Directory of Readers’ Advisory Activities

The Panorama Project
Readers’ Advisory Impact Committee

January 2019
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Introduction

Public libraries and librarians use many approaches to connect readers at all skill levels and ages with books and authors. They use story hours to teach preschoolers the six pre-reading skills needed to become successful readers; they take large print books to senior centers for elderly adults to enjoy; they host classes for adult new readers, or students of English as a second language; they promote specific books and collections in library displays; they tweet about books; and they host author events—to name just a few of the activities that libraries and librarians undertake to connect readers with books and authors.

Reading is a vital skill in our society—fundamentally basic to success—so learning to read is important, but librarians encourage pleasure reading as well. Pleasure reading is a joy and a way to help increase the needed literacy skills. People learn to read well by reading a lot—by practicing the skills they have learned. Librarians encourage patrons to read more by helping them more easily find books that they can enjoy, thus making it more likely that they will read more. But recent research also shows that pleasure reading itself has proven social benefits, including increased empathy, better insight into the surrounding world, healthy escape from stress, and an improved sense of connectedness with the wider community.

For decades public librarians have honed their skills in what is known in the library world as “Readers’ Advisory Service.” This means that they have studied and put into practice the myriad ways that libraries can help readers to find good books suited to them personally. Many users of libraries, and certainly those who don’t use libraries, may have never heard of Readers’ Advisory Service. Even if they’ve experienced it firsthand, they may not have recognized that the display they browsed through, the book list they took home, or the book suggestion they received from the librarian was more than just a result of serendipity or luck.

Readers’ Advisory Service is an umbrella term for the many activities that librarians use to aid readers in finding books that they will enjoy reading. These activities may include everything from choosing the right books for the library’s collection, to making it easier for browsers to find good books, to taking books outside the library walls. It also, and maybe most importantly, means working directly with readers one-on-one to help narrow their choices so they can more easily find books that might suit their tastes and reading skills. Readers’ advisors do this by talking with readers about their tastes, and then using various resources and their knowledge of books to try to match readers to books that might fit them personally.

Many books, articles, presentations, classes, and training sessions over the decades have helped library staff members hone their skills in Readers’ Advisory Service, but the field is largely unknown to the outside world. This is not surprising, since there is no professional journal dedicated to the subject, many library graduate schools do not teach it, and the information about it is scattered widely with no one good place to find it. Public libraries in the United States

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1 This [article](https://www.nbcnews.com/better/making-better/reading-books-can-help-everything-from-improve-social-skills-to-enhance-life-quality-ncfc260900) on the NBC News Better website provides a summary of recent research on the benefits of reading.
have quietly offered the service for well over fifty years, but not much is written about it outside the scattered professional literature. This may very well be because much of the work done in the field to develop techniques was—and is—performed by practitioners rather than academics, and practitioners tend to write less. Over recent decades other more visible library topics such as funding issues, censorship, the impact of technology, and sensational stories on the issue of the opioid epidemic or the problem of the homeless in libraries, have caught the eye of the news media. But regardless of its visibility, Readers’ Advisory Service is basic to public libraries, even though its impact on the publishing industry has generally been ignored.

This directory, compiled by a dedicated committee of librarians, is intended to be a listing, with explanations, of the many activities that librarians across the country currently use to help readers find books they will enjoy reading. With this document as a basis, Panorama Project teams will go on to measure the impact of the various public library Readers’ Advisory activities on book sales in the United States. How many libraries perform the different activities? Do libraries affect the popularity of titles? Do author programs in libraries affect retail sales of their titles? Do book lists help raise awareness and sales of publisher midlist and backlist titles? Do libraries help readers to discover new favorite authors whose works they then go on to buy? We hope to find out.

About the Panorama Project

The Panorama Project is the first data-driven research project focused on understanding the influence of the nation’s public libraries on book and author discovery, brand development, and retail sales. The multi-year industry initiative is supported by a growing list of publishers, booksellers, libraries, library service providers, and industry organizations.

This publication is the first work-product of the project’s Readers’ Advisory Impact Committee—a volunteer group of over 40 librarians and industry professionals. The committee was convened to research and document the wide variety of Readers’ Advisory services, activities, and title recommendations provided by public libraries and librarians.

