read all the books?

No person seriously interested in the theme or book should not attend because he/she has not read the book or attended previous sessions. However, most people find that they get much more out of the programs and are better able to participate in the discussions when they have read all the books. People may attend one, several or all of the programs but should be encouraged to attend as many as possible since some comparison of books and development of the theme will be done at each program.

How do we go about designing our own series?

When designing your own series, it is a good idea to discuss various possibilities with library patrons and local scholars and teachers of literature; then review your series with Mass Humanities staff before filling out the application.

When and where should we hold the series?

Often the winter and early spring is a good time for such programs to counteract "cabin fever." The fall (up to Thanksgiving) is also a popular time. Weekday evenings at 7 or 7:30 are good choices, but Sunday afternoons (especially in winter) may be better for elderly participants. Hold the series in your library if you have an appropriate room. If not, series have been successfully held in town halls, churches, community centers and similar locations. Whenever possible, find a room which is accessible to the handicapped.

How do we find good speakers?

Mass Humanities has a database of scholars interested in leading reading and discussion programs. You may contact Mass Humanities' staff for a list of scholars of relevant discipline in your locale. You may also locate scholars yourself for your series. Please see the application form for a description of the necessary qualifications of a humanities scholar.

How much should we pay our scholar?

A typical honorarium for one 2-3 hour session is \$250.

How much work is involved for us?

All the planning as well as detailed information and model forms for publicity and administration of the series are provided. First, however, you will need to schedule the speakers and fill out the online grant application form. Once the application is funded, you will want to involve people in carrying out the publicity, recruiting discussion leaders, obtaining and lending the books, hosting the programs, keeping records of money and volunteer work, and, at the end of the series, reporting to Mass Humanities. Much of this work can be delegated to a small committee of volunteers. A "Schedule for Carrying Out a Reading-Discussion Series" is included in this Information Packet. You can use it as a checklist of things to be done throughout the series.

How can we be sure people will come?

Librarians continue to be amazed at the number and variety of people who attend these series, many of whom are not regular library patrons. Large numbers are not necessary for a successful series, but Mass Humanities asks you to ensure a minimum of twenty participants. The "Publicity Plan" in the Information Packet will help you reach everyone who might want to attend.

May we ask other groups to cosponsor a series with the library?

Certainly. Involving other groups enlarges your pool of potential volunteers and also helps reach a larger and more varied audience than you could on your own. Good cosponsors are Chambers of Commerce, local

recreation departments, senior citizen organizations, and women's clubs as well as Friends of the Library and other literary groups. Don't hesitate, also, to cosponsor with a nearby public or school library.

When should we apply?

Plan to submit your application at least two months before the series is scheduled to begin. Four months is even better. This gives you adequate time to publicize the series and to order books if needed.

You may submit an application at any time. Notification is within two weeks.

If we apply, what are our chances of success?

Quite good, if you have spent some time planning the series, reading the Information Packet, and filling out the application.

May we do more than one series?

Certainly. See "Planning Future Programs in the Humanities" in this Packet for information about funding and suggestions for continuing these series and similar programs.

Schedule for Carrying Out a Reading and Discussion Series

Apply for a Discussion Program Grant

Read the [appropriate grant guidelines](#) and apply online at least two months before your planned program.

Before the series begins:

1. PUBLICIZE the series. (See the "Publicity Plan" in this Information Packet.) Plan to continue the publicity throughout the series.
2. SIGN UP participants.
3. ORDER and sell or lend books.
4. RECRUIT 1 or more DISCUSSION LEADERS. Ask scholars or interested people who you know have experience and would do a good job, for example, teachers, officials of local

organizations and local government, etc. Give each person recruited a copy of "Discussion and Discussion Leading" in this information packet.

5. ARRANGE A DISPLAY in the library (and elsewhere, if possible) of a poster advertising the program, books in the series, and other books by the authors or on the same theme.
6. DECIDE ON A SNOW DATE POLICY in the winter, and announce it, e.g., delay the program by one day or one week, or reschedule it to the end of the series.

