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## State Efforts to Promote Reading and Literary Activities in Communities

### Executive Summary

Rates of reading in the United States have been declining for at least two decades, and the steepest decline is among young adults. Fewer than half of adults read literature—poetry, plays, short stories, or novels—in their leisure time, according to a comprehensive survey by the National Endowment for the Arts. At the current rate of decline, literary reading will virtually disappear in the next half-century. Few would dispute the importance of reading for children; yet we do not emphasize the importance of literary reading in adulthood.

Reading and literary activities are important to states for two primary reasons. Strong reading habits enhance skills required in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workplace, such as high literacy and analytical thinking. An increasingly competitive economy demands a highly literate workforce, and according to many sources, the U.S. workforce is not prepared. In addition, literary readers have been shown to be more likely than nonreaders to pursue social and civic activities such as volunteering and attending sporting events. Therefore, literary reading may enhance community life and civic engagement.

Recognizing the benefits of adult reading, many state cultural agencies, governors, and governors' spouses have been actively promoting reading and literary activities for communities and individuals. By leading statewide reading initiatives, governors can promote a culture of readers, interest in literature, and understanding of the importance of lifelong learning. Offices of tourism, workforce development departments, state library systems, departments of education and human services, and state arts agencies and humanities councils can be vehicles in every state for advancing literary reading.

States can take three major approaches to promoting reading and literary activities.

- **Develop the literary infrastructure in the state** through networks, partnerships, state agency collaboration, state libraries, literary organizations, publications, and individual artist programs. State funding and governors' convening power can enable these activities.
- **Use the state's literary assets to boost interest in local literature** by recognizing and promoting native and local authors through awards, publications, broadcasts, and readings. Governors can personally recognize writers, launch publications, and encourage citizens to read.
- **Engage communities in literary activities** by offering book clubs, film series, and family reading programs at libraries, workplaces, and other community centers. State library systems, arts and humanities councils, and employers can facilitate and fund discussions and other activities.

An online version of this Issue Brief, including hyperlinks to many of its examples, is available at <<http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0602STATEREADING.pdf>>.

## Introduction

Rates of reading in the United States have been declining for at least two decades, and the steepest decline is among young adults. According to *Reading at Risk*, a report from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), fewer than half of adults read literature—poetry, plays, short stories, or novels—in their leisure time, while only 57 percent of adults read books of any kind.<sup>i</sup>

Not only are many citizens not reading, but the number of those who do read is declining. At the current rate of decline, literary reading will virtually disappear in half a century, according to NEA.<sup>ii</sup> Since 1982, the number of potential literary readers has decreased by about 20 million, and since 1992, the annual rate of decline has accelerated from 5 to 14 percent.<sup>iii</sup> The steepest decline in literary reading is in the youngest age groups; the reading rate of young adults (ages 18 to 34) has dropped 17 percent over 20 years.<sup>iv</sup>

The steepest decline in literary reading is in the youngest age groups; the reading rate of young adults (ages 18 to 34) has dropped 17 percent over 20 years.<sup>1</sup>

Few would dispute the importance of children’s reading to their academic success; yet we do not emphasize the importance of adult reading for its value in lifelong learning and cultivating informed, engaged citizens.<sup>1</sup> Strong reading habits enhance skills required in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workplace, such as high literacy and analytical thinking. An increasingly competitive economy demands a highly literate workforce, and according to many sources, the U.S. workforce is not prepared. In addition, literary readers have been shown to be more likely than nonreaders to pursue social and civic activities, such as volunteering and attending sporting events. Therefore literary reading may enhance community life and civic engagement.

Recognizing the benefits of adult reading, many state cultural agencies, governors, and governors’ spouses have been actively promoting reading and literary activities for communities and adults. By leading statewide reading initiatives, governors can promote a culture of readers, interest in literature, and understanding of the importance of lifelong learning. Offices of tourism, workforce development departments, state library systems, departments of education and human services, and state arts agencies and humanities councils can be vehicles in every state for advancing literary reading.

## The Importance of Reading and Literary Activities to States

Reading and literary activities can advance workforce development and enhance civic engagement and community identity. Literacy skills, including communications and problem-solving skills, are key for individuals to become productive members of society and the workforce. Literary activities promote analytical thinking and learning, which may improve career achievement.<sup>v</sup> Reading also has indirect learning effects, such as building vocabulary, improving communication skills, and fostering

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<sup>1</sup> This brief examines ways for states to promote reading and literary activities for families and adults, including reading of fiction or nonfiction for pleasure. The brief is not intended to address literacy activities in school-based or before- and after-school programs, or basic skills or remedial education for specific populations.

creativity. Reading activities bring literature and the arts to the forefront of community discussion, bridge social groups, and bond individuals together for an enhanced civic life.

### **Advancing Workforce Development**

A highly skilled workforce helps firms, states, and countries compete internationally and adapt to new technologies and challenges.<sup>vi</sup> The new economy demands that its workers be proficient readers, writers, problem solvers, and creative thinkers.<sup>vii</sup> According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), high-growth occupations—those in the fields of math, computer, and natural sciences—make the highest literacy and education demands, while jobs in declining industries—such as fabricators, assemblers, and inspectors—require a lower literacy level.<sup>viii</sup> In a knowledge-based economy, workers' human capital and lifelong learning abilities are increasingly important.<sup>ix</sup>

However, according to many sources, the U.S. workforce is not prepared. Only about half of our adult population is proficient at the literacy level required for high-growth occupations.<sup>x</sup> In addition, the United States ranks 15th in document and prose literacy,<sup>2</sup> according to the NCES International Adult Literacy Survey.<sup>xi</sup> Workforce skills may be improved through reading and literary thinking.