Other Panorama research projects are underway on topics such as the impact of library-sponsored author events and the effect of library-sponsored community reading events. The Panorama Project has the support of a growing list of publishers, booksellers, libraries, library service providers, and industry organizations. The project’s Advisory Council includes thought leaders from across the industry. Initial funding for the project is being provided by Rakuten OverDrive. The Panorama Project is an open membership initiative. Learn more at panoramaproject.org.

Contribute

We invite you to submit additional activities, examples and useful links. We also welcome your feedback on the directory. Email us at raic@panoramaproject.org.
Direct (One-to-One) Readers’ Advisory Activities

This section catalogs “direct” readers’ advisory activities. These activities involve a direct, one-on-one encounter between a librarian or library staff member and a reader. The encounter can be face-to-face, on the phone, via email or chat, or through a form, either online or in print. In all of these cases, the result of the encounter is that the reader takes away specific reading suggestions based on his or her reading interests. The focus here is on the suggestions.

Conversations and Recommendations

DESCRIPTION: Library staff members engage a reader in conversation to determine reading tastes, history and mood. The conversation often begins by asking the reader to name a book they have enjoyed recently and why. The conversation may then delve into greater detail about the importance of appeal factors such as story/plot, language, characters, and setting for the reader.

EXAMPLES:

- Engaging readers through both deliberate and casual impromptu conversations at service points in the library and through “roving” readers’ advisory
- Organized outreach events in the community
- Informal/incidental conversations in the community

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:


Form-Based Suggestions

DESCRIPTION: The library designs a form to collect information about the reader’s interests. The form may be available in hard copy or submitted online and will usually ask for some basic information such as reading history, genre interests, format preferences. The library may ask readers to rate the importance of appeal factors such as plot, language, characters, and setting. Some libraries also collect demographic information about the users of the form. The form is then evaluated by library staff members who provide specific reading recommendations for that reader.

EXAMPLES:

- Williamsburg Regional Library’s Looking for a Good Book service
- Seattle Public Library’s Your Next 5
- Denver Public Library’s Personal Reading List request
● King County Library System’s BookMatch
● Skokie Public Library’s Bookmatch

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:


Social Media Readers’ Advisory

DESCRIPTION: Library staff members provide personalized reading recommendations on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Although these interactions are one-on-one—a reader asks a question and gets an individualized response—the public nature of social media makes them visible to a large audience and other community members often chime in. Activities may follow a special theme or format. Librarians use services such as NetGalley and Edelweiss to find and share news about forthcoming titles with readers. Some libraries have regular social media “office hours” for readers’ advisory.

EXAMPLES:

● The New York Public Library’s NYPL weekly Recommends Facebook event
● Denver Public Library’s “Three-for-all” Fridays on Facebook
● Multnomah County Library’s National Tattoo Day Facebook event
● Using the Twitter hashtag #Libfaves(year), a number of librarians count down their favorite top ten titles published during the current year over a ten-day period in early December. Readers can follow the individual tweets to discover what librarians liked best during the year or wait for the final list to be compiled.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

● Honeycutt, R. (2016) *Got ink? We've got appeals!* NoveList blog

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2 Available free of charge with My JSTOR login.
Indirect (One-to-Many) Readers’ Advisory Activities

This section catalogs “indirect” Readers’ Advisory activities. These activities do not involve a direct, one-on-one encounter between a librarian and a reader (though they may involve in-person encounters within book groups and similar gatherings). Here, the focus is on discovery, providing opportunities for readers to encounter new titles and authors through lists, displays, browsing aids, and other tools discussed below. This discovery can happen whether or not the librarian is present.

Recommended Book or Reading Lists

**DESCRIPTION:** Library staff members curate lists of recommended, popular, or interesting titles around a specific theme, audience, or topic, and publish the lists on their library websites or on paper, often in bookmark size. Libraries distribute these lists to their readers in many ways—through their websites, on their digital media sites for ebooks and audiobooks, on social media, or at community events, as well as in the library building, by leaving paper lists in displays for readers to take or placing the paper lists into books throughout the stacks for serendipitous discovery. Sometimes the lists include staff reviews of the titles.

