

Summer Reading Program

Why A Summer Reading Program?

For many public libraries, the annual summer reading program (SRP) is the high-water mark for library events and community engagement. Libraries frequently offer a higher volume of children's programming and events during the summer months, when kids are out of school and able to more regularly participate.

The overall aim of the summer reading program is to combat the "Summer Slide" - a term that describes the way that children's learning can slide backwards during the extended period away from school. Summer reading programs aim to develop and maintain literacy skills during the summer vacation, by promoting reading as a fun, valuable activity and the library as an exciting place to visit - not just during the summer months, but all year long.

What is a Summer Reading Program?

SRPs can take many forms. Many libraries choose to create summer reading games, with special game boards or progress trackers for participants to play each time they visit the library. This could be a Monopoly, Candyland or Snakes and Ladders-based game board, a bingo card, or even a scavenger hunt. These can be reused annually or newly created every year, depending on a library's goals. A participant might be invited to play the game each time they visit the library, each time they borrow a book, or each time they track new reading (whether in "minutes read" or "books read"). Games often appeal to a broad audience of school aged kids, generally from kindergarten to grade 6, but this will depend on the individual library and the community served. Great examples of library summer reading games can be found on resource sites including Pinterest, LibraryToolshed.ca, or ProgrammingLibrarian.org. You can also ask the Client Services Librarian and your colleagues at other Shortgrass member libraries for tips and advice!

Many libraries also choose to run additional library programming in the summer, including storytimes, crafts, and other programs. Libraries may choose to create their own programs based on the SRP theme or participants' ages and interests. Again, resources including Pinterest, LibraryToolshed.ca, and ProgrammingLibrarian.org are all excellent resources for finding program ideas and guides. Shortgrass also has a variety of programming kits available to member libraries to support excellent library programming year-round, including during the SRP. If you would like more information on these kits, please see the "Programming Kits" section of this manual or contact the Client Services Librarian. Note that Shortgrass recommends booking programming kits well in advance of summer, as they are popular this time of year.

If a library is unable or does not wish to create their own summer reading program for any reason, but still would like to run one, TD Bank sponsors a free program for Canadian public libraries. The company provides all the promotional materials, workbooks, and recording sheets free of cost to participating libraries; other items, like prizes, staff/volunteer t-shirts, or tote bags, may be purchased for a small fee. The theme changes annually and is generally vague enough that it can be used as-is or fit into your own programming plans and themes. While there are guidelines you are required to follow if you use the TDSRC, they are flexible and easy to follow. Please note that if you opt to participate in this program, you must follow the branding and sponsorship acknowledgement related guidelines outlined by TD, and submit the statistics required.

Preparing for the Summer Reading Program

Preparations for the SRP generally begin several months in advance of the program's start. Libraries need to determine whether they wish to participate in the annual TD-sponsored summer reading program (more on that shortly) or if they wish to develop their own version of the program. Early in the year, you will also need to determine whether you are able (and want to) hire a summer student to assist you with running your SRP. Funding to help pay for summer students is available through a variety of programs, such as the Young Canada Works grant.

A sample timeline for summer reading program preparations might look like this:

- As early as November: the Client Services Librarian will contact you with information regarding optional participation in the TD-sponsored Summer Reading Club (TDSRC). If participating, you will order your free promotional materials for the program at this time. Even if you are not participating in the TDSRC, you may begin planning your own summer reading activities at this time.
- January/February: Determine whether you would like to hire a summer student to help you run the program and apply for Young Canada Works (or other applicable funding). Applications may be required to be completed online. You may need to consult your board while applying to the grant. Please note that while grant funding for summer students is available, it covers only part of the expenses related to employing a summer student- generally, 50% of the provincial minimum wage will be covered. If you have questions about the grant, your Client Services Librarian is happy to assist.
- January/February: You will be asked to choose a preferred date for the Shortgrass-sponsored summer reading concert.
- February/March: You will be told the amount of funding Shortgrass will provide you for summer reading program supplies and prizes. At this time, you will also have the opportunity to order prizes and TDSRC-branded items (if participating in TDSRC).
- April-June: Preparation for SRP programming and events
- July-August: Summer Reading Program!
- September/October: Submit your summer reading program statistics to the Client Services Librarian. You're finally free!