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Reading may contribute to workforce development in the same way it contributes to student achievement. The U.S. Department of Education demonstrated that high-performing readers throughout the world borrow books more frequently, read more on their own at school, have more books at home, and hold a higher reading self-image (how they feel they are doing compared to other children).<sup>xii</sup>

### **Increasing Civic Engagement**

One of the strongest findings of *Reading at Risk* was that literary readers engage in a variety of cultural, social, and civic activities at a significantly higher rate than do nonreaders. This is an important correlation for states that wish to encourage the development of vibrant communities and involved citizens. A culture of reading helps foster analytical thinking, creativity and innovation, and positive learning habits.<sup>xiii</sup> Reading exposes people to new ideas and cultures, history, and individuals who face similar challenges to their own, making them more informed citizens. Promoting literary activities can draw readers back to the library, encourage them to pass on and discuss literature with friends and family, and challenge them to think about political and moral dilemmas.

According to Robert Putnam, a noted author on civic engagement, Americans are less involved in civic and community activities than they were several decades ago.<sup>xiv</sup> Only about 16 percent of Americans are characterized as engaged in both civic and electoral activities by the Center for

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<sup>2</sup> Document literacy is the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, forms, schedules, tables and charts. Prose literacy is the knowledge and skills needed to understand information from texts such as editorials and poems.

Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement; another 16 percent are engaged only in civic activities, such as community problem-solving and volunteering.<sup>xv</sup>

Cultural participation—including literary activity—is strongly correlated with civic engagement.<sup>xvi</sup> Active, informed citizens are more likely to vote, volunteer, and participate in community activities that improve community life.<sup>xvii</sup> Literary readers are more likely than nonreaders to participate in civic life. According to NEA, they are much more likely to perform volunteer and charity work, visit art museums, and attend performing arts and sporting events.<sup>xviii</sup> Cultural activities may inspire more commitment and communication among citizens, encouraging empathy and community-building.<sup>xix</sup>

### **State Infrastructure and Resources for Promoting Reading and Literary Activities**

State arts and humanities councils, offices of tourism, workforce development departments, and child and adult education programs can coordinate a variety of resources and funding streams to promote literary activities throughout the state among all populations. Every state has a state arts agency and humanities council, as well as a “center for the book,” which provide funding and technical support for literary activity, educate the public about the arts, and recognize artistic achievement. Governors do not have to develop a new infrastructure—they can engage these agencies in their efforts to carry out literary programs and policies.

**State arts agencies** are a part of every state’s government. They broaden participation in and access to the arts, preserve and promote cultural heritage, and strengthen communities socially and economically by contributing to student learning, workforce development, and civic engagement. They received \$365.4 million in fiscal 2005. About \$294 million come from state appropriations, \$34 million from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), \$30 million from other state funds (such as transferred funds from other agencies), and \$6.6 million from foundations, corporate support, and other sources. Most agencies are overseen by a citizen advisory council, usually appointed by the governor.

In fiscal 2004, state art agencies awarded 1,079 grants totaling more than \$5 million for literature. Literature grants fund operating support, fellowships, publications, school residencies, and performances/readings. The largest number of literary grants supports fellowships, with the average literature fellowship totaling \$5,000 in fiscal 2004.<sup>xx</sup>

**State humanities councils** are independent, nonprofit organizations that support grassroots humanities programs and community-based activities. They received \$59.8 million in fiscal 2004. The National Endowment for the Humanities provided more than half these funds—\$36 million. About \$9.2 million came from state appropriations, \$6.6 million from foundations and corporate support, and the remaining \$8 million from individual donations, earned income, and other sources.

**State centers for the book** promote state literature, libraries, and literary activity, and sponsor book festivals, writing competitions, and book discussion programs. They are affiliates of the Library of Congress, but each state center is responsible for funding, staffing, and programming. The state library is expected to be closely involved with the center, either collocated or in partnership. Many centers are embedded in libraries and receive state funds. Some are in local libraries; others are independent nonprofit organizations.

Governors' offices also can activate many state departments and organizations to leverage resources to promote reading and deliver literary services to the public. Agencies can work together to engage new segments of the population, make materials and programs accessible, and promote lifelong learning through reading. In addition to state arts and humanities councils:

- **Offices of tourism** can assist with marketing activities, materials, and events.
- **Workforce development departments** can promote reading in the workplace and as a lifelong learning opportunity. Workforce Investment Act funds can be authorized for family literacy and general literary activities.
- **State libraries** often are partners or hosts for literary activities and events. Many libraries hold discussion series, host resident authors, and offer family programming.
- **Departments of education and human services** provide funding specifically for family literacy and literary activities. Funds can be used for child and adult education and classes in English as a second language. Specific funds for family literacy may be authorized by states, including funds from the No Child Left Behind Act and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families block grant.
- **Health departments** can encourage literary reading, which can foster the relationships between doctors and parents, decrease patient anxiety, and provide neurological stimulation for older patients.