**EXAMPLES:**

- **Staff Picks:** Bookmarks, with staff member comments, are placed in specific books shelved in the stacks or in displays. These comments often include suggested read-alike titles or authors.

- **Genre or Themed Bookmarks:** A team of genre or subject specialists create bookmarks around genres such as romance or cozy mysteries, or specific themes.

- **Recommended Listening Awards:** Curated lists of audiobooks are created and kept near the collection.

- **Featured Titles List:** Using book covers, staff members create a weekly curated list on the library's OverDrive site to promote titles in digital formats with low circulation.

- **Best of Lists:** Library staff members curate lists, including fiction and nonfiction titles in multiple categories including Best of the Year, Best of the Summer, Best Gift Books, and Best of Staff Picks and provides multiple copies of lesser-known well-reviewed titles to encourage interest. The lists are printed in a booklet format and used as part of a display with the multiple titles.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

● EBSCO’s LibraryAware™ template and display creation software’s Pinterest board of display, newsletter, and flyer examples

● Mt. Lebanon Public Library booklists

● St. Charles City-County Library’s OverDrive site

Displays

LONG DESCRIPTION: Library staff members create displays of titles that are either new, recommended, or thematically related. Displays are typically placed in high-traffic areas and are maintained and curated by staff members. As with reading lists, displays often include Staff Picks or Best Books. A print book list may also be available as part of the display.

EXAMPLES:

● School Library Journal: Teen Librarian Toolbox (Displays)

● Princeton Public Library’s Blind Date with a Book display

● Banned Books Week display

Social Media Book Talks

DESCRIPTION: Library staff members use social media in various ways to promote new and suggested titles. Discussions may take place on Facebook or Twitter at designated times or are ongoing. Library staff members may also record a book talk on Facebook Live and upload the video to YouTube for later viewing by readers. Staff members may also post book reviews to a Goodreads account or to a library blog.

EXAMPLES:

● Skokie Public Library Talkin’ Books YouTube playlist

● Cook Memorial Public Library District “Pick of the Week” feature on Read Watch Listen blog

● Toronto Public Library’s Twitter book club

● Denver Public Library’s book blogs

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

● American Library Association I Love Libraries initiative
Social Media Virtual Displays

DESCRIPTION: Pictures of physical book displays are posted online or to social media platforms in order to reach the virtual user. Hypertext links are typically provided to guide the user to the library catalog or text version of the display so the materials may be requested and/or downloaded. Libraries share images and links to books or book lists on social media. Lists are often related to current events or showcase staff favorites or new titles.

EXAMPLES:

- King County Library System’s Twitter feed
- Pinterest library book displays
- Kansas City Public Library’s Instagram feed
- Mt. Lebanon Public Library’s Instagram feed

Reading Groups or Book Clubs

DESCRIPTION: Library-hosted book groups take a variety of forms. In many groups, all participants read the same book and come together to discuss it. Groups may focus on special topics, such as mysteries, wellness, social justice, etc. They may also focus on special audiences such as parent/child, teens, or world language speakers. Other groups may take a less formal approach, inviting readers to gather and discuss anything they’ve been reading. Discussions may happen in person (in libraries or other settings) or online via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Goodreads.

EXAMPLES:

- Skokie Public Library and Morton Grove Public Library’s LitLounge
- Denver Public Library’s No Strings Attached
- The Mt. Lebanon Public Library’s book groups

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Connecting to Readers Through Book Clubs. NoveList blog

Presentations

DESCRIPTION: Library staff members offer various types of presentations on a book or books, or story that will be of interest to the intended audience. A book talk may take place at the library or at an offsite or online location. Book talks may be designed to promote new and hot titles, or to provide suggestions to a targeted population such as members of a senior center, the local
Chamber of Commerce, or in a school classroom. The presentation may be about one book or several books. A story hour includes a reading of the actual material, be it a picture book, short story, poetry, or an excerpt from a larger work. Story hours are usually aimed at children but some libraries also offer these for adults. Usually a story is read or told in person, but is sometimes offered via telephone or the Internet.