Before each program:

1. SEND THE SCHOLAR/DISCUSSION LEADER, at least five to six weeks before the program: (1) two filled-out copies of the "Letter of agreement," one to be returned to you; (2) a schedule for the series; (3) "Scholars Contributed Services and Evaluation"; (4) "Discussion and Discussion Leading"; and (5) directions to the library. Discussion leaders often appreciate recommendations for area restaurants and also a brief description of your community and the participants in the series (age, sex, occupations, locals and newcomers, etc.).
2. CALL THE SCHOLAR/DISCUSSION LEADER if, three weeks before the program, you have not received the information described in the "Letter of Agreement."
3. MAKE ARRANGEMENTS for refreshments at the program break, for a table and/or lectern for the speaker, for the building to be open, heated, etc.

At the Program:

1. NAME TAGS AND SIGN-IN SHEET: be sure everyone (including yourself and the discussion leader) has a name tag. This greatly helps the discussion leaders. The attendance sheet will help you in evaluating and reporting on the series.
2. OPEN THE PROGRAM: acknowledge local help and contributions as well as funding from Mass Humanities; describe the format for the evening; and introduce the discussion leader using the biographical information provided.
3. PARTICIPANTS' EVALUATION: add further questions, if you wish, to the "Participant Evaluation" form provided and get as many of the participants as possible to fill it out. These will help you in planning future programs and in reporting on your grant. Pass them out at the end of the next to the last program for people to take with them and fill out; have forms available also at the library during the two following weeks. Pass them out again at the last program and ask people to fill out and hand them in before leaving. Try also to get evaluations from people who may have attended only one or two of the programs.

After the series:

1. REPORTING TO MASS HUMANITIES: read the memos and forms for narrative and financial reporting which you will receive with your grant award letter before your series begins in order to gather the information requested. Reporting and evaluation are part of the responsibilities of a grantee of Mass

Humanities; more importantly, this information helps Mass Humanities and other librarians in successfully carrying out future reading and discussion programs.

Publicity: Getting the Word Out – and the People In

Librarians, project directors and Mass Humanities staff have put together the following suggestions to help you let everybody know about every program and activity you sponsor. Do not think, however, that you need to follow every suggestion for a successful publicity campaign. You will recognize many of the publicity methods recommended, but you will also find some new ideas which may help you reach a wider and more varied audience than you have before.

On the last page you will find models for (1) a news release, and (2) a pre-series and (3) a during-series announcement for newspapers, radio and TV. These are only for guidance; adjust them to suit your area and library but be sure to include all the necessary information.

In all your publicity for the series, make clear that (1) the programs are free and open to the public; (2) people may attend one, several or all of the programs; and (3) they are strongly encouraged, but not required, to read the book before attending. Also, remember to credit Mass Humanities and any other people or organizations who have contributed money or services. (Please use Mass Humanities' logo available online and enlarge or reduce it for posters, flyers, bookmarks, etc.)

The questions on the following pages will help you assess your potential audience and sources of help. Many of them you can answer right away; some may take a little longer. But before you do anything -- ENLIST OTHERS TO HELP YOU answer the questions, and plan and carry out the publicity. Ask Friends, present and former trustees, interested patrons, English teachers -- even a local reporter or radio person. These questions and suggestions are for any Massachusetts community, but you and your colleagues know your territory -- be imaginative: what works in your community?

START EARLY. Note that news releases to newspapers, announcements for newsletters, newspaper community service announcements, and radio and TV public service announcements, need to be sent 4 to 6 weeks ahead of time. Check schedules and desired formats with area papers, radio and TV stations, and community Web calendars.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOUR POTENTIAL AUDIENCE. People will drive up to 45 minutes or more one way to attend these reading-discussion programs. Therefore, consider communities and people within a 45-minute driving distance when thinking about the following questions and suggestions.

Know your audience

Who already uses your library for books, reference and/or programs?

Who does not use your library?

Are they men, women, students, older, younger, retired, teachers, farmers, professionals, parents...?

Who might be interested in participating in your series?

Who would you like to interest in participating?

Reading-discussion programs regularly attract new people to the library. Think about non-users as well as users of your library when planning publicity.

