

Raising A Reader

Sample Grant Language



This document provides excerpts of language that may be useful as you write your own grants and requests for funding. Please feel free to adjust and tailor language to fit your needs. This document includes:

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A. What is Raising A Reader?

Raising A Reader is an early literacy program that engages parents, children, early childhood professionals and librarians in a coordinated effort to build read-aloud routines in the homes of low-income families. At a time when the vast majority of public spending is concentrated on K-12 education¹, Raising A Reader offers a proven, cost-effective, scalable, and sustainable way to develop early language skills, parent-child bonding, and kindergarten readiness in the youngest, hardest-to-reach children.

¹ Derived from Table 1 in R. Haverman and B. Wolfe, "The Determinants of Children's Attainments: A review of methods and findings," *Journal of Economic Literature*, Vol. 33, December 1995.

B. Targeted Cause

Raising A Reader addresses a national crisis: teachers report that more than 40% of new kindergarteners are not fully prepared or "ready" for school.¹ An abundance of research has shown that when parents regularly read with their young children, they foster both early brain development and the early literacy/self-regulation skills necessary for success in kindergarten and beyond. However, although parents know that reading is important, overcoming the barriers to establishing reading routines and sharing books is difficult and overwhelming to many, particularly immigrant and low-income families. A U.S. Department of Education study in 1996 revealed that "sixty-one percent of low-income families have no children's books in their homes, and yet the single most important activity for building skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children from birth."²

The universal challenge among programs addressing this gap has been identifying scalable, sustainable programs that actually change behavior patterns. Raising A Reader was designed from the early days to fill the void between high-intensity, high-cost intervention programs (which are often impractical to scale) and low-intensity, low-interaction book giveaway programs. Specifically, it is a child-driven, family-focused program that manages to deliver real, measurable impact at a very reasonable cost (approximately \$100/child to launch and \$35/child to sustain in subsequent years).

¹ David Pavelchek, "Teacher Perceptions of Preparedness for Kindergarten", Social & Economic Sciences Research Center-Puget Sound Division, Washington State University, April 2005.

² U.S. Department of Education: 1996. Reading Literacy in the United States: Findings From the IEA Reading Literacy Study.

Here is an example of the language one affiliate, Raising A Reader Massachusetts, uses to express their targeted cause:

Key Message

Raising A Reader is a low cost, easy way to boost kindergarten readiness for at-risk children. We do this by connecting families with the tools to bring reading alive. Books build brains. This is the single most effective way to close the achievement gap - and - Raising A Reader does it by supporting the family connections that help young children thrive!

Sub Messages:

Raising a Reader is a non-profit program that supplies both simple training and preschool books to young families in communities where the need is great, including Chelsea, Everett, Somerville and now, Lawrence. We are working with many families who have never had a practice of reading in their homes or for whom English is a second language.

By educating parents to read with their babies and very young children – and to use some basic techniques to get them thinking during this reading time – young brains get a chance to really develop. This basic practice is the most important thing parents can do to help ensure their children arrive at kindergarten on a level playing field with their peers.

We provide our bright red book bags to families on a rotating basis, along with support on dialogic reading, which encourages parents to interact with their child about the things the child sees or thinks about during reading time. In the communities we have entered, we have seen a significant increase in kindergarten readiness.

Not only does Raising A Reader equip families with the supports to read together and help children develop their thinking abilities; this process truly empowers families with new ways to nurture their babies and preschoolers.

Raising A Reader offers a low cost, high yield means to change lives and improve society. By supporting families in this interactive reading with their babies, toddlers and preschoolers, the brain “wiring” needed for kindergarten readiness can happen. For the minimal expenses needed to cover the cost of books and parent education, these children are now on par with their peers. Research shows this is the best time to close the achievement gap. Imagine what that means in the life of this child 10, 15 or 20 years from now!

C. The Raising A Reader Mission and Theory of Change

The Raising A Reader® mission is to foster healthy brain development, parent-child bonding, and early literacy skills critical for school success by engaging parents in a routine of daily “book cuddling” with their children from birth to age five.

