



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Barbershop Books and Urban Libraries Council Expand Reading Opportunities for Kids

NEW YORK / WASHINGTON, DC - Barbershop Books (BSB) and Urban Libraries Council (ULC) announce their partnership to expand reading opportunities for children in need through an innovative collaboration with four library systems: Cleveland Public Library, Columbus Metropolitan Library, Shreve Memorial Library and Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. Funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services will enable the library partners to collaborate with Barbershop Books to create child-friendly reading spaces and provide early literacy training to barbers in 40 barbershops.

Today, more than eighty-two percent (82%) of Black and Latino boys nationwide are not proficient in reading and lost instructional time due to the pandemic has made educational disparities even worse. Barbershop Books is an award-winning literacy nonprofit that inspires Black boys and other vulnerable children to read for fun through child-centered, culturally responsive, and community-based programming and content. This project with Barbershop Books and Urban Libraries Council brings together leading library systems to increase out-of-school time reading.

Many Black boys have limited access to Black male reading role models at school or at home. Less than two percent of K-12 teachers in the U.S. are Black men and a majority of Black boys are raised by single mothers.

“In many communities of color, barbershops serve as community hubs and cultural centers, where families from different socioeconomic levels interact. Black boys generally visit the barbershop once or twice a month, creating a unique opportunity to connect reading to a male-centered space and to involve men in boys’ early reading experiences,” said Alvin Irby, Barbershop Books Founder & Executive Director.

“Public libraries are uniquely positioned to support reading achievement for Black boys and other under-resourced communities,” said ULC President and CEO Brooks Rainwater. “Inequitable achievement gaps

lead to lifelong limits on workforce opportunities and overall economic mobility. We are proud to partner with Barbershop Books to build robust local library/barbershop partnerships and provide effective and community-based literacy services for underserved children.”

Libraries have played a key role in the fight against book deserts. As the United States emerges from the pandemic, libraries stand ready to partner with community-based organizations like Barbershop Books to expand reading opportunities for underserved children and families. Participating libraries in this initiative will receive support, peer learning cohort opportunities, and virtual training to connect with and establish programs in 10 local barbershops throughout 2023.

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services grant number [LG-252555-OLS-22](#).



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About Barbershop Books

Founded in 2013, Barbershop Books, Inc. is a nonprofit literacy organization based in New York City. As a trusted curator of culturally relevant children’s books, we support a variety of positive, developmentally appropriate, and fun reading experiences that inspire Black boys and other vulnerable children to identify as readers and to read for fun. Working with library systems, school districts, municipalities, and individuals, Barbershop Books empowers communities to bring transformative literacy content and programming to where kids are. To date, we have distributed over 50,000 books and engaged more than 15,000 children throughout the United States.

About the Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and impact tank of North America’s leading public library systems. ULC drives cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions. More than 170 urban member libraries in the U.S. and Canada rely on ULC to identify significant challenges facing today’s communities and provide new tools and techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, digital equity, workforce and economic development, and race and social equity.