EXAMPLES:

- The Denver Public Library’s Phone-A-Story service
- Toronto Public Library’s “Tea and Murder” book talks
- Mt. Lebanon Public Library’s children’s, toddlers, and baby storytimes

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:


**Author Visits**

DESCRIPTION: An author event provides readers an opportunity to meet a favorite author or perhaps discover a new author that they might enjoy. Authors, whether local or national, often speak or read from their works at libraries. Additionally, when authors discuss their work and/or writing process, attendees often learn more about themselves and why certain books appeal to them. These can be single author events or conversations or panels with multiple authors and may feature both authors of fiction and nonfiction.

EXAMPLES:

- Cuyahoga County Public Library’s Beyond the Book Jacket Author series
- The Mt. Lebanon Public Library’s Speaker Series
- King County Library System’s Meet the Author events

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Newsletters

DESCRIPTION: Libraries provide print newsletters for giveaway or regularly scheduled email newsletters to subscribers. These may be created in-house or curated by a vendor through subscriptions. Newsletters may be of general interest or targeted to specific topics or genres. They link back to lists or specific titles in the library catalog or to book and author events such as readings or book groups.

EXAMPLES:

- Pinterest examples of library newsletters
- King County Library System’s NextReads sign up page
- LibraryReads monthly top ten list of titles voted on by librarians newsletter

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Reed, L. (2017). Experiences from the Field: Reaching Targeted Audiences with Email Newsletters [Webinar]. NoveList blog

Readers’ Advisory Podcasts

DESCRIPTION: Library podcasts take a variety of approaches, but almost all of them include some form of readers’ advisory service. Some are books- and reading-focused, while others take a broader look at libraries while including book talks or other readers’ advisory activities; others are primarily recordings of author talks and readings.

EXAMPLES:

- Seattle Public Library’s Library Podcasts
- New York Public Library’s Podcasts
- Lawrence Public Library’s Book Squad
- Sno-Isle Libraries’ Check It Out
- Ela Area Library’s Three Books Podcast
- Twinsburg Public Library and Perry Public Library co-hosted ABC Book Review Podcast

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Community Reading Campaigns

DESCRIPTION: An entire community is encouraged to read the same book and participate in discussions or attend related events—this is often an annual event. The book may be selected by a special committee, by vote, or it may be an award winner. The campaign may follow a theme. The programs can be heavily promoted, sometimes in partnership with other community organizations such as transit systems or the mayor’s office.

EXAMPLES:

- Seattle Reads
- One Book, One Chicago
- Skokie Public Library’s Coming Together in Skokie and Niles Township

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- American Library Association resources page for One Book, One Community initiatives

Community Reading Challenges

DESCRIPTION: An entire community is challenged to diversify and broaden their reading. Using gamification, programming, and interactive elements, patrons are encouraged to read books they would not otherwise choose on their own. These programs are usually presented as yearly or monthly challenges with prompts such as “Read a book by a person of color” or “Read a book in translation.” Some libraries also use the challenges presented by other media outlets. Prizes are often awarded to those who participate.

EXAMPLES:

- Skokie Public Library’s Spring Reading Challenge
- Denver Public Library’s Winter of Reading Challenge
- Twinsburg Public Library’s annual 50 Book Challenge
- King County Library System’s annual 10 to Try reading challenge

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Gene Luen Yang’s Reading Without Walls Challenge
Media Contributions/Appearances

DESCRIPTION: Librarians may appear on television, write columns in magazines or newspapers, or appear on the radio to offer reading suggestions.

EXAMPLES:

- Seattle Public Library Cozy Up with a Book television appearance
- Nancy Pearl’s NPR Picks for Summer Reading appearance
- 8 Books Librarians Can’t Stop Talking About post for PBS Newshour
- What’s Popular at Northeast Ohio Libraries This Summer? WCPN Cleveland feature

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- American Library Association Preparing for All Kinds of Interviews guide

Catalog Interventions

DESCRIPTION: Using local cataloging, vendor-provided products, and local content, librarians can connect with readers through the library catalog to make suggestions for read-alike authors and titles, to link to other library-developed content, and to pull together reading lists for popular materials.

