Public Library Readers' Advisory Survey Report

April 2021

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METHODOLOGY: *Library Journal* developed the readers' advisory survey questions in coordination with NoveList, and with input by representatives from Library Reads, ARRT, and RUSA CODES. A survey invite, with branding from all our partners, was emailed to a random list of public libraries on March 5, 2021, with a reminder on March 15. *LJ* also advertised the survey via social media and the *LJ* Xpress newsletter. Our partners also pushed the survey to their members. A drawing to win a $100 Visa® electronic gift card was offered as incentive to reply.

The survey closed on March 22, 2021 with 1,211 U.S. responses. Hosting, tabulation, and data analysis were conducted by *Library Journal*. The data in this report is unweighted.

RA SERVICES OFFERED   The most common types of RA services offered by public libraries during the survey fielding time included personalized suggestions, displays on the library website, virtual book clubs, and general staff suggestions pushed out via e-newsletters, emails, and blogs. In-library displays, browsable collections, and in-person book clubs were the most likely RA services to be put on hold due to COVID-19, although nearly three-quarters of libraries were still creating in-library displays and browsable collections this past winter.

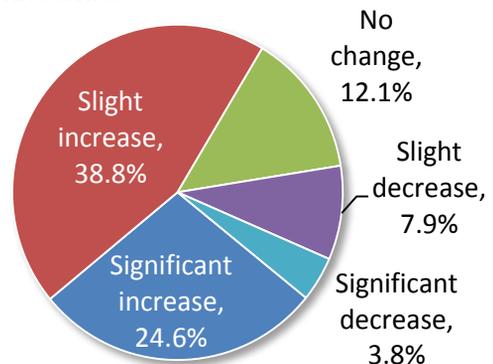**Q. What is the status of each of the following types of RA services in your library?**

	Currently offer	On hold due to COVID	Plan to add in future	Do not offer
Personalized suggestions (one-on-one conversations, #askalibrarian on social, form-based RA, etc.)	90%	3%	3%	4%
Displays on library website or elsewhere online	87%	1%	4%	8%
Book clubs: virtual	86%	1%	3%	10%
Digital staff suggestions (In newsletters, book-themed emails, library/librarian blogs or podcasts, etc.)	86%	0%	5%	9%
Displays in the library	73%	25%	0%	1%
Browsable collections (shelf talkers, collections broken up by genre, face-out shelving, etc.)	72%	20%	3%	5%
Catalog enrichment (patron ratings, read-alike suggestions in the catalog, etc.)	66%	1%	6%	26%
Printed staff suggestions (bookmarks, booklists, etc.)	55%	17%	8%	20%
Book clubs: in-person	8%	87%	1%	4%

CHANGE IN DEMAND FOR RA

A quarter of respondents say that demand for RA services increased *significantly* since the pandemic began, with another 39 percent saying it has increased *slightly*.

60% **feel that RA is 'very important' to the library's mission.**

Q. Since the pandemic started, has your library experienced a change in demand for RA services?

Pie chart: Slight increase, 38.8%; No change, 12.1%; Slight decrease, 7.9%; Significant decrease, 3.8%; Significant increase, 24.6%

EXPANDED RA SERVICES   The most common RA service added in the last year was curbside service, added by 86 percent of libraries. Over half of libraries added virtual programs as a new service in the last year, and another 24 percent expanded existing virtual programming. Book bundles/grab-and-go book bags were added by half of libraries in the last year. Eighteen percent were already offering book bundles, and nearly a third (30%) still does not offer them.

Q. Has your library added or expanded any of the following RA services in the last year?

	Added as new service	Expanded existing service	Maintained existing service	Reduced Service	Do not offer
Curbside service	86%	4%	2%	1%	7%
Virtual programs (author visits, book clubs, etc.)	57%	24%	11%	4%	5%
Book bundles/Grab and Go Book Bags	50%	9%	9%	2%	30%
Personal shopper RA/Individually curated book bundles	43%	12%	9%	1%	35%
Recorded video book talks	35%	14%	6%	1%	44%
Form-based RA	31%	12%	25%	1%	31%
Chat RA	15%	7%	21%	1%	56%
RA via social media	11%	26%	31%	2%	31%
Browsable resources on website/catalog	8%	26%	60%	0%	6%
Phone RA	5%	14%	61%	1%	19%

RA FOR MEDIA   Sixty-four percent of libraries officially provide RA services for audiobooks, 44 percent for movies, 36 percent for TV shows, and 25 percent for music. Only 7 percent make RA for podcasts or video games part of their regular service, and over half of libraries never provide RA for either of these, not even informally.