Raising A Reader is a results-oriented program driven by a robust theory of change that maps to extensive, ongoing program evaluation. At its most basic, the theory of change consists of five conditions that, in combination, lead to the desired changes reflected in our mission. These are:

- **A child-driven process:** Raising A Reader uses center-based story time, peer effects, and gorgeous, age-appropriate materials to get children excited about picture books and shared reading. Most early literacy programs target parents through training and public awareness campaigns using “should messages.” Raising A Reader has a different approach—children discover the magic of books and run home each week with a new treasure to share with their parents, leading very naturally to read-aloud routines.
- **Turnkey:** Recognizing how over-extended many program implementers are, Raising A Reader developed the book bag program to be complete and simple to use “out of the box.” The program is also flexible enough to work in a variety of different systems serving low-income families, including childcare settings, adult education classes, housing developments, home visiting programs, and more.
- **Trained Professionals:** Program implementers are trained in advanced “read-aloud” and early brain development—and are given the tools to pass this knowledge on to parents through a train-the-trainer model.
- **Parents Are Trained:** Parents are trained in effective read-aloud techniques through culturally-sensitive tools designed to address whatever barriers they may be dealing with. The training includes an interactive parent training and a special DVD/video, available in 11 languages.
- **Families Use Libraries:** To sustain the routines that families develop, RAR program implementers establish a partnership with the local branch of their public library, introducing families to this underused public resource and exciting children with their very own Blue Library Bag.

The theory of change grew out of research about motivation of human behavior and extensive focus groups with young parents, including those who could not read or speak English. In combination, both research and independent evaluations of RAR have shown that the five core conditions of Raising A Reader’s Theory of Change lead to the following desired outcomes:

- Early literacy skills
 - Parent-child bonding
 - Kindergarten readiness
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D. Program Mechanics

Raising A Reader (RAR) overcomes traditional barriers to literacy by tapping into the natural storytelling traditions of all people, ultimately helping families with young children establish a regular practice of library usage and “read-aloud.” The program and training materials are specifically designed to fit the diversity of cultures, languages and demographic settings across the United States.

Working through a variety of nonprofit and local government affiliate programs, RAR rotates a set of bright red bags filled with award-winning children’s books into the homes of low-income families on a weekly basis. The 600+ books in the RAR collection are selected by a panel of literacy experts and Raising A Reader staff for their appealing artwork, age-appropriate language and multicultural themes. Some concept genres included in the collection are: rhythm and rhyme, colors, wordless/limited text, alphabet, numeracy, diversity themes, etc.

Affiliates can customize the kits according to program size, age range, cultural demographics and language (RAR offers complete kits in both English and bilingual Spanish-English.) The bags are specially designed for children, with chubby handles and thick zippers just right for small hands, and the book bag and its contents quickly become a favorite toy.

In order to remain nimble and scale at a lower cost, Raising A Reader uses a train-the-trainer’s model, hosting quarterly trainings for community coordinators. These coordinators raise funds, build support for RAR in their local community, and identify partner organizations that do regular outreach to low-income families. Before beginning the book bag rotation, RAR coordinators train program implementers in interactive “read-aloud” techniques that stimulate early brain development and language acquisition. These implementers in turn train low-income parents, aided by a fun, colorful video (available in fourteen different languages) that teaches interactive reading techniques that are designed for parents of all literacy levels.

Once the red book bag rotation is underway and a read-aloud routine has been established, RAR, in partnership with the local library, issues a special Blue Library Bag to each child in the program. While children have to return the red book bags and books each week, the Blue Library Bags are theirs to keep and use as they build a lifetime habit of library usage. When RAR families walk into the library, often for the first time, they are given special attention and made to feel at home.