### **State Policies for Promoting Reading and Literary Activities**

States that are interested in developing their workforce, improving quality of life, and engaging citizens in their communities can enact policies to support literary reading and related activities. To maximize state efforts, governors' offices can help coordinate state resources and collaborate on literary projects. States can take three major approaches to promoting reading and literary activities.

- **Develop the literary infrastructure in the state.** A literary infrastructure supports reading and literary activities in the state through networks, partnerships, libraries, literary organizations, publications, and individual programs. Individual artists depend on this support for their enrichment, projects, and networking. State resources from a variety of departments, agencies, and initiatives can be coordinated to promote implementation of statewide literary activities. State funding and governors' convening power can enable these activities.
- **Use the state's literary assets to boost interest in local literature.** The state can engage residents in reading that celebrates its cultural heritage through state arts and humanities council funding, tourism materials, and award programs. Governors can personally recognize native and local writers, launch publications, and invite citizens to read.
- **Engage communities in literary activities.** States can promote adult and family reading and discussion to make reading a more regular activity, introduce citizens to new literature, and engage citizens in community literary events. Programs can be offered for families, adults, women, or any segment of the population, often with the support of state funding at libraries and workplaces. State library systems, arts and humanities councils, and employers can facilitate and fund discussions.

Although the impacts of literary reading programs are difficult to measure, they are not expensive for states to undertake and offer several potential benefits with no known disadvantages. This issue brief reviews a number of existing programs and practices designed to increase reading, many of which are implemented on a relatively small scale.

### **Develop the Literary Infrastructure in the State**

A state's literary infrastructure supports reading and literary activities through networks, partnerships, state libraries, literary organizations, and individual support programs. Support for individual artists helps connect communities with writers, encourages the production of new works, and helps authors strengthen artistic and business skills. Literary organizations and cultural agencies play essential roles in marketing, distribution, networking, technical assistance funding, and research. For example, state arts agencies and humanities councils often help communities locate literary artists and become familiar with their work. They can also encourage schools and community centers to include authors as artists-in-residence. These literary infrastructure components work together to ensure that all citizens in a state are encouraged to read and have accessible opportunities to participate in literary activities.

States can build their infrastructure by supporting individual artists and organizations, building artist rosters and resource banks, enhancing library programming, fostering literary partnerships and networks, and coordinating state resources.

**Support individual artist fellowships and projects.** Supporting individual artists' work builds state literary capacity. Many state arts agencies fund individual artists and organizations to pursue specific projects through apprenticeships, program support, and arts education initiatives. Artists also benefit from technical assistance, such as identifying agents and publishers, developing networks among writers, and arranging reading engagements and other writing-related work.

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In 2004, 34 states awarded fellowships to individuals to recognize local artists' accomplishments and enable artists to set aside time for creating art, improving skills, and advancing publication of their work. Fellowship awards are typically several thousand dollars and often may be used in any way the artist wishes. The **Maine** Arts Commission's [fellowship program](#) is unique for two reasons. The number of fellowships is limited, but the amount per award is large (\$13,000 per fellowship, compared to the national average of \$5,000 in 2004). The commission also awards fellowships solely for creation and not interpretation.

While fellowships typically cover the artists' time and some professional development, some grant programs fund specific literary projects and the costs associated with them. The **Indiana** Arts Commission provides a large number of small [grants](#) for specific project-related costs for projects that will have a positive impact on the artists' communities. In fiscal 2006, grantees included [13 literary artists](#) in various genres including short stories, novels, interviews, and poems. The grants cover costs for literary agents, retreats, workshops, publication, and attending conferences. The **Ohio**

Arts Council offers grants to individual artists in three program areas: [Individual Excellence Awards](#), [Artists and Communities](#) and [Traditional Arts Apprenticeships](#). Ohio offers the most fellowship funding of any state arts agency; in 2004, \$143,960 was available for individuals.

Other programs are intended for literary communities and groups of writers. The **Delaware** Division on the Arts sponsors an annual poetry and fiction writers retreat for local authors. The four-day retreat features workshops and critique sessions, in addition to writing time. In 2002, the state [poet laureate](#) assisted in the selection of poets for a [retreat](#) at a state park. Many were beginners and others were “on the verge of taking themselves seriously as writers.” The retreat provided a chance to work independently and join together for workshop-critique sessions. Alumni of the retreat have organized readings; printed booklets, workshop sessions, and displays of their work; and produced marketing materials. They have published their works and led workshops at wellness communities and camps.

**Build artist directories and resource banks.** Directories and resource banks can be useful resources for many constituencies throughout the state. Writers can use directories to network, promote their books, and learn more about literary activities. Presenters, nonprofit organizations, and event planners can refer to directories when looking for writers. Library reference, community service, and acquisitions departments may find this resource valuable in their work.

Some directories are created for the purpose of locating and learning more about artists. The **Ohio** Arts Council’s [Directory of Creative Writers](#) lists approximately 500 authors of fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, drama, and literary or art criticism who live or work in Ohio. This nonjuried listing of one-page résumés supplied by creative writers is updated each year. The **Delaware** Division of the Arts produces the [Delaware Artist Roster](#), which includes almost 100 artists and their contact and booking information. Many are literary artists who are available for readings, workshops, social events, lectures, and programs for students and adults. The **South Carolina** Palmetto Book Alliance, a collaboration of the state library and the university library college program, provides a [literary map](#) of contemporary writers by county.

