# LITERACY AWARDS

**Library of Congress**

# 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.

The deadline for applying is 11:59PM, March 1, 2023 (ET); 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 https://www.loc.gov/programs/library-of-congress-literacy-awards/about-this-program/ 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 in any given year.

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 for Type of Nomination. If you are applying on behalf of an organization with which you are not affiliated, select Outside Nomination for Section 1. (You are affiliated with an organization if you are an employee, contractor, volunteer or board member of the organization.)

6. For Service Area in Section 2, list the cities and countries (e.g., Paris, France) where the applicant’s literacy programs exist. In some cases, an applicant might serve 20 countries but at the time of applying, their literacy program might only cover 18 countries. In this case, the applicant should only list the cities and countries for those 18 countries.

7. Complete the application form.

Short Narrative Response Questions

8. The short essay must be no more than 300 words each and should be unique from one another. Short essays that exceed 300 words will be disqualified.

9. Do not link to your website or repeat information that is on your website as reviewers will visit your website as part of their application review. Do not repeat information provided
elsewhere in the application and do not state literacy statistics, which are already known by the committee members.

Selection Criteria Statements
11. Selection criteria statements should not exceed 250 words each and should not contain information included in your short narrative essays.
12. A bulleted list of the sub-criteria is provided for your convenience. Applicants are not expected to demonstrate compliance with every sub-criterion. However, applicants are encouraged to demonstrate compliance with as many sub-items per criterion as applicable.
13. Do not refer to other websites in your narrative and do not state literacy statistics, which are already known by the committee members.

Letters of Reference
15. Two letters of reference are required. There is no word limit but they are typically no more than 1,000 words.
16. 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
17. Email the two letters of reference and the completed application form, including the three short narrative response essays, and the six selection criteria statements to literacyawards@loc.gov. The subject line should read: “Organization name, Prize category, Application” (i.e. Subject: Acme Books, International, Application). If you do not have an Employer Identification Number (EIN), requested in Section 2 of the application, please provide a letter verifying, or other proof of, your non-profit status.

Application Tips
• Observe the word count limit.
• Read the Frequently Asked Questions.
• In your short narrative essay, 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 the application 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 six 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
20 points for American and International; 15 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
15 points for American and International; 25 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
15 points for American and International; 10 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.

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 their 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.

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.

Community Responsiveness
15 points for American, International and Rubenstein

Community responsiveness is evaluated by the organization’s awareness and responses to the unique identities and social needs of the communities served. Organizations that respond to the community define, develop and practice literacy in ways that move beyond only reading, writing, and speaking skills development to emotional, intellectual, individual, societal, and cultural awareness and self-empowerment.
Frequently Asked Questions

Timeline
1. When can I submit an application?
   The application period is from January 11, 2023, to March 1, 2023. All applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m., March 1, 2023 (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 Successful Practices Honorees will be publicly announced on International Literacy Day (September 8).

Prize Categories
4. How many prize categories can I apply in?
   Each organization may apply in only one category in any given year.

5. Which prize category should I apply in?
   It depends on where your organization is based and where you do your work. Please see prize descriptions for specifics.

6. My organization is based in the United States, but works internationally; can we apply for the International Prize?
   Yes. Organizations based in the United States that work internationally may apply for the International Prize.

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 they feel that the organization 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. Reference letters must be signed.

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,”
Short Narrative Response Essays

11. What information should the essays contain?
The short essays should respond directly to the questions presented, summarizing why the organization should be considered for the prize. Given the size limitation of the short essays, applicants 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.

13. My short essay is more than 300 words, is that acceptable?
No, short essays longer than 300 words will be disqualified.

14. Do URLs add to the word count?
Please do not include URLs in your short essays.

Reapplying

15. My organization applied previously and received recognition. May we reapply?
If you are a former recipient of the David M. Rubenstein Prize you are not eligible to apply again. Organizations that have been recognized previously as a Successful Practices Honoree, American or International Prize recipient may apply again but your organization will only be considered if the project is different than the one that received the recognition previously. Be sure to indicate what is new and different. Additionally, provide relevant information under “applicant status” in the application.

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, 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, we encourage you to apply again. Some of our winners and Successful Practices Honorees applied multiple times before being recognized. The applicant pool changes each year, so you should continue to apply.
Successful Practices Honorees

19. What does it mean to be a Successful Practices Honoree?
   Each year up to 15 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. Additionally, honorees may be invited to participate in an awards celebration.

20. How are the honorees selected?
The Successful Practices Honorees are selected based on the overall evaluation of their application and their successful implementation of a specific literacy promotion practice.

21. Do I need to apply separately to be considered for “successful practices” recognition?
No. Honorees are chosen from all three prize categories.

Miscellaneous

22. 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.

23. 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.

24. Can I request feedback on my application if it is not successful?
   Due to limited personnel resources, feedback on unsuccessful applications will not be provided.

25. Do I need to provide proof of my organization’s non-profit status?
   All organizations based in the U.S. must have 501 (c)(3) status. International organizations must provide a letter verifying, or other proof of, their non-profit status.

26. Does the scale of my organization’s reach determine how competitive my application is?
   Not necessarily. The Literacy Awards Advisory Board considers the entire application package, not just the number of people served through the literacy program described in the application. To submit a competitive application, it is important for the application to clearly describe how the organization approaches and implements its literacy program using the six components of the Literacy Awards Evaluation Criteria: Innovation, Sustainability, Replicability, Evidence-Based Practice, Measurable Results, and Community Responsiveness.

27. Can an organization be awarded for a literacy program that has been carried out in the past and is no longer active?
   No. Organizations must still be active to be considered for a Literacy Award.

28. I have more questions. Whom should I contact?
   Email questions to literacyawards@loc.gov.