E. What Makes Raising A Reader Unique?

- **Research-based:** RAR is built on research on such areas as: early brain development, language acquisition, emergent literacy, family bonding, poverty & illiteracy, behavior theory, parent education, and storytelling.
- **Nationally effective and replicable in many settings:** Independent evaluations conducted by affiliates across the country demonstrate program success and statistically significant improvements in family read-aloud behavior and library usage, across many different types of implementation settings.
- **Frequently evaluated:** Rather than solely relying on past evaluation data, RAR is constantly being evaluated in different settings, with different age ranges, etc.
- **Lower-cost and more turnkey than high-intensity programs:** RAR’s train-the-trainer model and scalability make the most out of scarce resources.
- **Reaches more families than traditional, stand-alone, workshop/parent education models.** To reach the parents that need it the most, RAR reaches into homes through the Parent DVD and the rotating bags.
- **Higher quality/more programming than “book give-away” programs.** Going a step further than just getting books into the home, RAR actually changes family reading behavior.
- **Non-profit.** Because of its own status as a mission-driven non-profit, RAR understands and can accurately address the complexities and challenges of its non-profit affiliate partners.

F. Project Request

Here is one example of how a grant writer clearly summarizes excitement for the program and implementation plans:

Our Early Childhood staff has expressed strong interest and enthusiasm for this program, which rotates developmentally and linguistically appropriate books home with children in bright red book bags. This creative “rotating book bag” model supports our own efforts to forge a home-to-school connection that engages parents as full partners in their child’s development. The program’s use of communal or shared books helps early care teachers to foster the self-regulation and responsibility children will need to succeed as learners. It is for these reasons that (insert here) agency name is particularly eager to pilot Raising A Reader across (insert here) # classrooms/sites reaching a total of (insert here) # children. We believe that the program will complement the existing structure of our (insert here) program and offer further support to those children making the transition from (insert here) pre-K to kindergarten.

G. Raising A Reader Testimonials

"Raising A Reader is based on the best research on early reading. The program reaches into the home to help parents create the literacy-rich environment that has been shown in research to foster high levels of literacy skills."

- Professor Deborah Stipek, Dean,
Stanford University School of Education

"One local mother told me that her 8 year-old could not read and that she herself did not graduate from high school, but that her 4 year-old was learning to read because of Raising A Reader. She also shared that because of Raising A Reader, she was learning to read and she had been inspired to go back to school to get her GED."

- Sarah Bishop, Success by 6 Director,
United Way of Southampton Roads, Norfolk, VA

"Raising a Reader helps children and families prepare for the challenges of organizing and turning in homework on the date it is due. The book bags teach children to keep school materials stored in an orderly manner and the fact bags are rotated means that children and families need to return the books on time. Both of these skills are critical to success in the school years."

- Elizabeth Acosta-Crocker
Director of Children & Family Services
Unity Council, Oakland, CA

"As we engaged our community in conversation about school readiness, we learned that there is no universally accepted formula for preparing children for school. However, all the stakeholders agreed that nurturing pre-literacy skills and a love of reading are critical to a child's success, and that Raising A Reader effectively addresses those goals."

- Della Hodson, Director of Community Impact
United Way of Kern County, Bakersfield, CA

"Raising A Reader gives Spanish speaking parents the ability to practice reading basic English in the privacy of their home which begins to build confidence to read outside the home."

- Dawn Ryan, Preschool teacher, Aspen, CO

"The books and bags that go home with my 4 year-old daughter have helped my 7 year-old son just as much. He was behind in reading and below grade level in school. When the Raising A Reader books came home, he read them to my daughter every week. The books are helping and now he is at grade level with his reading. My daughter is using her finger like the teacher shows us and she knows what the books say from her imagination. She will be ready for kinder when she is five."

- Teresa, Mother, Migrant Education Even Start
Santa Cruz County, CA

H. Background Research

The Raising A Reader® program design is supported by research emphasizing the importance of reading to children. Experts lend valuable information regarding the effects of reading for healthy attachment and bonding between parents/caregivers and children:

- The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (1998) found that 62% of parents with a high socioeconomic status read to their kindergarten-aged children every day, compared to 36% of parents with a low socioeconomic status.
- The 1997 National Survey of America's Families found that 24% of children living below 200% of the poverty level were read to or told stories fewer than 3 days a week compared to only 10% of children living of children living above 200% of the poverty level.
- In the 1997 National Portrait Study on the schooling experiences of children:
 - 77% felt that teachers need to learn more about encouraging involvement.
 - 38% of parents had never been asked how their school might help them become more involved at school.