Other publications, such as resource banks, include more resources for writers themselves. The **Colorado** Council on the Arts provides [links](#) for publishers, literary associations, and publications for local authors. The Western States Arts Federation maintains the [WritersRegister](#) online, with resources for writers, lists of events and contests, career resources, bookstores, publishers, and a searchable database of writers.

**Enhance library programming.** Most communities have libraries that are poised to host literary activities and promote reading. Public libraries provide the only opportunity some people have to read and learn about literature. State library systems should work with humanities councils, arts agencies, and university systems to maximize resources and opportunities for audiences.

States can tap into a number of funding sources for library programming. Library funding can be used for literary events, book discussions, artist residencies, exhibitions, and other events. Many state arts agencies and humanities councils provide financial and technical assistance to libraries in selecting visiting writers to conduct readings and in negotiating contracts with them.

State humanities councils often fund discussion series at libraries, covering a scholar's or facilitator's honorarium and related costs, such as mileage and housing, and supplying marketing materials and copies of books. The **Pennsylvania** Humanities Council [provides libraries](#) with promotional materials, including posters and bookmarks; free books for participants; and funding for their discussion leader's honorarium.

Since 1983, the **Louisiana** Endowment for the Humanities' adult reading and discussion series, [RELIC: Readings in Literature & Culture](#), has enrolled nearly 80,000 readers from almost every parish. These six-week thematic series are led by university scholars, who introduce the books and lead group discussions in libraries. RELIC themes include the Louisiana Purchase: Impact and Legacy; The Newest South: The Native American World of the Southeastern United States; and Biographies of the Bayou State.

The **South Carolina** State Library and Humanities Council sponsor [Writers Reading](#), a literary-heritage funding program targeted for underserved and low-income regions of the state. Community organizations can host popular authors with only a match of in-kind contributions (volunteer and staff time, publicity efforts, etc.). Libraries or friends of library groups must initiate the projects, but other organizations, such as local arts councils, colleges, and schools, are often involved.

States can also provide funding and other support for library programs, residencies, and librarians to improve literary activity. [Arts and Libraries Community Literary Partnership Program](#) provides funding to libraries for programs that celebrate **Michigan's** literary and cultural legacy and foster the joy of reading. The program is funded by the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, the Michigan Humanities Council, and the Library of Michigan. Grants range from \$2,500 to \$5,000 and may be awarded for projects such as poetry readings or concert series based on "community reads" themes, or for the addition of an arts and culture festival tied to story-hour themes.

The **South Dakota** Council for the Arts developed [Solo Artists in Libraries](#) in the 1980s to provide grants to place writers in residence in library systems for week-long residencies throughout the state. The authors conduct activities at libraries in communities with populations of fewer than 5,000 residents. Host libraries apply directly for a \$900 grant and request up to three artists they would like to have in residence. These artists must be residents of South Dakota selected from the [arts council's artist roster](#). The host site is responsible for paying for only artist housing and travel.

**Support literary organizations.** Although fellowships and other types of grants to individuals are an important component to developing literary materials, many state arts agencies also provide grants to literary organizations that hold events, build relationships, and promote artists' work. Literary organizations—which often host literary fellowships, events, discussion series, and resource clearinghouses—serve an important role in the state literary infrastructure.

The **New York** State Council on the Arts manages a literature grant program that awarded more than \$1 million in 126 grants in 2005. The [literature program](#) encourages public appreciation of literary writing by offering funds for public readings, workshops, publications, and special projects. Grants from state arts agencies and humanities councils support organizations such as [Literary Arts](#), a statewide, nonprofit arts organization in **Oregon** dedicated to promoting the importance of language.



Literary Arts supports annual book awards and literary fellowships as well as poetry events and an extensive lecture series.

Many states financially support independent, statewide literary centers that promote reading, writing, and publishing. These centers can serve as a physical and resource hub for literary activities and classes throughout the state. Centers can answer inquiries, provide resources, host workshops, offer camps, and hold competitions. The [Log Cabin Literary Center](#) in Boise, **Idaho**, was established in 1992 to host readings and increase the profile of Idaho writers. The center offers classes, a lecture and discussion series, and exhibits of written and visual art. The [Carnegie Center for Literacy and Learning](#) in **Kentucky** hosted a series of literary events with the theme, “A New Kentucky Home: New Books by Great Writers,” to broaden the scope of Kentucky literature. Various literary artists were featured at readings, book signings, workshops, and outreach events related to the writer and the writer’s work.

**Foster state literary partnerships and networks.** States can work to establish partnerships between departments and networks, such as writers’ forums. Arts partnerships are often beneficial to convening writers, publishing anthologies, and maximizing resources.

The **South Carolina** [Literary Arts Partnership](#) pools the literary resources of the humanities council, the state library, and the arts commission to foster an appreciation of the written word, sponsor literary programming, and reduce the duplication of effort. The partnership helped found the “SC Reads” project, publish an anthology of fiction works that is now in every state library, foster a hospital-based creative writing course, and bring together artists and groups from around the state.