EXAMPLES:

- Toronto Public Library’s utilization of catalog search analytics to insert a list of recent, recommended titles to appear at the top of the list of popular search results (knitting)
- Williamsburg Regional Library’s utilization of NoveList Select to bring curated content from Ebsco’s NoveList resource into the library catalog
Appendix A: Additional Examples

Direct (One-to-One) Readers’ Advisory Activities

Conversations and Recommendations

- Library staff initiate friendly conversation about a current book that they have read or comment on an interesting book that a patron is checking out. These conversations often lead to informal book recommendations which sometimes lead to purchase suggestions from patrons. Patrons get to know certain library staff members’ reading tastes and seek them out for reading recommendations.

- Denver Public Library staff “rove” public areas, refilling displays and answering questions, allowing for spontaneous book conversations and readers’ advisory opportunities.

- Cook Memorial Public Library District has a “Book Expert” booth at its community farmers’ market that is stocked with recommended reading lists and selected books available for checkout. Patrons receive a list of suggested titles, customized to their interests.

- Many librarians are “book people” who provide readers’ advisory casually all the time.

Form-Based Suggestions

- Denver Public Library’s Customized Book List for Kids request

Social Media Readers’ Advisory

- Denver Public Library’s National Tattoo Day Facebook event
- Denver Public Library’s Facebook Live Books & Ink Literary Tattoo Fundraising event
- Toronto Public Library’s Twitter TOpicks
- EarlyWord Galley Chat
- #Libfaves18
- Origination of #LibfavesYR
- NetGalley
- Edelweiss (Above the Treeline)
Indirect (One-to-Many) Readers’ Advisory Activities

Recommended Books or Reading Lists

- Mt. Lebanon Public Library’s recommended reading lists for children
- Mt. Lebanon Public Library’s Patron Book Review booklet, collected during Summer Reading Club from all age groups.

Displays

- Many libraries have special displays of in demand titles, often in a prominent location and stocked with multiple copies. These displays go by names such as “Featured Title,” “Lucky Day” or “Most Wanted.”
- Most libraries have a new book area with materials published in the last 6-9 months. These books are usually shelved in a way that allows for face-out displaying of under-the-radar titles or debut authors.
- Most libraries have a dedicated display unit or shelf for staff picks. To further the personal connection, a display may feature pictures of staff alongside the books they have picked. In some libraries, readers can offer their own review on blank forms and place in a dropbox in the display.
- Librarians promote books through themed book displays created around national observances, authors, book awards, social issues, international and national events, consumer education, wellness and health, seasonal interest and event/program support.
- Because browsing stacks of books can be intimidating for many readers, librarians use the shelves as an avenue to promote individual titles. Many libraries use both shelves and end caps to offer shelf talkers. These can take the form of a review of a title, topical reader suggestions that promote other parts of the collection, or read-alikes for a book that is currently checked out. Beyond shelf talkers, some libraries create visually interesting tags that are placed within specific books or specific areas depending on the theme.

- Creating Engaging Book Displays [Webinar], NoveList blog
- Beyond Book Displays: Helping Readers Help Themselves [Webinar], NoveList blog

Social Media Book Talks

- Cook Memorial Public Library District’s Goodreads account
Social Media Virtual Displays

- [King County Library Library System’s Instagram feed](#)

Reading Groups or Book Clubs

- [Denver Public Library’s book clubs](#)

Presentations

- [Kansas City Public Library’s Dial-A-Story](#)
- [Toronto Public Library’s Dial-A-Story](#)
- Mt. Lebanon Public Library’s offers annual Holiday Gifts book talks.
- Skokie Public Library offers an annual, themed book talk to the Women in Business group that meets monthly in the library.

Readers’ Advisory Podcasts

- [New York Public Library’s The Librarian Is In](#)
- [King County Library System’s The Desk Set](#)

Community Reading Challenges

- Twinsburg Public Library’s 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten challenge
- [The Morning News’s Tournament of Books](#)
- [Deerfield Public Library’s Reading Without Boundaries](#)

Catalog Interventions

- [Toronto Public Library’s utilization of catalog search analytics to insert a list of a popular author’s works to appear at the top of the search results (Louise Penny)](#)
Appendix B: Librarian Networking and Training

- Librarians network with publishers, reviewers and other librarians through NetGalley and Edelweiss (Above the Treeline), free online services that connect to publishers’ catalogs and provide librarians with advance reading copies of some titles. These services provide librarians the opportunity to submit reviews, annotations, or blurb comments that publishers can use for promoting their titles to readers.

