Application Instructions and Frequently Asked Questions

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Application Instructions

Thank you for your interest in the Library of Congress Literacy Awards Program. Please read these instructions in full before completing your submission. If you require additional guidance, please email your questions to literacyawards@loc.gov or call (202) 707-0596.

The deadline for applying is midnight, April 30, EDT; all applications and supporting materials must be received by this time to be eligible for consideration.

Application Form
1. Download the Application Form and Instructions from http://www.read.gov/literacyawards and save the form as "OrganizationName_PrizeCategory," (i.e., Acme Book applies for the International Prize, the file name is AcmeBook_International.doc).
2. The application is supported in Microsoft Word 2007 and later. If you are using another program to complete the application, dropdown functionality in Section 1 may be disabled. If the dropdowns do not appear, please follow these instructions carefully to complete Section 1. For Award Category type one of the following: David M. Rubenstein Prize, American Prize, or International Prize. For Applicant Status type one of the following: New Applicant, Returning Applicant, Returning Applicant / Previous Honoree, or Previous Winner. For Type of Nomination type one of the following: Self-nomination or Outside Nomination. All other fields in this application may be completed by typing your answer.
3. An organization may be nominated in only one prize category.
4. Outside nominators should coordinate with the nominee organization to ensure that a single application is submitted. In the case of multiple nominations the board may review only one application.
5. If you are applying on behalf of an organization with which you are affiliated, select "Self-Nomination" in section 1 and complete the self-nomination portion of section 4. If you are applying on behalf of an organization with which you are not affiliated, select "Outside Nomination" and complete the outside nomination portion of section 4. (You are affiliated with an organization if you are an employee, contractor, volunteer or board member of the organization.) The outside nomination portion of section 4 does not need to be filled out for self-nominations.
6. Complete the application form. Selection criteria statements should not exceed 250 words each and should not contain information included in your essay.

Essay
7. The essay must be no more than 750 words. Website URLs should be fully written out and count as one word. (Check links to make sure that they are correctly spelled and lead to active web pages.) Essays that exceed 750 words may be disqualified.

8. Your essay should summarize why your organization should be considered for this prize. Do not repeat the information in your selection criteria statements.

Letters of Reference
9. Two letters of reference are required. There is no word limit but they are typically no more than 1,000 words.
10. Save letters of reference as "OrganizationName_Reference1" and OrganizationName_Reference2" (i.e., AcmeBooks_Reference1). PDFs are preferred for letters of reference, but text formats such as .rtf, .doc, etc. are also acceptable. Please do not send .jpg or .jpeg files.

Submission
11. Email the two letters of reference and the completed application form, including the five selection criteria statements and your essay, to literacyawards@loc.gov. The subject line should read: "Organization name, Prize category, Application" (i.e. Subject: Acme Books, International, Application).

Application Tips

- Observe the word count limit. You can optimize your word limit by referring to your initiative's website (note the details that the website provides, such as staffing, budget and resources).
- Read the Frequently Asked Questions.
- In your narrative stay focused on providing the most relevant information and specific information or examples to support your case.
- Usually, it is more effective for the overarching organization to submit a proposal rather than one subset of the organization (for example, a national literacy center rather than one town's center, which is part of the national group).
- Focus on the impact—improving people's lives. You might distribute a million books, but if people don't read those books then the initiative may or may not be making the difference.
- If applying for the David M. Rubenstein Prize, demonstrate:
  o Broad and deep impact over time.
  o Growth and improvement over time.
  o How the initiative sustains itself through stable funding, staffing and other support.

About the Selection Criteria

Each application is evaluated based on the five selection criteria described here. The applications are rated on a 100-point scoring system, with different weights for each selection criterion by prize category, listed below.

Innovation

25 points for American and International; 20 points for Rubenstein

Unique, original, creative and forward-thinking approaches to literacy are considered when evaluating an organization's innovation. From implementing ideas no one else has tried to fresh approaches to community building and partnerships, innovation includes developing new and well-suited solutions. Examples of innovation from previous applicants: leveraging emerging technology, teaching literacy to newlyweds, closed-captioned songs and storefront literacy centers for teens.

Sustainability

20 points for American and International; 30 for Rubenstein

Organizations are evaluated for sustainability by examining several factors, including a predictable and strong budget, funding sources, stability of service, institutional support and community participation. Typically, a self-sustaining initiative is not a one-time campaign, based on soft money or dependent on the leadership of one individual. Sustainable organizations often have several funding sources, as in these models: a baseline fund, such as from a national public library, supported by additional funding from partners for enhanced services; or several stable and continuous funding sources such as a foundation, sponsoring partners and profits from training or publications.

Replicability

20 points for American and International; 15 for Rubenstein

Replicable initiatives help further the cause of literacy throughout the world. Organizations are evaluated for replicability by examining the ease and scalability of their model. With the details of the initiative and its guidelines, can another organization replicate the effort? Initiatives that succeed due to the influence of a small group of people, unique circumstances or financial windfall are not easily replicable. Examples of replicable initiatives from previous applicants: train-the-trainer model, guides and tutorials, and building through existing structures such as healthcare.

Measurable Results

25 points for American, International and Rubenstein

The impact of an organization is evaluated with measurable results in comparison with baseline data. While anecdotes are compelling, the impact should be in terms of the target group's improved reading competence. Ideally, this literacy improvement results in measurable outcomes such as employment and promotion, academic pursuit and success, improved family literacy, better health and better consumer decisions. Measurements of individual improved literacy might include increases in: reading and writing scores, participation in reading and writing competitions, academic course grades, number of minutes reading and reports of self-confidence as readers. Measurable impact may also include evidence such as enactment of literacy-related legislation, improved literacy curriculum, publications by the target audience, new libraries to support increased literacy demands, more literate employees and the establishment of book clubs.