The **Ohio** Arts Council supports a Reading at Risk Advisory Board. Named after the 2004 National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) publication, *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, the advisory board—led by First Lady Hope Taft—has members representing a variety of organizations including Governor Bob Taft’s Ohio Reads Program, the state department of education, the state library, state arts education alliance, universities, magazines, a newspaper, booksellers, legislative aids, and the state center for the book. The advisory board is also working with Ohio Government Television to develop an on-air book club.

**Coordinate state resources.** To maximize state efforts to promote reading, governors’ offices can help coordinate state resources and collaborate on literary projects. Funding streams can be coordinated from the arts and humanities councils, state offices of tourism, workforce development departments, and child and adult education to promote literary activities throughout the state among all populations.

**Florida** Governor Jeb Bush has encouraged all agencies to make reading a priority in their activities. The state department of health’s [Read for Health Initiative](#) incorporates a combination of literacy and literary reading activities for youth and families. Many [county health departments](#) provide staff readers and story time for children in waiting rooms, children receive books in their native language, and local libraries provide packets and books. One program of note, “loving to read,” engages high-school students in reading and dramatizing literature.

**Use the State’s Literary Assets to Boost Interest in Local Literature**

Every state's arts industry includes literary writers, many of whom focus on topics of regional interest or local heritage. Showcasing local talent and inviting citizens to read the local literature are some ways for states to encourage reading. These activities can develop state identity and raise the profile of a state's distinctive cultural heritage or "brand identity" while helping to create a culture of literary appreciation among state residents.

States can recognize and promote native and local authors through residencies, awards, events, and invitations to citizens to read. Many state agencies around the country employ one or more of these programs.

**Establish artists' residencies.** Several states offer artists' residencies to showcase local talent and develop awareness of local authors' work. An artist residency supports an author so that he or she can interact with the public in venues such as libraries, schools, and community centers.

The **Idaho [Writer in Residence Award](#)** is the state's highest literary recognition and largest financial award given to a local writer. The recipient is given \$8,000 over three years and is expected to share his or her work in 12 community public readings, which can span a three-year term. Eight must be in rural communities. Governor Dirk Kempthorne recognized the [2005-2008 writer-in-residence, Kim Barnes](#), based on the recommendation of the peer-review panel organized by the state arts commission.

The [TumbleWords: Writers Rolling Around the West](#) literature program is a collaborative effort among 12 Western states and the Western States Arts Federation to bring writers into isolated or underserved communities. Writers of fiction, nonfiction, and poetry give readings and hold writing workshops in their own states, assisting local authors and children in crafting stories, poems, and other works. State arts agencies award residency funding to schools and nonprofit organizations to host artists; in some cases, the sponsoring organization is responsible for matching some or all of the grant funding. In [Nevada](#), the TumbleWords program seeks to increase the visibility of regional writers; sponsoring organizations can choose from up to 17 Nevada-based writers for a full day of residency activities.

**Give awards and recognition.** To showcase literary talent and promote cultural heritage, states can sponsor poet and writer laureates, governors' awards, and writing contests, and engage award recipients with the public to maximize their recognition and outreach. These approaches can include publicizing residencies and readings conducted by the laureate; involving the public in the nomination and selection process; and publicizing the work and activities of the laureate through Web sites, press releases, and events. One outreach example is the literary lounge held by **Delaware** Poet Laureate Fleda Brown during the 2005 [state arts summit](#), which included readings of poetry, short stories, fiction, and nonfiction by Delaware writers.

Most states have poet laureates who are appointed by the governor and charged with encouraging reading and appreciation of literature throughout the state. Many state arts agencies assist in the recipient selection and engagements. In **Indiana**, the [poet laureate](#) receives an annual \$2,500 stipend and per diem funds. The state education department provides

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support for scheduling with schools, and community organizations are encouraged to contact the poet laureate directly for scheduling.

For more than 40 years, **Alaska** has appointed a [state writer laureate](#) to this two-year position to recognize and honor all genres of writing. Alaska's current state writer laureate is poet Jerah Chadwick of the Aleutian Island of Unalaska. The state council on the arts facilitates the selection of a local writer who has demonstrated exemplary professionalism, literary excellence, and a commitment to the advancement of literary arts in Alaskan communities.

States often award individual authors for their work, some in very specific categories. In **Hawaii**, the [literature award](#) for outstanding achievement is administered by the state foundation for culture and arts. The **South Carolina fiction project** is an annual writing competition for previously unpublished short stories, sponsored by *The Charleston Post and Courier*, which publishes the winning works, and the South Carolina Arts Commission. In **Wyoming**, the state arts council gives annual [awards](#) for short stories, poetry, creative nonfiction, and nature-inspired writing.

**Invite citizens to read local literature.** States can promote their literary heritage by encouraging all citizens to read native authors and literature about the state. Local writers often write about a region's endemic places and issues, and readers are sometimes particularly interested in reading about issues related to their hometown. By reading local literature or literature about a place, citizens may feel more connected to their community and more attracted to reading.