- Librarians can also use these services for submitting votes to LibraryReads, the monthly nationwide library staff picks list for adult fiction and non-fiction. Our goal is to help connect librarians’ favorite books to as many readers as possible, while drawing upon the incredible power that public library staff has in helping to build word-of-mouth for new books, and the important role that libraries play in creating audiences for all kinds of authors.

- Librarians contribute to a regularly scheduled Twitter chat using the hashtag #AskALibrarian, held every Thursday. Penguin Random House, Read It Forward, & Library Journal originated the hashtag and “host” the weekly chat, but libraries and librarians from all over the country participate.

- Some librarians use Twitter to connect with readers, publishers and other librarians by participating in open EarlyWord Galley chat sessions using hashtag #ewgc (Adult galley chat) and #ewgcy (YA galley chat). Each month, librarians and publishers tweet about forthcoming titles, and as the sessions take place on Twitter, readers can follow the posts to discover information about new titles.
Appendix C: Subscription/Fee-based Tools

The products referred to are fee-based subscriptions, though many have a cost-free component.

- **libraryAware** is a product of EBSCO that includes templates and tools to create newsletters, bookmarks, shelf talkers, flyers, and more for promoting books and resources throughout the library.
- **DearReader™** provides customizable newsletters, new book alerts, and author tracking on its subscription platform.
- **NextReads™** is a product of EBSCO’s NoveList. There are more than 25 NextReads newsletters delivering reading recommendations directly to patron inboxes through their libraries.
- **BookPage** is a national monthly review of books available online and in print. The library purchases a subscription and then *BookPage* is made available to their readers at no cost. Librarians try to make sure that the library purchases all highlighted books.
- **Wowbrary** is a subscription service that offers readers weekly email or RSS newsletters featuring the new books, movies, audiobooks, music CDs, and ebooks added to their library’s catalog.
- **NoveList Select** brings curated content from Ebsco’s NoveList resource into the library catalog, including realikes, series, information, appeal factors, author information, reviews, and more.
- **LibraryThing for Libraries** from ProQuest brings book recommendations and tag browsing from the social reading site LibraryThing into the library catalog.
- **Select Reads** connects to the library system catalog and has an option for users to input favorite reading subjects that can be customized to offerings in the library system. The Select Reads online reader’s advisory tool provides customized reading selections to readers with direct links to the library’s catalog. It also connects readers to the library staff’s online staff picks and book lists that are also connected to the library’s catalog.
Appendix D: Contributors

This directory was developed by volunteers from the following libraries, companies and organizations:

Libraries

- Chicago Public Library (IL)
- Cook Memorial Public Library District (IL)
- Cuyahoga County Public Library (OH)
- Denver Public Library (CO)
- Elkhart Public Library (IN)
- Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library (IN)
- Great Neck Library (NY)
- Henrico County Public Library (VA)
- Johnson County Library (KS)
- Kansas City Public Library (KS)
- King County Library System (WA)
- Lexington Public Library (KY)
- Library of Congress (DC)
- Lindsey Wilson College (KY)
- Los Alamos County Public Library (NM)
- Mesa County Library (CO)
- Mt. Lebanon Public Library (PA)
- Omaha Public Library (NE)
- RAILS (IL)
- Santa Barbara Public Library (CA)
- Schaumburg Township District Library (IL)
- Skokie Public Library (IL)
● Sno-Isle Libraries (WA)
● Springfield-Greene County Library (MO)
● St. Charles City-County Library (MO)
● Timberland Regional Library (WA)
● Toronto Public Library (Canada)
● Twinsburg Public Library (OH)
● Vineyard Haven Public Library (MA)
● Westbank Community Library (TX)
● Williamsburg Regional Library (VA)

Companies and Organizations

● collectionHQ (Baker & Taylor)
● Gale, A Cengage Company
● LibraryReads
● LRB Library Associates, LLC
● NoveList (EBSCO)
● Overbooked
● RA for All
● Rakuten OverDrive