Q. Does your library provide RA for the following types of media?

	Yes, part of our official service	Informal conversations only	No RA service for this
Audiobooks	64%	33%	3%
Movies	44%	49%	7%
TV Shows	36%	53%	11%
Music	25%	50%	25%
Podcasts	7%	42%	51%
Video Games	7%	38%	55%

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MOST POPULAR RA CONTACT METHODS

Sixty percent of libraries name in-person as the top method used by patrons to receive personalized RA suggestions. Form-based and phone RA were the next most popular methods.

Q. Please rank the most common contact method used by patrons to receive personalized RA suggestions. Ranked #1.

Method	Percent
In-person	60%
Form-based RA	18%
Phone	16%
Email	3%
Social media/#askalibrarian	1%
Virtual meeting (via Zoom, etc.)	1%
Chat on library website	0%
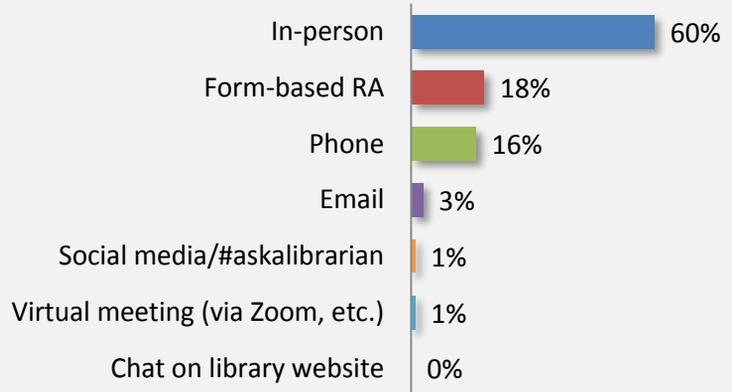
RA VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

Eighty-nine percent of libraries conduct RA via social media. The social media channels used most frequently for RA are Facebook and Instagram. Three-quarters of libraries use multiple social media channels.

Q. Which social media channels does your library use to offer readers' advisory service? Check all that apply.

Channel	Percent
facebook	83%
Instagram	59%
twitter	36%
You Tube	36%
goodreads	16%
Pinterest	12%
DISCORD	4%
TikTok	3%
No RA via social media	11%

ROVING READERS' ADVISORY

Forty-two percent of libraries offer roving readers' advisory services when they are open to the public.

PROMOTION OF RA SERVICES

Seventy-eight percent of libraries specifically promote RA services to their communities.

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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY IN RA SUGGESTIONS Only 13 percent report that their library has formal guidelines to ensure that RA suggestions are diverse, equitable, and inclusive, but 66 percent of respondents say they consider inclusivity independently. Twenty-one percent have no formal guidelines and do not monitor the inclusivity of their suggestions.

Q. Are formal guidelines in place for ensuring that RA suggestions are diverse, equitable, and inclusive?

Not formal, but do this on my own, 66%
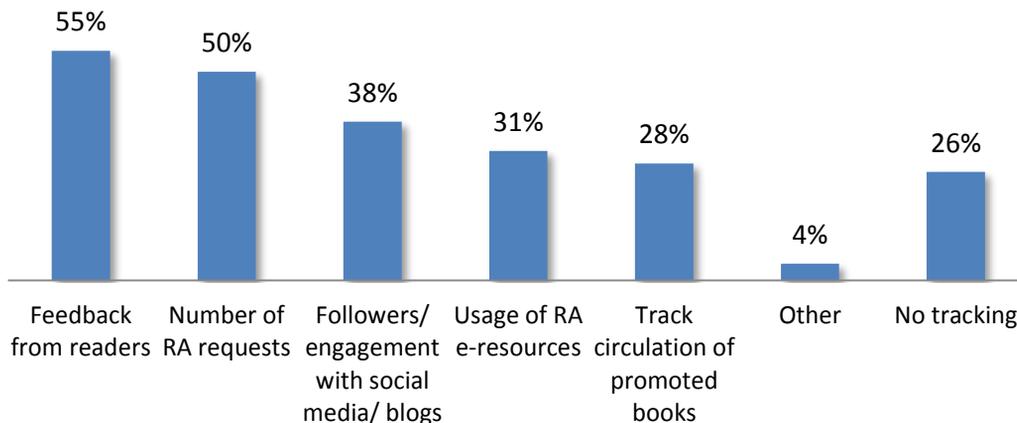No, 21%
Yes, 13%
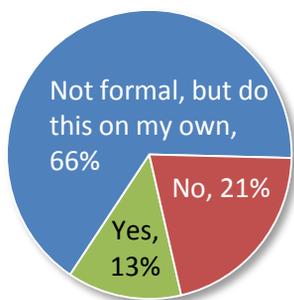
DIVERSITY AUDIT OF COLLECTION
Twenty percent of libraries have at one time conducted a diversity audit of their collection and 28 percent say they are planning to conduct a diversity audit in the future. A third of the sample was unsure whether their library has audited their collection for diversity and inclusion.