Often local literature is promoted through read-one-book programs, which challenge residents to read a selected book and hold related events. Originally known as "If All of Seattle Read the Same Book," [Seattle Reads](#) is often credited with originating the one-book sensation across the country. Created with foundation funding, Seattle Reads is now supported by major federal and state grants. The American Library Association's [One Book One Community resource CD](#) provides communities with a step-by-step planning guide for community reading programs. The CD features digital art for promotional pieces that can be customized; best practices examples; and a toolkit that contains interactive budget, program, and marketing materials.

Some state arts councils and centers for the book select the literature for the year, and other states—such as **Oklahoma**—invite citizens to vote on a work that reflects the state history or heritage. The **California** humanities council [invited citizens to read](#) *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck and share stories of California experiences. Almost 200 libraries and many other community organizations held high-profile lectures, performances, art exhibits, films, and discussion groups. The [One Book Montana](#) program invited all Montanans to read *Letters from Yellowstone* by Diane Smith over the summer and fall in 2005. The [Montana Center for the Book](#) provides reading and discussion guides; suggestions for library, school, and book-group projects; and opportunities for readers to comment on its Web site.

Governors can be excellent exemplars of reading native and local literature. **Maine** Governor John Baldacci invited everyone in the state capital of Augusta to read *The Lobster Chronicles*, written by a lobsterwoman about life on a small island off the coast. Former Governor Mike Johanns issued a [proclamation](#) encouraging residents to read *My Antonia*, "a **Nebraska** book by a Nebraska author," as part of a read-one-book program.

**Feature native authors in print and broadcast.** States can capitalize on the work of local authors by featuring them in publications, literary maps, and broadcast, or other audio media. These compilations exhibit local literary tradition for state residents, businesses, and tourists.

Several states have published anthologies by artists living in or native to the state. *My California: Journeys by Great Writers* is an anthology of narrative travel and adventure stories by 27 California authors and journalists. *My California* is a collaborative effort between artists and a number of private-sector organizations, including a publisher, literary Web site, printer, and public relations firm. Proceeds from sales benefit the state arts council and school writing programs. **Michigan Notable Books**, an annual program of the state library, compiles a list of 20 of the previous year's best books either written by a Michigan resident or about Michigan or the Great Lakes. The list of fiction and nonfiction is affiliated with the Michigan Week festival to promote cultural heritage.

Visual depictions are another way to feature and publicize native authors. They can be used by state departments of tourism to promote local literary heritage. **New York's** literary map lists authors by county, including biographies, literary organizations and sites, bookstores, and libraries. The map is a collaborative initiative between the state arts council and a private press. The West Virginia Folklife Center has produced a state Literary Map that highlights 35 local authors who wrote between 1863 and 2003. It features a geographic location often associated with the author or his or her work and notes any awards or literary distinctions the author received. **Wyoming** has produced several literary maps, the Map of the History and Romance of Wyoming, created in 1928 by the University of Wyoming, and the Wyoming Literary Map produced in 1984 by the Wyoming Association of Teachers of English.

Radio broadcasts and CD anthologies also can promote native authors and stimulate discussion on literary works. A poet and farmer in southwest **Iowa** hosts a weekly radio poetry show called "Voices from the Prairie" to complement the yearly Iowa writers' celebration and introduce the audience to some of Iowa's great writers. The show is funded by the humanities council. In **New Hampshire**, the state humanities council and public radio offer the six-week Granite State Stories Series, which explores the work of state authors and themes such as local politics, nature and the impact of the state landscape, the state character, and insiders versus outsiders.

*In Their Own Country* is a CD anthology of entertaining visits with 14 of **West Virginia's** most celebrated writers, including the poet laureate and award-winning novelists. Public broadcasting and the state library commission collaborated to produce the CD, which includes interviews with authors and music by local performers.

### **Engage Communities in Literary Activities**

States have many means of encouraging adults and families to read and discuss what they have read. By engaging citizens in literary activities, states can help make reading a more regular activity and introduce citizens to new literature. Programs can be offered for any segment of the population, often with the support of libraries, nonprofit organizations, and employers.

**Engage adults in literary discussions.** Many organizations, such as humanities councils, libraries, and community centers, run programs to engage communities in literary discussions. Discussion

topics and lists of books are usually based on a variety of themes. Some states focus on specific themes, such as the American Dream in **Delaware** and the Earth in **New Hampshire**. Many book selections examine state culture and history, through themes such as the Great Depression, conservation, feminism, and life in colonial times.

Numerous state humanities councils provide materials, discussion questions, funding to sponsoring organizations and communities, and sometimes a scholar to lead the discussion. Funding can cover the scholar's honoraria and expenses, related administrative costs, and meeting space. Humanities councils may loan the books at no cost to the organization. Local organizations are usually responsible for organizing the logistics to present the series to the community and publicizing the events.

The **Arizona** Humanities Council (AHC) offers [community book discussions](#) to introduce adult audiences to great literature. AHC provides 20 copies of the book, a study guide, and a skilled facilitator to lead the discussion. The facilitator helps participants work through the meaningful and sometimes challenging issues that good literature evokes. The **Wisconsin** Humanities Council offers a similar program that includes mini-grants to support periodic group [book discussions](#) around the following themes: Images of Rural Life in American Literature, Lives Worth Knowing: Distant Lives, One Vision, Many Voices: Latino Literature in the United States, and The Storytellers.