Other libraries and library groups in your area

Which neighboring libraries will help distribute posters, flyers and bookmarks?

Will they also register people and sell books?

Are there Friends groups in your area?

This is a good project for them to help arrange, publicize, provide refreshments for, etc.

Are there trustees or former trustees who will help? Are any of them members of other organizations which would help spread the word?

Newspapers, radio and TV, Web

Talk with your local editors, reporters, and radio and TV announcers about what you are doing and why it is important. They will be more receptive to your news releases and announcements, and perhaps send a reporter for a feature story.

Which newspapers do people in your area read (dailies, weeklies, shoppers)?

Send each paper a news release so that it appears 4 weeks before the first program. (See model)

Display ads in newspapers reach a wide audience. Place them so they appear a couple of weeks before the series begins. Talk with the newspaper(s) about the best days and sections of the for your ad, and about design, cost, etc.

Which community Web calendars and listings serve your area?

The local NPR radio station may have an online calendar.

Make use of social media. Utilize the library's Facebook page or a twitter account to advertize the program.

Which radio and TV stations serve your area?

Find out the schedule for submitting Public Service Announcements (PSA's) and also to whom to send them. Send one to each station before the series. (See model)

Many radio stations have informal interview shows. Ask about them, and send a staff member or recruit a trustee, Friend or patron. It's good publicity for the series and the library.

Some local cable TV stations have even videotaped the lectures and shown them later in the week.

Publicity during the series is very important: without it, participation will dwindle. Send announcements to the newspapers and radio and TV stations for their "Community Calendars" before each program. (See model) Weekly papers (and some dailies) may run short news stories on local meetings. Immediately after the first program (at least) send a short, concise story; use local names and quotes from participants, if possible.

Posters, flyers and bookmarks:

At least **2 months** before your series begins, start thinking about a **poster**.

Ask someone with experience in graphic design and text layout for help or look in books of clip art or period graphic art for an appropriate and eye-catching motif. An 11 x 17 inch poster can be easily taped on store windows and tacked on bulletin boards.

Flyers can be simply posters reduced to 8 1/2 x 11 (letter) or 8 1/2 x 14 (legal) size by the printer and quick-copied on regular weight paper. These can be distributed, posted, and folded and mailed.

On the back of the flyer (or a sheet stapled to it), briefly explain the format of each program and give information about registering, attending, obtaining books, etc.

Bookmarks are handy reminders to participants of the **schedule for the series**. As you did for the poster, provide your copy and artwork (if you like) to a graphic designer for formatting. This can be copied onto card stock and the bookmarks cut apart with a paper cutter.

Note: Always ask to verify and proofread any copy before it is made up in quantity.

The **number** of posters, flyers and bookmarks needed varies depending on the area you wish to cover and the number of people you wish to reach. Don't be stingy. As minimum numbers, however, plan on 50 posters, 300 flyers and 400 bookmarks.

Distribution

Where are the places in which posters will be seen and read?

Where can stacks of flyers and bookmarks be placed for distribution?

Banks, bookstores, coffee shops. . . where else?

Enlist several volunteers to put up the posters and distribute flyers and bookmarks at least 3 to 4 weeks before the series begins.

Mailing lists

Your library has an email list, a record of who has attended other programs, etc. Email the program flyer to the library's distribution list and if possible invite registration through email. Consider creating a temporary Facebook group for the series or create an event on the library's Facebook page and invite fans.

Newsletters

Many organizations have newsletters (printed and electronic) and will include a news release or announcement in them if it is received in time. This is a good way to reach a large membership easily.

Contact such organizations as:

-Churches and religious organizations;

-PTO, PTA and other parents' organizations;

MODEL NEWS RELEASE

For further information: [name]
 [address]
 [phone number]
 [email address]

For Immediate Release

The [sponsor(s)] invite(s) area residents to participate in the reading-
[any organizations contributing money, such as Mass Humanities]. Participants will read and discuss [numb
books about [name theme]. The programs will be held at [two or three-week] intervals during [months] on
town].