MEASURING RA EFFECTIVENESS Fifty-five percent of libraries rely on feedback from patrons to measure the effectiveness of their reader suggestions. Half of respondents track the number of RA requests they receive, and just over a third keep tabs on engagement with library social media/podcasts/blogs. Tracking the usage of RA e-resources and promoted book circulation is done by less than a third. A quarter of libraries do not track RA effectiveness at all.

Q. How does your library measure the effectiveness of its RA efforts? Check all that apply.

55%	50%	38%	31%	28%	4%	26%
Feedback from readers	Number of RA requests	Followers/ engagement with social media/ blogs	Usage of RA e-resources	Track circulation of promoted books	Other	No tracking

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RA STAFF　　The majority of respondents (82%) say that <u>all</u> staff members provide RA services in their library. Nineteen percent employ at least one dedicated readers' advisory librarian, and 13 percent rely on the expertise of select staff members/subject specialists.

Q. Who is responsible for providing readers' advisory at your library? Check all that apply.

All staff provide some level of readers' advisory assistance	82%
Dedicated readers' advisory librarian(s)	19%
Select staff members/subject specialists	13%
Other	3%
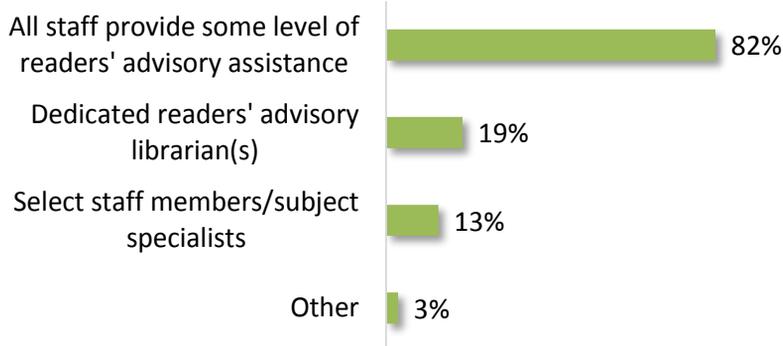
CONFIDENCE IN MATERIALS SUGGESTIONS　　Of the survey respondents who conduct RA, 87 percent feel 'very confident' or 'confident' when providing RA to adults, but less than half are similarly confident providing RA for teens or children.

Q. How confident are you in providing RA services to the following age groups?

	Confident	Very Confident
Adults		87%
Teens		45%
Children		40%

■ Confident　■ Very Confident
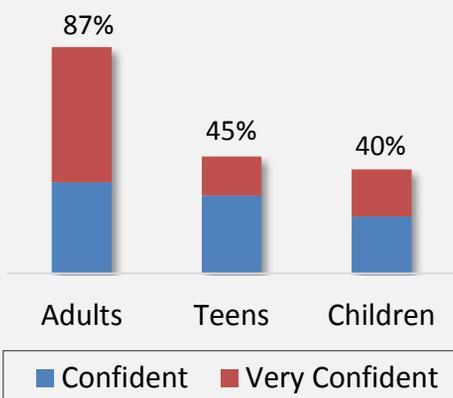
RA CHALLENGES　　When doing RA, respondents say that their biggest challenge is working with genres/authors they are unfamiliar with, ranked as #1 by 44%. The next two biggest challenges (tied at 18%) are finding the time necessary to provide thoughtful suggestions and keeping up with new titles.