Beyond book clubs and discussion groups, states have implemented creative activities to promote shared reading experiences. The **Virginia Center for the Book** offers an [online book recommendation column](#) issued monthly. [Perspectives of literature and film](#), a grantee of the **Alaska** Humanities Forum, is a monthly presentation of films based on literature followed by discussion at a public library.

The **Idaho** Humanities Council hosts a [“What are you reading?” Web site](#), which features three or four readers who write about their current books and recommendations. The **Rhode Island** Council for the Humanities collaborates with [Living Literature](#), a group of actors who take literature “from the page to the stage.” One exciting and thought-provoking presentation explores the immigrant's pursuit of happiness in defining and achieving the American Dream.

**Offer thematic discussion series.** Some states offer grants and materials for thematic discussions. Thematic discussions, typically focused on a half-dozen books, give readers the opportunity to study enduring ideas, reflect on experience, and analyze important issues.

Some discussion groups are political or philosophical in nature—exploring national values and democracy. The **Wisconsin** Humanities Council has held several discussion series, titled [“A More Perfect Union,”](#) to explore the foundation of the U.S. Constitution and the founders' mandate “to provide for the common defense.” The **Rhode Island** Council for the Humanities holds a [summer book club](#); this year's series was titled, “Pursuit of Happiness in Another America—Mexico's Patriots, Prophets, and Pleasure-seekers.” The council offered grants up to \$15,000 to nonprofit groups to provoke conversation and debate about the question: “What is the pursuit of happiness?”

The **Illinois** Humanities Council's [art of association](#) program provokes discussion of historic and contemporary writings to promote civic engagement and discuss American democracy. Funded by

The Project on Civic Reflection, the discussion series has been offered for several groups. “Building for Justice”, the most recent series, gives Americorps volunteers and staff members the opportunity to reflect on the meaning and content of their commitment to public service.

***Provide programs for specific populations.*** State agencies can provide discussion series and book clubs for specific populations, such as retirees and speakers of English as a second language.

Programs for retirees reinforce the goals of lifelong learning and community building. Mental stimulation and continuous learning are particularly valuable for older adults to avoid or delay the onset of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia. Reflection in Retirement is a **Connecticut** Humanities Council program that promotes reading and discussion of classic books and short stories by pairing reading leaders with small groups of senior citizens. The program also invites active retirees to volunteer as reading partners with frail and secluded elderly people in a variety of settings, including senior centers, nursing homes, and hospices.

Including English-as-a-second-language speaking populations in literary programs is critical to engaging the whole community in reading activities and building the workforce. The Bilingual Initiatives of the **Minnesota** Humanities Commission provide leadership, resources, and programs that help recent refugee and immigrant groups develop reading skills, while developing heritage language resources and appreciation of the humanities. Programs include the Hmong Translation Initiative, Somali Bilingual Initiative, and Initiatives for Spanish Speakers, and the publication “Tips for Reading with Your Children” in multiple languages.

**Promote literary events.** Literature festivals, public readings, and visual and literary arts exhibits are some of the ways states can introduce citizens to new literature and expose them to community activities. Many humanities councils and state centers for the book sponsor events that reach out to various cultural communities and generate significant revenue for localities. For example, the 2005 **Virginia** Humanities Council’s Festival of the Book welcomed about 7,000 overnight guests to local hotels, and 63 percent of attendees bought at least one book. The **Montana** book festival was expected to draw more than 5,000 visitors from across the state, the nation, and Europe.

Many state Centers for the Book hold book festivals, which can be arranged as celebrations of local authors, history, poet laureates, and reading groups. Festivals often include readings, lectures, panel discussions, and book signings by the authors; opportunities to meet authors; a venue for young and promising writers to showcase their work; children’s and family events; film screenings; and workshops for aspiring writers. The Great Salt Lake Book Festival in **Utah** includes poetry slams, a “rare book road show,” bookmaking workshops for children, workshops on collecting and valuing rare books, and an introduction to self-publishing.

State humanities and arts councils, library systems, cultural councils, and other private entities—such as newspapers, banks, and universities—often partner as festival sponsors. Private sponsors play an important role in supporting literary activities. The Southern Festival of Books—a free, three-day literary festival held in **Tennessee**—is sponsored by book publishers and sellers, a foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Nashville Public Library, and the Tennessee Arts Commission.

***National Book Festival Celebrates Literature, Promotes Reading in Every State***

The [National Book Festival](#) is a free, annual event organized and sponsored by the Library of Congress and hosted by first lady Laura Bush on the National Mall that features more than 80 award-winning authors, illustrators, and poets appearing in pavilions by genre. The Pavilion of the States gives attendees an opportunity to learn about the literary traditions and reading and literacy promotion projects of the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories. Representatives from throughout the nation provide information and answer questions about their states' writers, libraries, book festivals, book awards, and reading promotion activities.

Some events incorporate complementary visual and written works. Community Authors, a program supported by the **Massachusetts** arts agency, was designed to develop audiences for the visual arts and contemporary literature. The program thematically links writing to art displayed in the [Brookline Arts Center](#) Gallery, and combines its efforts with “open mike” night at a local club and a writer’s critique group.