MODEL PRE-SERIES COMMUNITY SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT AND PSA

The [sponsor(s)] invite(s) area residents to participate in a reading-discussion series ["title"] funded by
[contributors of money]. [Number] books will be read and discussed at [two or three-week intervals] during
[months] on [day] at [time] in [location]. [Name of discussion leaders] of [affiliation or town] will make a short

The programs are free and open to the public. For more information and to obtain books, contact [person or library] at [phone].

MODEL DURING-SERIES ANNOUNCEMENT AND PSA

The next program in the reading-discussion series ["title"] will be held on [day and date] at [time] at the [location]. [Name of speaker] of [affiliation or town] will discuss the book ["title"] by [author], followed by small group discussion. For more information contact [person or library] at [phone].

Discussion and Discussion Leading

Why discussion?

It is not until we attempt to put an idea or opinion into words and convey it to someone else that we know ourselves what that idea is. When others react to it by agreeing, disagreeing, or questioning, we can then develop and improve the thought -- or abandon it for another, better idea. By listening to ourselves and to each other, we become aware of different ways of looking at the world, and learn new things while shining up some old ones.

Why small group discussion?

Some discussion leaders may utilize small group formats to encourage peer-to-peer conversations. In these groups there is no "authority." Participants are talking with individuals rather than to a roomful of people; consequently, most people find it easier to express their agreements and disagreements, grievances and delights, and questions and theories about the book in small groups. This active examination and discussion by the participants is an important and necessary part of a humanities program.

Often, however, each group is curious about what the other groups are saying. It is, therefore, a good idea for someone to take notes on the discussion and to report, at the end of the session, all the main ideas discussed. Sometimes, too, one of the small groups will wrestle with a question and then bring it to the whole group for discussion.

Groups of from 6 to 8 give everyone ample opportunity to talk, although slightly larger and smaller groups can work also. On the occasion where the total number of participants at a program is less than 10, the group could decide to break up for discussion or to remain together with discussion led by the discussion leader.

Why discussion leaders?

In order for people to be able to pay attention to the ideas they are hearing and expressing, someone is needed to help the group focus on questions, develop ideas, and avoid too many long or unproductive side trips. This person guides - more than leads - the progress of the discussion, making sure everyone has an opportunity to be heard.

How can the leaders prepare for discussion?

The discussion leader should send the librarian (or project director) an outline of his/her talk along with several discussion questions to be given to the librarian two weeks before the program. These discussion questions can be used if the group runs into a dead end, strays too long off the subject, or otherwise needs refocusing to get discussion going again.

Reading carefully and thinking about the book is good preparation for leading a discussion on it: note your own questions and reactions as well as those you think others might have. You might also look for events and situations, past and present, in your community and state which are similar to those in the book.

What can the leaders do to encourage effective and enjoyable discussion?

Make people comfortable: be sure everyone can see and hear everyone else and that they know each others' names (name tags are very helpful). Speaking to and calling on people by name makes them feel more at home and part of the group.

If a recorder is needed, ask for a volunteer; don't take notes yourself except as reminders of points or people to return to during the discussion. The recorder can then report in the concluding session.

Open the discussion with the question that is sufficiently open-ended to invite reactions from everyone. For example, "Should Newland have married Ellen (Age of Innocence)?" or "By the end of The Awakening, who has gained what and who has lost what?"

Encourage your group members to talk to each other and not to you.

Throughout the discussion listen carefully to what is said, and to what is not being said and perhaps needs to be discussed. Encourage others also to listen carefully by asking people to be as specific as possible in their statements about personal reactions and about the book. For example, "You said that Benjamin and Lewis (On the Black Hill) are weird. What do you mean by that?" or "A number of you have called Alexandra the heroine of the book (O Pioneers.)'. How is she heroic and is she a typical heroine?"

Avoid giving your opinion about the reading or subject under discussion. Remain, as much as possible, a neutral guide. Do not feel you should evaluate and respond to everything that is said. This, at first, is often difficult but quickly becomes easier as the group recognizes your role as guide and not authority.

Guide the discussion so that it is not dominated by one person's voice or opinions or by two or three people who talk to each other. Invite others to participate by asking for agreements, disagreements, further definitions, etc. Remember that your group is not searching for a single "right" answer to any question but is uncovering many possible "answers" and further questions. Ideally, at the end of a discussion, people should want to reread the book.