Q. Please rank your biggest challenge when providing RA services. Ranked #1.	
Working with genres/authors I am unfamiliar with	44%
Time necessary to give thoughtful suggestions	18%
Keeping up with new titles	18%
Collection availability	8%

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RA RESOURCES   Respondents most commonly keep up with book information through professional journals/media (86%), conversations with colleagues/coworkers (86%), awards lists (80%), and RA databases (73%). In an open-ended question asking respondents to name their specific go-to resources for RA, the top answers were NoveList, Goodreads, colleagues/coworkers, Google/Internet searches, Amazon, and Fantastic Fiction.
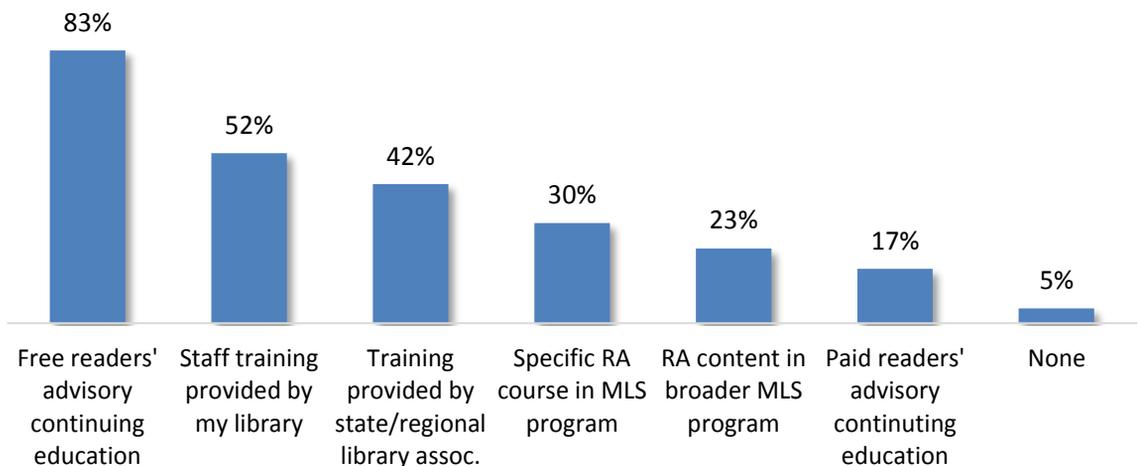
Q. What are your go-to resources when faced with an RA question you are unsure about?
Top coded answers from an open-ended question.

Resource	Percentage
NoveList/NoveList Plus	79%
Goodreads	50%
Colleague/Coworker	24%
Google search	22%
Amazon	19%
Fantastic Fiction	14%
Library catalog/OPAC	13%
Professional Journals (LJ, PW, etc.)	5%
Book Riot	5%
Lists created in-house	4%