**Create and support family reading programs.** Family reading programs bring together parents and children to learn, improve skills, discuss educational needs, and work as a family. Often supported by state humanities councils and library systems, these programs have demonstrated positive social, educational, and civic outcomes for children, parents, and families. In addition to the numerous benefits for children, parents in family literacy programs participate for longer periods of time than in any other kinds of adult literacy or literary programs. Family literacy programs have been proven to improve parents’ attitudes about education, writing ability, employment status, and job satisfaction. Participating families become more involved in school and engage in more literate activities at home.<sup>xxi</sup>

Many family programs focus on parents’ skills for reading, teaching, and book selection. [READ from the START](#) is a program of the **Missouri** Humanities Council, centered on family reading for children from infancy to age five. Group meetings with parents and caregivers focus on stimulating child development and enhancing the parent-child bond. Book selection and print and image association are discussed, as well as repetition, rhythm, and rhyme.

Literary events can be targeted for families or include some family aspect. [Share A Story](#) is a **Michigan** event for families, held at the Michigan Library and Historical Center. Popular storybook characters Father Bear and Sister Bear of the Berenstain Bears and Winnie the Pooh attend the event to greet children. In addition, many organizations geared to family health, growth, and literacy host information tables, and families find a variety of hands-on activities and resources they can use to help their young children build literacy and other important developmental skills.

Some state programs specifically promote reading with a particular parent. The **Minnesota** Humanities Commission’s [Reading with Dad Initiative](#) strives to increase fathers’ involvement in the educational lives of their children. Studies indicate that a father’s involvement in a child’s early educational experience has a significant bearing on the child’s academic life. The program features the [Reading with Dad Booklist](#), [Dads and Kids Book Clubs](#), and [Fathers Reading Every Day](#), a four-

week program offered by host organizations to emphasize the fun and importance of reading and sharing stories with children on a daily basis.

***States Work with National Family Reading Programs***

States can take advantage of several national programs through their state humanities councils. At least 15 [councils](#) operate [Motheread](#) and [Fatheread](#) programs to integrate literature-based curriculum and training into literacy, early childhood education, and family-support programs. In **California**, parents in the programs are [trained](#) to identify important issues—such as community, responsibility, and unconditional love—in books, and to use dramatic reading skills and interactive methods of reading with their children. [Prime Time Family Reading](#) is a 6- or 8-week reading, discussion, and storytelling program held at public libraries. Developed by the **Louisiana** Endowment for the Humanities, the program has been expanded to several other states. The program trains parents and children to bond together around the act of reading; teaches parents and children to read and discuss humanities topics; and helps parents and children learn how to select books and become active library users.

**Encourage workplace programs.** Many adults spend most of their waking hours in the workplace, which presents an opportunity for literary activity, discussion, and reflection. Private employers, state workforce programs, and state employers can take advantage of this opportunity to stimulate reading and discussion. Workplaces can also encourage employees to serve as volunteers and tutors for literacy and literary activities, organize the service opportunity, and provide paid or unpaid leave for these activities. Tailored for various professions and time schedules, workplace programs can focus on a range of specific concerns such as decisionmaking, cultural diversity, gender equity, or effective team building.

The **New Jersey** Council for the Humanities created [Ideas at Work](#) to offer companies and their employees a lunchtime forum for thought and dialogue on literary art. For \$500 per session, businesses and corporations can choose from the established list of speakers or work with the council to tailor a program to fit their needs. Many companies take advantage of Ideas at Work to recognize a timely topic, such as Black History Month, Native American Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, or Women’s History Month.

[Stories at Work](#), a program of the **Kansas** Humanities Council, and [Humanities at Work](#), a program of the **Wyoming** Humanities Council, both use short works of fiction in full-day seminars to stimulate discussion about professional issues and dilemmas. Humanities facilitators use short stories, novellas, and plays to stimulate discussion on issues such as risk-taking and leadership, making ethical judgments, and balancing the occasionally conflicting claims of conscience and duty.

Workplace reading programs often are tailored for specialized fields, such as the health-care profession. The **New Hampshire** Humanities Council’s [Communities of Care](#) program, an outgrowth of its “Literature and Medicine Initiative,” engaged seven communities in 2003-2005 to read literature about and discuss the human dimensions of health care. A trained facilitator led groups at hospitals and other community locations in exploring issues such as quality of care, death and dying, aging, grieving, disability, cultural differences, and wellness and prevention. The program was funded by a private foundation and health-care provider.



Literature and Medicine: Humanities at the Heart of Health Care, an award-winning reading and reflection program for doctors, nurses, receptionists, trustees, administrators, lab technicians, and physician assistants, was developed in 1997 by the **Maine** Humanities Council and has expanded to several other states. Health-care professionals in 79 hospitals and community health-care facilities have taken part in scholar-led discussions. The Maine Hospital Association has cited it as an exemplary patient-quality program, and participant outcomes include greater work satisfaction, understanding of varied cultural and socio-economic perspectives, and improved patient communications.

### **Conclusion**

Research demonstrates that literary activities have the potential to develop workforce skills, bring communities together, challenge individual thinking, and keep citizens engaged in civic life. States can offer and support reading activities through the tools and resources of state arts agencies, humanities councils, centers for books, libraries, universities, workplaces, and workforce development departments. Policies and programs that support reading—particularly if undertaken on a coordinated statewide level—can leverage these resources and talent to create a culture of reading and community action. By promoting literary reading, states can help build vibrant communities and compete in the new economy.

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## Endnotes

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