If the group is in agreement all the time, the topic may be too general, those who disagree may be afraid to speak, or the subtleties of the book are being ignored. Asking "why?" or "what if . . . ?" often helps move the discussion beyond the superficial level. For example, "Why did everyone like reading *Duke of Deception*?" or "What if Sylvie, rather than the daughter, had told the story of *Housekeeping*?"

Guiding a lively, interesting discussion takes patience and some practice. However, helping yourself and others clarify thoughts and learn something new is a worthwhile and satisfying experience. It should also be fun -- for you and for the members of the group.

Planning Future Programs in the Humanities

The question many librarians and participants ask at the end of one reading-discussion series is "Can we do another one?"

Certainly. Reading-discussion series benefit libraries and their communities in many ways. In addition to offering the opportunity to read and discuss good literature and, at the same time, to explore a theme of interest, they appeal to a broad and varied audience. In this way, they can enlarge the library's role as a cultural center and gain community interest and support for the library and its activities. Sponsoring one reading-discussion series provides library staff a model for further programs.

Mass Humanities has developed the special application form and Information Packet with the idea that libraries could continue these series and possibly other, similar humanities programs as well.

There are, therefore, many reasons to take advantage of the interest created by one series to plan and recruit support for another. The "Participant Evaluation" form, for example, asks for ideas and volunteers for another series.

Libraries interested in subsequent programs have found it a good idea to discuss and recruit help for another series as soon as possible. Some add a half -hour to the last program for discussion; others schedule an additional program in the series. In some libraries, Friends groups have taken responsibility for continuing the programs; in others, special groups of interested participants have formed for the same purpose.

What about funding for further series?

Since Mass Humanities' funds are limited, its grants are best regarded primarily as "seed" money to help introduce libraries and communities to these programs. At the same time, Mass Humanities is learning about the needs and resources of Massachusetts libraries and how best to distribute its funds to encourage humanities programming.

You may eventually find interest in your community for similar series on other subjects on the humanities, such as philosophy, history or other literature; or on other themes of particular interest to the participants. People may also be interested in different types of programs such as interpretive exhibits or film-discussion series. As long as the subject and approach are in the humanities, Mass Humanities may be able to fund them with [project grants](#).

Mass Humanities staff will be glad to help you plan programming in the humanities and to apply for funds. Contact them as soon as you have an idea.

Notes:

If you are awarded a grant, Mass Humanities would like assurance that you have at least 20 participants preregistered for the first program before funds are released.

Letter of Agreement

Letter of Agreement between discussion leader _____ and Project

Director _____. The discussion leader will speak and lead discussions

at the _____ Host site in _____ on

_____ at _____ on the text _____,
(day & date) (time) (title)

(publisher)

The discussion leader agrees to:

Three weeks before the program, send to the Project Director

1. A brief outline of subjects to be covered in talks for librarian. (See other side)
2. Several questions for use guiding discussions. (See other side)
3. A paragraph of biographical information. (See other side)

At the program

4. Present a 15-20 minute talk on the book. (See other side)
5. Listen to the small discussion groups if utilized, helping out only when needed. (These generally last 30-45 minutes)
6. Lead a final wrap-up period of discussion by the whole group.

After the Program

7. Fill out and send to the Project Director the enclosed form, "Scholar's Contributed Services and Evaluation."

The scholar will receive an honorarium of _____ upon the Project Director's receipt of the *Scholar's Contributed Services and Evaluation Form*.

Signed: _____ Your host for the program is:
(Project Director)

Address: _____ Name: _____
_____ Address: _____

Phone: _____ Phones: work _____

Signed: _____ home _____
(Scholar/Facilitator) (Date)

Please sign both copies, retain one for your records, return one to the Project Director.