*(Above information taken from The National Institute for Literacy website:
<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/facts/parental.html>)*

- Studies indicate that shared-reading interventions can have a significant, substantial, and positive impact both on young children's oral language skills and on young children's print knowledge.
(Shanahan, Timothy, et al. (2008). Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel. p. 155, National Institute on Family Literacy, Jessup, MD.)
- In virtually every state, minority and low-income children are less likely to be read to every day than their non-minority and higher income peers.
(Russ S, Perez V, Garro N, Klass P, Kuo AA, Gershun M, Halfon N, Zuckerman. (2007). Reading Across the Nation: A Chartbook. Reach Out and Read National Center, Boston, MA.)
- Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g. less than high school maternal education) are closing gaps in basic skills (i.e., recognizing their letters and counting beyond 10). However, these same children lag further behind their more advanced classmates when it comes to gaining more sophisticated reading and mathematics knowledge and skills (i.e., recognizing words by sight). In fact, the gap has widened.
(West, Jerry, Kristen Denton, and M. Lizabeth Reaney, The Kindergarten Year: Findings from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-99, U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Washington, DC, 2001.)
- The single most important activity for building understandings and skills essential for reading success appears to be reading aloud to children.
(Bus, A., van Ijzendoorn, M.H., & Pelligrini, A. (1995). Joint book reading makes for success in learning to read: A meta-analysis on intergenerational transmission of literacy. Review of Educational Research, 65, 1-21.)
(Wells, G. (1985) Language Development in the Pre-school Years. Cambridge: CUP)
- We know that children's understandings about literacy emerge in infancy and are continually in the process of being shaped and clarified by countless experiences and active engagement with oral and written language, books and stories.
(International Reading Association & National Association for Education of Young Children, 1998).

- Although many experiences are said to contribute to early literacy, no other single activity is regarded as important as the shared book experience between caregivers and children. (Neuman, Susan. (1999, July–September). *Books Make a Difference: A Study of Access to Literacy. Reading Research Quarterly, 34(3), 286–311.*)
- The one form of stimulation that has been proven to make a difference is language: infants and children who are conversed with, read to, and otherwise engaged in lots of verbal interaction show somewhat more advanced linguistic skills than children who are not as verbally engaged by their caregivers. Because language is fundamental to most of the rest of cognitive development, this simple action – talking and listening to your child – is one of the best ways to make the most of his or her critical brain-building years. (*Zero to Three, 2002*)

I. Raising A Reader Results

Independent evaluations from different Raising A Reader programs around the country have demonstrated significant improvement in family reading behaviors, library usage, and kindergarten readiness.

- Compared to a randomized control group, Raising A Reader Spanish-speaking parents showed a greater increase in time spent book-sharing with their children and the children showed **greater gains in overall development, particularly social skills, physical skills (self-help and motor skills) and number skills.** Compared to control group toddlers, Raising A Reader toddlers showed greater increases in proportion of **time spent asking questions** during book-sharing. (Perez-Granados, Huffman & Latzke, Stanford School of Education and Cal State Monterey, 2008)
- Head Start children participating in Raising A Reader had a **37.5% greater likelihood** of achieving literacy at the highest level than the Head Start children who did not participate in Raising A Reader. (Norfolk, 2005)
- The program has demonstrated a **471% increase** in the percentage of low-income parents sharing books with their children five or more times each week. (San Francisco, 2004)
- Head Start children participating in Raising A Reader for less than one year developed **58% higher pre-reading** scores and **27% higher story comprehension** scores than children without the program. (San Francisco, 2003)
- Head Start children in Raising A Reader for 8 months tested at least **twice as high** as the national norms for Head Start children in readiness skills of **book knowledge, print concepts and story comprehension.** (Santa Clara County, 2001)
- There was a **337% growth** in the percentage of Spanish-speaking parents taking their **children to the library** at least once a month. (Santa Clara County, 2001)

(Many of these evaluation reports can be viewed at www.raisingareader.org/research.html.)