The top reasons cited for turning to these resources include ease of use, broad book coverage, and book expertise.
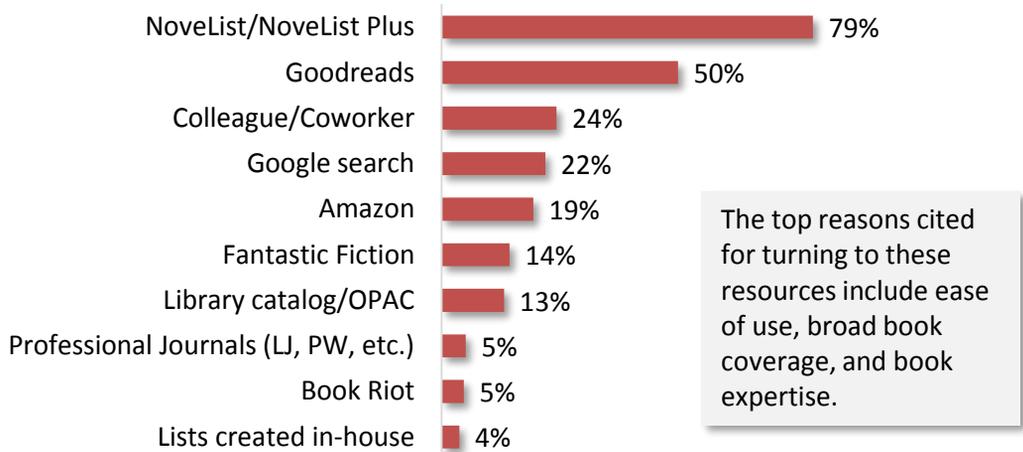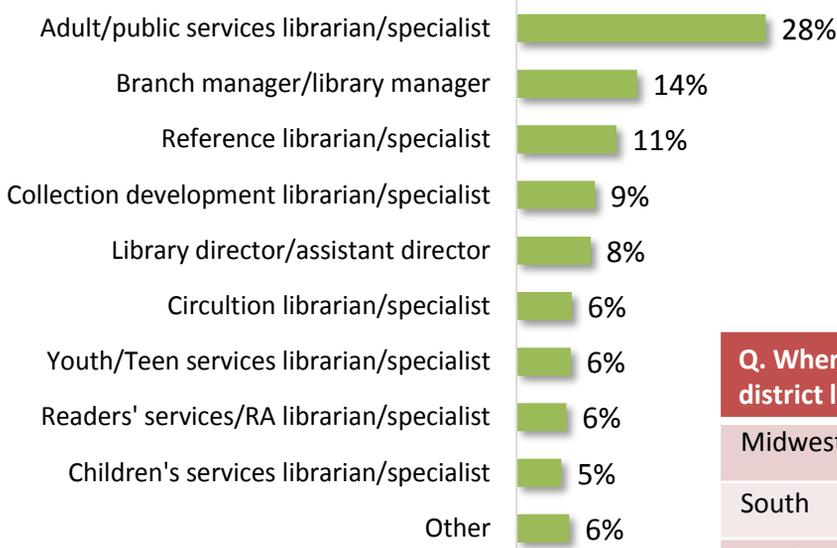
READERS' ADVISORY EDUCATION   Most respondents have taken advantage of free RA continuing education programming such as webcasts, while half or nearly half have received RA training through their library or state/library association. A third took an RA focused course in their MLIS program. Five percent of respondents with RA responsibilities say they have received no RA education.

Q. What type(s) of education in readers' advisory have you received? Check all that apply.

Category	Percentage
Free readers' advisory continuing education	83%
Staff training provided by my library	52%
Training provided by state/regional library assoc.	42%
Specific RA course in MLS program	30%
RA content in broader MLS program	23%
Paid readers' advisory continuing education	17%
None	5%

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RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Q. Which of the following best describes your job title?

Job Title	Percentage
Adult/public services librarian/specialist	28%
Branch manager/library manager	14%
Reference librarian/specialist	11%
Collection development librarian/specialist	9%
Library director/assistant director	8%
Circultion librarian/specialist	6%
Youth/Teen services librarian/specialist	6%
Readers' services/RA librarian/specialist	6%
Children's services librarian/specialist	5%
Other	6%

Q. Where is your library or district located? U.S. Regions

Midwest	36%
South	28%
Northeast	20%
West/Mountain	16%

Q. What is the population served by your library?

- Don't know, 5%
- Under 10,000, 10%
- 500,000 or more, 12%
- 250,000 - 499,999, 10%
- 100,000 - 249,999, 17%
- 50,000 - 99,999, 14%
- 25,000 - 49,999, 17%
- 10,000 - 24,999, 15%
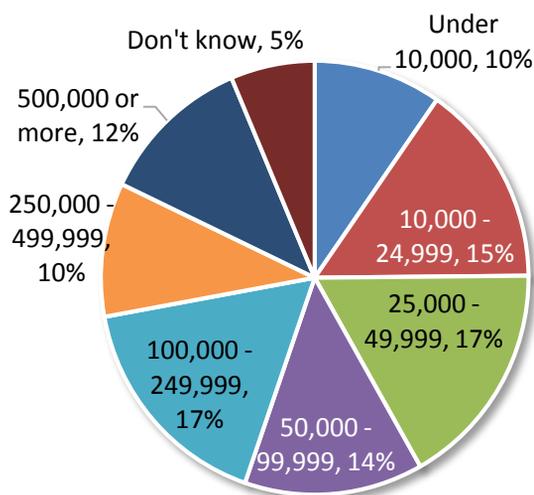
Q. How would you characterize the area your library serves?
Question accepted multiple answers.

Suburban	62%
Small town	30%
Urban	29%
Rural	22%

45% *are part of a regional library/ consortium.*

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