

Community Engagement Matters: Learnings from the Barbershop Books Pilot

Best Practices for Libraries

This Best Practices one-pager is meant to accompany ULC’s July 18, 2024, webinar, “**Community Engagement Matters: Learnings from the Barbershop Books Pilot for Libraries.**” View the recording of that webinar [here](#).

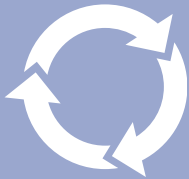
ULC’s Barbershop Books Pilot for Libraries

In partnership with Barbershop Books and supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), ULC’s Barbershop Books Pilot for Libraries was a one-year program that supported a small cohort of four libraries as they worked to provide reading opportunities to Black boys directly in barbershops in their local communities.

The four pilot libraries—Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, Cleveland Public Library, Columbus Metropolitan Library and Shreve Memorial Library—partnered with a total of 10 barbershops in their communities.



KEY TAKEAWAYS



The Barbershop Books Theory of Change:

“Early, positive, and culturally meaningful reading experiences cultivate children’s reading identity. When children identify as readers, they read for fun and perform better in reading.”



Insights for Libraries:

Community engagement programs like Barbershop Books offer rich opportunities for public libraries to expand their reach and support their communities and:

- Expand community partnerships
- Increase awareness of library services
- Further library’s organizational priorities



Key Findings:

1. Black boys are more likely to be observed reading in barbershops than doing anything else compared to shops that didn’t have the program.
2. Boys are more likely to be observed reading independently.
3. Black boys were more likely to identify as readers in participating barbershops.

MEMBER PRACTICES

Cultivating Strong Community Partnerships:

Best Practices from Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, Cleveland Public Library, Columbus Metropolitan Library and Shreve Memorial Library

The Barbershop Books program pilot libraries collaborated with local barbershops to make tangible change in their communities. The pilot improved access to books for an estimated 15,113 Black and African American males aged 5-9. **Here are some key strategies from their successful programs:**



Program Collaboration

- Strategically plan your program around the library's capacity, sustainability, funding, and how you will measure impact.
- Take the library to the barbershops through actions like promoting reading campaigns and distributing library event calendars.
- Bring the barbers to the library through actions like inviting barbers to library block parties, hosting storytimes with mobile barbershops offering free haircuts, or inviting barbers to speak on career panels for teens in the library.
- Show strong partnership by supporting barbers with their own events (like toy/book drives).



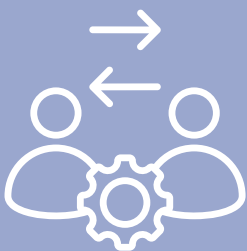
Determining Barbershops to Work With:

- Consider partnering with barbers that are within city limits, receptive to the program, already doing other community programming, appeal to kids, and/or near neighborhoods the library is trying to reach.
- Once contacted, libraries found that barbers were really receptive. Participation was found mainly by word of mouth and through barbers contacting other barbers.



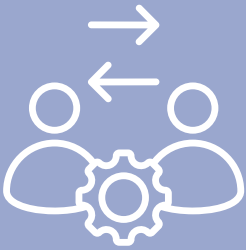
Potential Challenge: Communication

- Not all barbershops used email or phones to schedule, so often librarians had to make physical visits and have conversations. Take this challenge into consideration when planning out your timeline.



Approach:

- Barbers are already staples in their communities; the barbers and their time deserve respect!
- If visiting barbers during busy hours, make sure visits are minimally disruptive and have clear objectives ready so collecting data can be quick. For example, have a survey pulled up on iPad before even walking in the door. Have the librarians input answers so barbers can keep working.



Approach (continued):

- Stress to barbers that their participation won't take a lot of effort on their part.
 - For example, Shreve Memorial Library provided the 15-minute training video as a QR code that was dropped off at each barbershop so that barbers could watch it when they had downtime.
- Show your appreciation, even before the barbershops agree to join the program. Charlotte Mecklenburg Library's team shared gift baskets to break the ice with barbers and show that they were there to support them.



Book Curation:

- If curating the collection on your own, identify around 15 titles by asking Black boys which books they like.
 - For example, Columbus Metropolitan Library used the Barbershop Books-curated list as a jumping-off point and then tried to find books in the same genre that represented Black and brown kids in the community.
- Listening is important! You can shift your books over time based on comments and requests from the kids and community.
- Visiting the barbershop is usually a family affair, so make sure that everyone has books to read – including little girls who will want to see themselves represented in the books provided.
- Expect that some books will be damaged and permanently borrowed.

RESOURCES SHARED IN WEBINAR:

- [Barbershop Books Website and Resources](#)
- ULC White Paper: [“Community Engagement Matters: Learnings from the Barbershop Books Pilot for Libraries”](#)
- [Webinar Recording](#)

Thank You to Our Program Supporters

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