Evidence-based Practice
10 points for American, International and Rubenstein

Relevance and legitimacy of an initiative are evaluated by examining its research and reliance on existing professional literature and applied practice. Organizations with thorough evidence-based practice cite research and clearly state how its recommendations have been consulted and applied to develop their initiative in specific ways. Examples of demonstrated evidence-based practice: the initiative's actions model theory and research; research led to the development of the initiative and its methodology is used to demonstrate significant improvement; the initiative's impact is measured with the evaluation tools from research; and literacy researchers serve as consultants and external evaluators.

Frequently Asked Questions

Timeline
1. **When can I submit an application?**
   The application period is from March 5 to April 30. All applications must be submitted by midnight, April 30, EDT.
2. **When will I know if my application was successful?**
   Award winners will be contacted in late summer.
3. **When are the winners announced?**
   Award winners and best practice honorees will be publicly announced in the fall.

Prize Categories
4. **How many prize categories can I apply in?**
   Each organization may apply in only one category each year.
5. **Which prize category should I apply in?**
   If you are an organization based in the United States, you may apply for the American Prize or the Rubenstein Prize, but not both. If you are an organization based in a country outside

the United States, you may apply for the International Prize or the Rubenstein Prize, but not both.

6. **My organization is based in the United States, but works internationally; can we apply for the International Prize?**

   No. Organizations based in the United States should apply for either the American Prize or the Rubenstein Prize, regardless of where they perform work.

Letters of Reference

7. **What should a letter of reference contain?**

   The letter should include a short description of how the writer knows the organization and a brief statement about why he or she feels that it should be considered for an award. Letters that specifically address the difference the organization makes and its unique value to the promotion of literacy are highly encouraged.

8. **How long should they be?**

   There is no word count for the references, but most are 1,000 words or less.

9. **Who should write the letters of reference?**

   Letters should come from someone outside of the nominated organization who knows the program and can clearly articulate why the organization's work should be considered for the award. This might include partners, policy advisers, academics, government officials, beneficiaries or anyone else who is familiar with the organization's work.

10. **To whom should the letters be addressed?**

    The letters can be addressed to the Literacy Awards Advisory Board as follows:
    "Dear Literacy Awards Advisory Board,"

Essay

11. **What information should the essay contain?**

    The essay should summarize why the organization should be considered for the prize, focusing on how it meets the selection criteria (innovation, sustainability, replicability, measurable results and evidence-based practice). The most important information to include in the essay is a description of what the organization does and whom it serves. Given the size limitation of the essay, nominators are encouraged to have their text focus on the value of the work the organization provides and the difference that work makes in increasing literacy and/or public awareness of the need for literacy.

12. **How much information about context/organizational history should be included in the essay?**

    A brief statement about the organizational history is useful, which might include the length of time the program has been active and any important milestones that are relevant to the organization's current work. Again, a reference to website content may be appropriate to provide in-depth history or background.

13. How do I add links to the essay to direct readers to additional information?

Write out the full URL directly in the text of the essay. Links embedded in the text will not be accessible to those evaluating the application.

14. My essay is more than 750 words, is that acceptable?

Essays longer than 750 words may be disqualified.

15. Do URLs add to the word count?

Yes. Each URL counts as one word.

Reapplying

16. How do I reapply?

If you have applied for an award in the past, you must reapply to be considered for this year. To apply, fill out a new application form, update or rewrite your essay to reflect any changes or new achievements since the prior application and attach your letters of reference. Specifically, any applications (and their supporting material) from prior years are not considered in the current year application process.

17. Do I have to submit different letters of reference?

We encourage organizations to obtain current letters of reference that speak to the organization's current application. If the letters of reference from the past are being used, they must be resubmitted with the new application. All prior year's applications and supporting materials are not considered in the current year's application process.

18. My organization applied previously and was not recognized; should we bother applying again?

Yes. Some of our winners and best practice honorees applied multiple times before being recognized. The applicant pool changes each year, so you should continue to apply.

19. My organization applied previously and received recognition for our implementation of a best practice; may we apply again?

Yes. We encourage organizations that have previously applied to the Literacy Awards program and not won one of the three prizes to submit their applications again each year.

Best Practice Honorees

20. What does it mean to be a best practice honoree?

Each year 12 to15 organizations that apply in the three major prize categories are recognized for their successful implementation of a specific literacy promotion practice and receive a $5,000 award. Short profiles of the honorees are included in the annual Library of Congress Literacy Awards publication along with descriptions of the prize winners.

21. How are the honorees selected?

The best practice honorees are selected based on the overall evaluation of their application and their successful implementation of a specific literacy promotion practice.

22. Do I need to apply separately to be considered for "best practices" recognition?

No. Honorees are chosen from all three prize categories.

Miscellaneous

23. Who is eligible to apply for the literacy awards?

Any organization or program that does not operate on a for-profit basis is eligible to apply. We accept applications for projects created or sponsored by local, regional or national governments. We do not accept nominations for individuals.

24. Can I submit my application in a language other than English?

At this time we are only able to evaluate materials submitted in English. If you wish to use letters of reference that are written in another language, please provide an English translation as well.

25. Can I request feedback on my application if it is not successful?

General feedback may be provided to unsuccessful applicants. Due to limited personnel resources, detailed and timely responses cannot be guaranteed.

26. I have more questions. Whom should I contact?

Email questions to literacyawards@loc.gov or call 1-202-707-0596.