Enclosures: Schedule of books and speakers in series
"Discussion and Discussion Leading"
"Facilitator's Contributed Services and Evaluation"
directions to host site
other: _____

1. Talk - exactly what you say will depend on the book, author, theme and your own feelings about and approaches to them. A preliminary outline helps focus your thoughts and lets the discussion leaders know where you're coming from. Scholars and librarians agree that, as it is relevant, readers are interested in information about the author; the place of the book in the author's personal and professional life; the reception of the book and its social-political context; highlights (what you find especially intriguing) of the book's style, plot, characters, setting, etc.; the major subjects/themes explored; and how the book relates to the theme and the other books of the series. Although the participants may not be trained in literary analysis, they generally take the reading and discussion seriously and wish to be challenged by the scholar in a way that helps them develop their ideas about the book and theme.
2. Discussion questions - these will be given to the librarian who is organizing the series. Two or three questions are sufficient. Keep in mind when writing them that their main purpose is to help get good discussion going. They should open up a subject, generate many possible "answers" and, just as important, raise more questions. They may be distributed to participant readers ahead of time.
3. Biographical information - please make this a short paragraph in an informal style, which the person introducing you can, if necessary, simply read. This information will also be used in press releases from the library. Include the usual information about education and professional experience, and also such personal information as where you are from, how long you have lived in New England, and what you are doing now.
4. Meeting with librarians or other program organizers - scholars have found that the half-hour pre-program meeting helps them get a sense of the audience he/she will be addressing.
5. Presentation of the talk - although this usually precedes the discussion, some libraries have found that having the discussion groups first allows freer expression of opinions about the book and also gives the discussion leader an idea of what questions and subjects in particular he/she should address. The librarian will discuss the order of the program with you. No matter which order is followed, an informal but structured and informative presentation has proven most effective. You may invite audience participation during the talk or request that the questions and comments be kept until you have finished. (Please observe the time limit for your talk.) It is helpful to remember that you are bringing your special knowledge and abilities to a non-student, adult group in order to explore the world of the book and the world we live in.

Facilitator's Contributed Services and Evaluation

Name: _____

Text(s) presented: _____

Date(s): _____ Host Site: _____

The time you spent preparing for your presentation is part of the matching contributions required in the award of the grant from Mass Humanities. Others also contributing are librarians, Friends groups, trustees, discussion leaders, and other community volunteers. A record of your time with a brief description of what you did (reading/ rereading text, criticism, other books by author; drafting talk, etc.) is needed by the Project Director.

Evaluation is an important part of the project. Your responses to the questions below will help us improve future reading-discussion series.

Please fill out and return this to the Project Director as soon after the program as possible.

Preparation Work	Date	# of Hours	\$ value @ \$50/hour
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
Total Hours:		_____	Total \$_____

1. Please describe briefly: (1) the format of the program; and (2) the participants' reactions to and discussion of the book, theme, and your presentation.

Participant Evaluation Form

Date(s): _____ Location: _____

Your evaluation of this series is necessary to help plan and improve future programs.

1. If you missed some sessions in the series, was it due too: (check as many as relevant)
 weather illness vacation
 other commitments lack of interest behind in the reading
 other reasons no missed sessions
2. What did you like about this discussion program?
3. What could have made it better?
4. Would you be interested in another discussion series? yes no
5. What topics, themes and/or books would you be interested in discussing?
6. Would you be willing and able to help plan and carry out another series? yes no
7. Are you willing and able to buy materials (like paperback books) for a series? yes no
8. How did you find out about this discussion program?
9. This program was paid for in part by tax dollars. Was the money well-spent? yes no
10. Are you currently receiving mailings from Mass Humanities? yes no

If you are not receiving mailings and would like to, please complete information below.

Electronic Mailings	
<input type="checkbox"/> Humanities eNews (monthly)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Event Announcements by Region (select all regions that apply) <input type="checkbox"/> Berkshire <input type="checkbox"/> CT Valley <input type="checkbox"/> Central <input type="checkbox"/> Metrowest Boston <input type="checkbox"/> Greater Boston <input type="checkbox"/> Northeast <input type="checkbox"/> Southeast <input type="checkbox"/> Cape & Islands	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mass Humanities Newsletter (biannual)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mass History News (occasional)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Mass eMoments (daily)	
First Name:	Street:
Last Name:	City:
Email:	State: Zip: