

USA Toy Library Association

# TOY LIBRARY GUIDELINES

*“Build it thoughtfully and they will play.”*



## DEDICATION

*This document is dedicated to Judith Iacuzzi for her leadership and dedication to play and toy libraries and we applaud her tenacity in not only taking us to Toy Library Land but for being our counselor every step of the way.*

*We also dedicate this document to Anthony Iacuzzi who, for years, utilized his extraordinary skills in photography, technical support and creative design to improve our conferences, publications and website.*

*Judith and Anthony have been the lifeline of the USA Toy Library Association for almost half a century! Time and again, they helped set a firm foundation and then followed up by being a positive influence on fledgling as well as veteran toy libraries around the world. Together they have, in Judith's famous words, made this organization "robuster" and we are enormously grateful for their time, effort and dedication to the USA Toy Library Association, to toys and play, and to those who will benefit from the standards set forth in this document.*

*– USA Toy Library Association Board of Directors*

## Foreward

*The **USA Toy Library Association's Toy Library Guidelines** is offered for the benefit of prospective and engaged toy librarians. It aims to build a deeper understanding of what it takes to form, build and sustain a successful toy library.*

*The first U.S. edition of this publication – called a Toy Librarian's Operator's Manual – emerged from responses to a lengthy questionnaire sent to toy librarians nationwide in the 1990s. It was revised twice before this fourth edition – and the first digital edition – was created.*

*For the approach and content of this digital publication we are grateful for guidance from the Australian Toy Library Association and the UK Toy Library Association. Their systems of ranking activities along the way – “Good-Better-Best” – as developmental steps to successful library operation and delivery streamlined and clarified the approach for U.S. readers. For the advice and direction from both countries, the USA Toy Library Association is indebted.*

*The U.S. authorship for this edition includes toy library advocates Donna Giannantonio, Nina Hillery, Judith Iacuzzi and Anthony Iacuzzi. We are grateful for their determination to launch this digital publication and hope that it is successful in helping build and strengthen toy libraries nationwide.*

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## **Toy Libraries Answer Fundamental Needs**

Why a toy library? Because it is all about play and play continues to be one of the most important avenues to healthy development in a child's life. Noted educator, Brian Sutton-Smith, who studied and advocated for play all his life, said it succinctly.

“The playing child performs a task, gains acceptance of his comrades and experiences success. It's playing out an analogy of life.”

Play stimulates the imagination, builds intelligence about how the world and other people work; it encourages cooperation and curiosity. Toy libraries are designed so that play opportunities offer the kinds of materials and personnel that encourage play in safe, thoughtful and loving environments.

Toy Libraries May Meet All or Some of the Following Objectives:

- To enrich the lives of children by ensuring that play becomes the operative activity in the space
- To provide materials, information and educational resources to parents, childcare providers, teachers, librarians and therapists
- To help parents with limited budgets find quality play materials
- To reduce waste through recycling rather than tossing
- To provide adaptive materials and play spaces for children of diverse abilities, particularly those who need and may not have access to more sophisticated and often expensive adapted toys
- To promote responsibility through sharing, borrowing and recycling
- To serve as an educational resource for students, parents, librarians, therapists and child care providers

## **Toy Libraries Share a Common Purpose**

Toy libraries reflect needs and desires of the communities served. Some operate in larger facilities like public libraries and schools – sharing space, staff and resources. Others operate independently, even as for-profit enterprises. Whatever the differences between the physical space and setup, starting a toy library needs a core group of people who are determined to form the toy library.

## **Considerations from the Start**

A toy library needs to start from a base of monetary and philosophical support. It can and often will grow if it has a solid base. Here's what to investigate and determine:

- The need, interest and support of your community. Surveys of interest groups such as preschool teachers, parents and librarians, social service professionals. Informal meetings with the same groups will help gauge how successful a toy library will be.
- Geographic Area: school district, neighborhood, city, county, etc.

- Populations: target all families – low-income families, (grandparents, too), teachers, therapists, foster parents, day care providers/centers, social service agencies like Head Start, and children with special needs, etc.
- Ages/Abilities: infants, toddlers, preschoolers, school-aged, adults with special needs.
- How will the toy library enhance existing early-childhood programs in the area?

## **Forming a Board – Important Partners**

A core group of volunteers – the people who share your interest in a viable toy library – will provide guidance and support to build a good program.

Professional backgrounds of this board could include: early childhood education, library sciences, special education, accounting, law, insurance, community involvement and leadership, and others who share your passion and who have the time to devote to the organization.

## **Why Quality Guidelines for Toy Libraries?**

Toy libraries across the United States vary because local people work together shaping them to respond to individual community needs. But despite this variation there are some common guidelines that universally apply.

Funders typically seek evidence of quality planning, goals and objectives when making decisions about grants and funding.

Whether you are just starting out or have been operating for many years, following the toy library quality guidelines will help you review your practices and ensure that your toy library is on sound footing.

## How to use these Guidelines

These guidelines can be used to assess your toy library program. It is recommended that toy libraries perform a self-assessment and use it as a basis for developing an action plan to address areas where guidelines have not been met. The toy library could decide to focus on a small number of guidelines each year or do a comprehensive review of all aspects of their operation.

### Assumptions

A number of key threads run throughout these Guidelines and form the basis upon which high quality services can be built:

- Placing children and toy library users at the heart of your service
- Recognition of and support for diversity
- Integrating toy libraries within the local community
- Supporting parents and caregivers
- Building awareness of access issues
- Valuing the unique contribution that individuals can make
- Building awareness of health and safety issues

# TOY LIBRARY QUALITY GUIDELINES



**1. Know Where You're Going**



**2. Getting Your House in Order**



**3. Building a Team**



**4. Making It Happen Day-by-Day**



**5. Supporting Your Users**

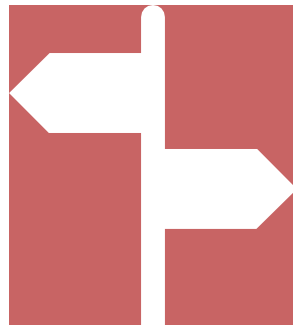


**6. Managing the Money**



**7. Seeing and Being Seen**

# Guideline 1



**Know Where You're Going**



## Guideline 1: Know Where You're Going

Developing your toy library is a journey, and like most journeys it helps to have a good idea of where you want to go. You may be at the beginning of your journey or part way through, but from time to time it is useful to reflect on where you have been, look at where you are and check to see if you are still on course. Maybe you'll want to change plans to take into account new factors, experiences, learning and demands, and set new goals. In essence this section is about 'strategy'.

Understanding the community served is necessary to determine goals and objectives.



*Knowing where you are going includes three guidelines:*

1.1	Understand the local community
1.2	Set clear goals
1.3	Make connections

## 1.1 Understand Your Local Community

It is worth taking the time to understand the community in which you operate because it means your services will be shaped to meet real needs. Relevant factors could include issues such as housing types, population growth, minority groups, languages spoken, literacy levels, employment and unemployment, skills shortages, childcare needs, health issues, transportation issues, education levels, teenage pregnancy figures and special needs.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review your local area community profile through such organizations as United Way, Head Start and Chamber of Commerce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify local issues that could impact the community's use of the toy library</li> <li>Survey and document the community to understand pertinent needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify new directions or changes for your toy library that may need developing as a result of seeing gaps in your community</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

Local United Way, local Head Start, Chamber of Commerce, Resource & Referral Agencies, Foundations, other local children's educational/library resources, NAEYC

## 1.2 Set Clear Goals

Having clear goals means that everyone can work together with a sense of common purpose. You need to let both your toy library members/patrons and stakeholders outside your organization know about your aims - what you are trying to achieve and why.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annually discuss and agree on goals for your toy library</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a vision and mission statement</li> <li>Develop a written plan with clear goals and objectives</li> <li>Make all members/patrons of your toy library aware of your vision and plans</li> <li>Regularly review the progress of your plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify external stakeholders</li> <li>Educate members/patrons and stakeholders about your goals and objectives</li> <li>Communicate your progress of your plan to members/patrons and stakeholders</li> </ul>

## 1.3 Make Connections

Knowing what other services are available in your community means that you will be able to avoid duplication as well as network and work in partnership to provide services that complement and dovetail with others. Your local chamber of commerce or government may have a directory of services.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Know which services are available in your community for families and children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make contact with appropriate children’s organizations, such as Children and Family Services, Head Start, Resources &amp; Referrals, Montessori and other preschools</li> <li>• Send regular updates on toy library activities to these services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that local services know about your toy library</li> <li>• Explore opportunities for collaboration with other local services</li> <li>• Prioritize a strong, ongoing relationship with these organizations</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- List of family and community services known to the toy library and how you have worked with each service
- Memoranda of understanding, contracts or similar documents demonstrating your relationship/collaboration
- Examples of collaborations undertaken with other local services and organizations

# Guideline 2



## Getting Your House in Order

## Guideline 2: Getting Your House in Order

Who is responsible for your toy library? Yours may be independent or part of a larger organization. Whatever governance structure is adopted you need to be clear about who is responsible for running your toy library, the legal requirements you must meet, and the appropriate policies and procedures to put in place to help everything run smoothly.

The first part of this section helps you to look at governance and legal responsibilities, including ways to minimize risk.

Throughout this section we will use the term 'committee' to mean the governing body of the toy library.



*Getting your house in order includes three guidelines:*

2.1	Understand your legal responsibilities
2.2	Carry adequate insurance
2.3	Implement policies and procedures

## 2.1 Understand Your Legal Responsibilities

If you are an independent toy library, this may be the first time that many of your committee members have had legal responsibility for an organization. If you are incorporated, such as a 501(c)(3), it is important to know and follow local, state and federal laws pertaining to your organization.

### Essential

- Provide new committee members with a copy of goals and objectives and financial plan upon joining the committee
- Know the legal responsibilities of committee members and individual office holders (if applicable)
- Identify all rules and regulations relating to your organization
- Ensure your committee has user representation

### *Useful Resources*

- Boardsource: <https://boardsource.org/about-boardsource/>
- A lawyer who specializes in not-for-profit organizations
- Authoritative legal publications

## 2.2 Carry Adequate Insurance

Every toy library faces a certain amount of risk, whether it's ensuring the health and wellbeing of its volunteers or protecting its toys and property. It is important that every toy library has enough insurance to allow it to re-establish operations. Liability insurance should be considered at the planning stages. If the library is part of an existing program, insurance coverage may already be in place. If not, insurance must be researched and planned for in the budget.

### Essential

The following forms of insurance should be considered when establishing a toy library:

1. Liability insurance covers injury. Careful selection of toys and adult supervision cannot fully prevent injuries from occurring. If a child is hurt at a toy library or hurt by a borrowed toy, the child's parents could decide to take legal action. A general liability coverage plan would protect the library from financial ruin.
2. Fire, theft and vandalism insurance protects the toy library from building, equipment and inventory losses
3. Workman's compensation insurance pays medical bills and reimburses lost pay of an employee who is hurt on the job. Most states require businesses to carry this type of insurance.

The amount of coverage recommended for any of the liability exposures will vary with the needs of the organization. Insurance rates vary by state and location. Each toy library operator should consult a local insurance professional for specific rates and coverage information. Sometimes a rider on another organization's policy is all you'll need to cover essential situations.

## 2.3 Implement Policies and Procedures

Toy libraries should have a set of policy documents, approved by the committee that guide members/patrons and staff in decision-making and day-to-day conduct. In addition, you need documentation of procedures to be followed in special circumstances. Policies and procedures should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of the toy library.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

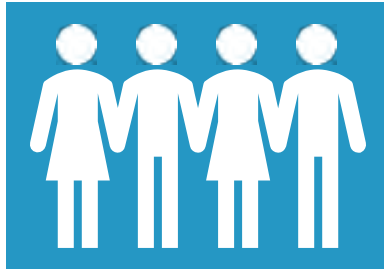
Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have some policies, e.g., OSHA requirements</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have a comprehensive suite of policies including: OSHA requirements, toy purchasing, complaints, privacy, staff performance review policies and handling social media</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Put processes in place to ensure policies are regularly reviewed</li><li>• Put processes in place to help people understand how to implement the policies</li><li>• Make relevant policies available to toy library users</li></ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- OSHA Requirements



# Guideline 3

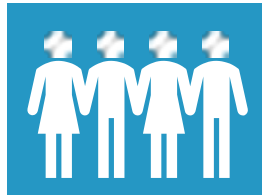


## Building a Team

## Guideline 3: Building a Team

Getting the right people on your team, keeping them and providing on-going support and development are key to success. In this section the term ‘team’ refers to paid staff, volunteers, members/patrons who help out, students on work study, as well as those participating on your committees or management group. Everyone in your organization is important!

Because there are many tasks involved in running a professional service, each person’s contribution is important, and every offer of help welcomed and valued. The person who cleans up at the end of the session is just as important as the people who check the toys in and out or manage the finances. It really is a team effort! Finding people to help and keeping them can be a challenge, and you will want to make sure that you adopt an approach that puts the safety of children and equal opportunities in the forefront.



*Building a Team includes six guidelines:*

3.1	Ensure an equal opportunity approach
3.2	Be clear on roles and responsibilities
3.3	Support paid staff and volunteers
3.4	Offer opportunities for training and development
3.5	Ensure staff know and receive their benefits
3.6	Deal swiftly with inappropriate behavior and complaints

### 3.1 Ensure an Equal Opportunity Approach

Human rights recognize the inherent value of each person, regardless of background, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect, which are shared across cultures, religions and philosophies. They are about being treated fairly, treating others fairly and having the ability to make genuine choices in our daily lives. Respect for human rights and ensuring an equal-opportunity approach are cornerstones of strong communities in which everyone can make a contribution and feel included.

#### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demonstrate open, fair and equitable processes in writing for members/patrons, volunteers and staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a committee member with an understanding of HR roles</li> <li>• Ensure the toy library is accessible to those with disabilities</li> <li>• Ensure the toy library is welcoming to everyone regardless of age, gender, abilities, race, sexual orientation, language or family structure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have an equal opportunity policy</li> </ul>

### 3.2 Be Clear on Roles and Responsibilities

Most toy libraries rely on volunteers to perform operational and management activities. To make the most of volunteers' time it is important to ensure clarity about responsibilities.

#### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committee members have defined roles</li> <li>• Staff have written job descriptions and are clear in their roles and know where to go for help and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key committee members, including office holders, have written role descriptions</li> <li>• At a minimum, the toy library director has a good understanding of board responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role descriptions are reviewed each year</li> </ul>

### 3.3 Support Paid Staff and Volunteers

Both paid staff and volunteers are key to successful community organizations and should be treated with respect and care as they are valuable assets. Staff and volunteers must be provided with ongoing support to assist them to work productively and feel satisfied with their efforts.

#### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paid staff and volunteers know where to go for help and support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paid staff have regular performance reviews</li> <li>• Discussions are held within the committee on how to support staff and volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a volunteer policy</li> <li>• Document volunteer roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>

### 3.4 Offer Opportunities for Training and Development

Staff and volunteer training and development activities not only improve an individual’s capabilities but also help your toy library grow and develop. Spending time thinking about how your team’s personal aspirations can be met through their toy library work will keep them challenged and engaged.

#### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development is offered to staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a training and development budget</li> <li>• At least one person from the toy library attends a USATLA training event (including online webinars) each year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paid staff have a training and development plan in place based on results of performance reviews</li> <li>• Development opportunities for volunteers are identified</li> </ul>

### 3.5 Staff Know and Receive Their Benefits

There are written rules about employee benefits such as what hours they work, how often they have to have a break and their leave benefits.

#### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff have a written contract</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A designated person on the committee is in charge of overseeing the employment arrangement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee hours, wages and benefits are tracked in easily accessible software</li> </ul>

### 3.6 Dealing with Inappropriate Behavior and Complaints

Inappropriate behavior comes in many forms – it is defined as any behavior that creates or may create a risk to a person’s health, safety and well-being. Examples of unacceptable behaviors include but are not limited to bullying, verbal (or written) abuse, emotional, psychological or physical violence or abuse, coercion, harassment and/or discrimination, aggressive/abusive behavior, unreasonable demands and undue persistence, and disruptive behavior.

A governing body must ensure an environment that is free of inappropriate conduct, while staff, volunteers and members/patrons are held accountable for their own conduct.

#### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A written code of conduct is in place</li> <li>• Unacceptable behavior is addressed and the person is spoken to</li> <li>• A procedure is established for complaints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Someone is assigned the role of dealing with unacceptable behavior and complaints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complaints procedure and system for dealing with unacceptable behavior are reviewed and refined periodically</li> </ul>

# Guideline 4



**Making It Happen  
Day-to-Day**

## Guideline 4: Making It Happen Day-to-Day

Here we look at some everyday matters involved in running a toy library. We cover locations and toys, both are of equal importance. 'Locations' means wherever you run your service. Your toy library might have the best toys for miles around but if people can't get to you then your service will never reach its potential or its customers! If you've got a great location but poor or poorly presented toys, people will be frustrated and not use your service.

This section invites you to take a fresh look at things. Take a good look at your locations and if they are meeting your current needs. If you are not attracting enough members/patrons, opening hours or location could be a factor.

Toy storage methods and display set-up are important. Materials that are well organized help to maintain an attractive center and encourage members/patrons to take borrowed materials. Storage and display can be accomplished in a variety of creative ways depending upon your budget.



*Making It Happen Day-to-Day includes seven guidelines:*

4.1	Have adequate, accessible space
4.2	Select quality toys for your collection
4.3	Keep toys clean, safe and well-displayed
4.4	Inform members/patrons on toy availability and suitability
4.5	Protect the privacy of members/patrons
4.6	Help members/patrons understand how your toy library works
4.7	Keep track of members/patrons and protect inventory

## 4.1 Have Adequate, Accessible Space

Finding suitable space can be a challenge for toy libraries. With persistence and creativity, securing a good space is possible and can transform your service. Consider shared-space and non-traditional venues; for example, a jail, church basement, van, etc.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular use of an adequate space and accessible locations</li> <li>• Opening hours are regular and well-advertised</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A secure lease/contract for use of an adequate space</li> <li>• Location provides enough room for safe display and storage</li> <li>• Parking is available close by</li> <li>• Toy library is accessible by public transportation</li> <li>• All facilities are wheelchair accessible</li> <li>• Baby change facilities and restrooms are provided</li> <li>• Hours of operation conform to members/patrons preferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space for play is provided</li> <li>• Space provides opportunities for families to socialize</li> <li>• Locations are totally accessible for all members/patrons and potential volunteers</li> <li>• Hours of operation complement other local family services</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- [www.usatla.org](http://www.usatla.org) & Facebook



## 4.2. Select Quality Toys for Your Collection

Most likely toys will be your biggest expense and largest asset. At a minimum they must be safe and durable. Updating your collection with high quality, engaging toys that let the child determine the play activity will keep members/patrons interested and attract new members/patrons.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Someone oversees the toy buying process</li> <li>Toy buyer only buys toys that meet the Consumer Product Safety Commission guidelines</li> <li>Toy buyer understands any insurance restrictions and additional requirements for specific types of toys</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toys should be developmentally appropriate, fun, durable, safe, cleanable and age appropriate</li> <li>Gaps in inventory are regularly identified, and toys are acquired to replenish</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toy buying criteria are documented and followed to ensure quality and relevant purchases</li> <li>Toy buyer has received training in what makes a quality toy and the best toys for different developmental stages</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- [usatla.org](http://usatla.org)
- [www.toyportfolio.com](http://www.toyportfolio.com)
- NAEYC - [naeyc.org](http://naeyc.org)
- Family Place Libraries - [familyplacelibraries.org](http://familyplacelibraries.org)

## 4.3 Keep Toys Clean, Safe and Well Displayed

Updating your packaging and toy display can invigorate your toy library. No one wants to borrow unclean or damaged toys!

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toys are regularly checked for cleanliness and damage</li> <li>• All staff, toy buyers, repairers, and those in charge read and understand the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) guidelines and postings</li> <li>• Members/patrons can easily see what toys are available</li> <li>• Toys are clearly labeled, including safety warnings</li> <li>• Storage space and display units are safe and secure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All toys are checked after borrowing</li> <li>• Members/patrons are advised on the preferred cleaning methods for each type of toy</li> <li>• Damaged toys are removed from circulation until they are repaired and meet CPSC toy safety guidelines</li> <li>• The packaging is attractive, sturdy and safe</li> <li>• Items are easy to handle and carry or transport home</li> <li>• Displays are attractive, inviting and easy to access</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and safety policy includes provision for the cleanliness of toys</li> <li>• Resources are provided for members/patrons to clean their toys in the toy library</li> <li>• Toys are displayed in clearly labeled areas for patron's convenience</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- [usatla.org](http://usatla.org)
- CPSC Guidelines
- [www.toyassociation.org](http://www.toyassociation.org)

## 4.4 Inform Members/Patrons on Toy Availability and Suitability

Online toy library systems have made it easy for members/patrons to view and browse your toy collection. Members/patrons will benefit from the support of trained staff/volunteers in selecting toys.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toys are categorized in a logical and accessible system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members/patrons are made aware of the suitability of toys for different age ranges or abilities through labeling and/or signage</li> <li>• Members/patrons are supported in choosing appropriate toys</li> <li>• Catalog of toys is available on your website or via picture album or “open shelving”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online catalog includes photos of toys</li> <li>• Staff and/or volunteers have training on suitability of toys for different ages and stages</li> <li>• Staff and volunteers know their members/patrons well enough to help them select appropriate toys</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- [usatla.org](http://usatla.org)
- Oppenheim Portfolio
- CPSC Guidelines
- [www.toyassociation.org](http://www.toyassociation.org)

## 4.5. Protect the Privacy of Members/Patrons

Most toy libraries collect information of a private nature. It is important that this information is securely stored and appropriately disposed of.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collected patron data is kept secure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Records are disposed of sensitively</li> <li>Sensitive information is kept secure and is not made available to members/patrons (e.g. when volunteering at the toy library)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Written policies regarding data collection and retention are created and followed</li> </ul>

## 4.6 Help Members/Patrons Understand How Your Toy Library Works

First-time members/patrons will not know how your toy library operates and the responsibilities of membership. So that they get the most out of your toy library you will need to spend the time explaining the operation and answering questions.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New members/patrons are given a comprehensive introduction to the toy library</li> <li>Relevant policies on joining, including volunteer requirements and fees, are explained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome email covering the basics is sent to all new members/patrons</li> <li>Information on toy library operations is available on your website or in printed materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular communication with all members/patrons is undertaken, both electronically and in the toy library</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- USATLA Headquarters

## 4.7 Keep Track of Members/Patrons and Protect Inventory

Systems are now available that make it easy for the toy library and its members/patrons to track members/patrons and toy borrowing. Smart use of these systems will save time and ensure effective management of your toy inventory.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A tracking system for members/patrons and inventory is in place</li><li>• Adequate insurance is in place</li><li>• All toys are checked out each time they leave the toy library</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A reliable toy library software system is in place</li><li>• Toy library system can produce reports useful for managing the toy library</li><li>• Members/patrons are informed when toys are due to be returned</li><li>• Identification of missing toys is recorded</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Members/patrons can 'self-serve' via an online member site (e.g. renew toys, pay membership, select volunteer session times)</li><li>• System is backed up regularly</li><li>• Procedures are in place for toys that are not returned</li></ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- [www.lendengine.com](http://www.lendengine.com)

# Guideline 5



## Supporting Your Members/Patrons

## Guideline 5: Supporting Your Members/Patrons

Building caring, nurturing relationships with the adults who use your service, as well as demonstrating your commitment and respect for children are good practices. Providing quality, open-ended toys and encouraging enjoyable interactions between adults and the children in their care will strengthen relationships in the toy library and encourage all-around well-being.

In this section you are invited to look at ways to build relationships so that children, parents and other members/patrons feel valued and respected and their needs understood. You are asked to consider the face-to-face interaction between people involved in running your toy library and your members/patrons, and the impact this interaction may have on the success of your program. You are also invited to consider various types of support that can be provided and the benefits to all involved.



*Supporting your members/patrons includes four guidelines*

5.1	Provide services that respond to community needs
5.2	Encourage members/patrons to play
5.3	Support members/patrons and empower children
5.4	Encourage patron involvement and volunteering

## 5.1 Provide Services That Respond to Community Needs

Communities change, and sometimes rapidly. It is important that toy libraries work to understand the needs of their local families and are proactive in asking for members/patrons' feedback. Some groups in your community will openly communicate their needs, while others will require more work on the part of the toy library staff.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimal barriers are imposed to any community member joining the toy library</li> <li>• Feedback is welcome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works hard to make all community members/patrons feel welcome</li> <li>• Opinions of members/patrons are encouraged and used to inform changes to the service</li> <li>• Members/Patrons provide input into the toy collection</li> <li>• Members/Patrons are encouraged to become part of the committee/management team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Membership reflects the diversity of the community</li> <li>• Materials are offered in languages other than English</li> <li>• Events hosted by the toy library are well attended by the community</li> <li>• Members/Patrons' opinions are sought in surveys that are analyzed by staff and fed back to the community</li> <li>• Staff and volunteers are trained to understand the diversity of member needs</li> <li>• Toys and other resources reflect the cultural diversity of the community</li> <li>• Collection includes toys that serve members/patrons with special needs</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- Survey Monkey



## 5.2 Encourage Members/Patrons to Play

The right to play is so important that it is so published in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31). Young children learn through play with the help of quality toys. Toy libraries have an important role in encouraging families to play together and in diverse ways.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands why play is important, particularly for children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toys are purchased based on their play value</li> <li>• Members/Patrons are encouraged to discuss the importance of play with staff and others</li> <li>• All kinds of play, including outdoor play, free play and play without toys is encouraged</li> <li>• Ideas to encourage families to play more are provided</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff and volunteers have studied play and early childhood development</li> <li>• Events hosted by the toy library demonstrate a broad range of types of play</li> <li>• Members/Patrons are educated on 'ages and stages' – appropriate play based on a child's development</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- PLAY by Dr. Stuart Brown, National Institute for Play
- How Children Acquire “Academic” Skills Without Formal Instruction, by Peter Gray, Ph.D
- [www.encourageplay.com](http://www.encourageplay.com)

## 5.3 Support Members/Patrons and Empower Children

If members/patrons feel welcomed and supported by the toy library it can become an access point for engaging more deeply with the community and finding new opportunities or services.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members/patrons are treated equally</li> <li>• Toys are displayed so that children can make their own selections</li> <li>• A friendly toy librarian is available to answer questions and help members/patrons get the most out of their visit to the toy library.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents and caregivers are encouraged to let children choose toys for themselves and to respect those choices regardless of age or gender</li> <li>• Staff and volunteers are educated about and can direct members/patrons to local services</li> <li>• Toy library staff have a close relationship with maternal and child health nurses (or similar services)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The toy library serves as an entry point to help families connect with other relevant services</li> <li>• Staff and volunteers know when they should connect members/patrons with professionals and other services outside the toy library</li> </ul>

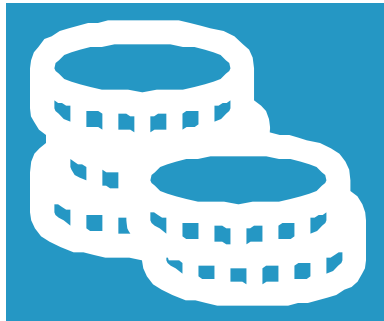
# 5.4 Encourage Patron Involvement and Volunteering

Most toy libraries could not run without volunteers and are richer for their involvement. Likewise, volunteering provides opportunities for people to make new connections, gain confidence and learn new skills, as well as make contributions to their communities.

## Benchmarking Standards

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members/patrons are encouraged to be involved in the toy library</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members/patrons of the community are encouraged to volunteer or assist in the toy library</li> <li>A variety of volunteer opportunities that conform to an individual's personal circumstances are offered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteers are involved with every aspect of running the toy library</li> <li>A volunteer induction or training program is in place</li> <li>Volunteers are regularly and formally acknowledged and thanked</li> <li>Evidence that volunteering at the toy library offers a pathway to new education or employment opportunities is visible</li> </ul>

# Guideline 6



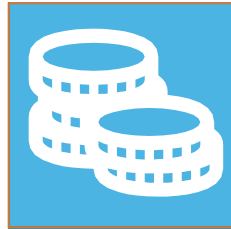
## Managing the Money

## Guideline 6: Managing the Money

All toy libraries must work hard for their money, and keeping the dollars flowing can be a challenge. Maintaining a careful eye on the budget, planning expenditures thoughtfully and securing income are all important aspects of managing your finances.

Accounting patterns and money management may differ from library to library. Whatever your choice of system, from a simple ledger on the kitchen table to sophisticated software programs, the principles are the same. You will most certainly need to be accountable and will want to show openness and transparency.

If your toy library is part of another organization or local authority, and questions arise that you are unable to answer because the responsibility lies outside your purview, you will need to ask the supervisory organization to provide you with the documents and information you need.



*Managing the Money includes four guidelines:*

6.1	Financial responsibilities are clear and safeguards are in place
6.2	A budget is prepared and followed
6.3	Fees and charges are affordable
6.4	Fundraising sources are considered during the budgeting process

## 6.1 Financial Responsibilities Are Clear and Safeguards Are in Place

Hopefully the people managing or spending your toy library's money will have the toy library's best interest at heart. Still it is important to have clear expectations and guidelines in place to protect everyone.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assign responsibilities for the finances</li><li>• Be sure bank account access and signatories are approved</li><li>• Retain and file copies of receipts for all expenditures</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Retain an experienced treasurer to manage finances</li><li>• Write and follow proper financial procedures</li><li>• Ensure that limits and procedures for petty cash, debit cards and credit cards are in place</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Put in place safeguards to protect individuals dealing with finances</li><li>• Ensure that financial accounts are reviewed and/or audited by an independent financial person annually before presenting to IRS</li></ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- [www.501c3.org/nonprofit-fundraising-basics](http://www.501c3.org/nonprofit-fundraising-basics)

## 6.2 Financial Position Is Forecast and Tracked

Whether you retain employees or not, it is critical to know that your program has the funding to cover its expenses. Ongoing funds can be a challenge.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toy library keeps accurate records of income and expenditures</li> <li>• Current cash positions and any outstanding bills are presented regularly to the budget/financial committee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toy library has software to record financial activities</li> <li>• Toy library prepares an annual budget at the start of the fiscal year</li> <li>• Variances from the budget are made clear at each management meeting</li> <li>• The treasurer submits the requisite annual financial reports to the IRS</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toy Library management understands the organization's financial position and carefully reviews financial reports presented by staff</li> <li>• Steps are taken to repair any variances to the budget</li> <li>• Toy library has means of capturing and valuing non-financial assets for complete financial reporting</li> </ul>

## 6.3 Fees and Charges Are Affordable

A family's financial situation should not prohibit them from using the toy library. Membership fees should be set at levels that are affordable for most of your community, while ensuring the toy library retains its financial viability. Discounted memberships or discreet scholarships may be considered when the need arises.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fees and charges, made and approved by a supervisory committee and/or management, are consistently applied</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fees and charges are realistic and reflective of the community</li> <li>• Affordable, discounted memberships are made available for members/patrons in need</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policies are in place to ensure that financial hardship is not a barrier to using the toy library</li> <li>• The impact of fees and charges on members/patrons is considered when financial changes are made.</li> </ul>

*Useful Resources:* Member survey feedback

## 6.4 Grant and Fundraising Sources Are Considered

Most toy libraries rely on grants and fundraising efforts to supplement membership fees, particularly to buy toys. To ensure a flow of funding from these sources will require a concerted effort and planned approach to fundraising.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

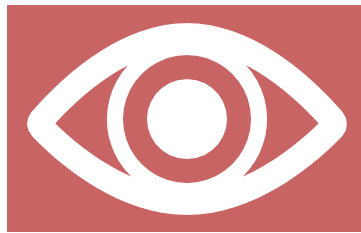
Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fundraising and grant opportunities are considered on an ad-hoc basis with an eye to a more systematic (annual, bi-annual) approach</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A grants writer or fundraiser is selected to generate non-member revenue</li><li>• Realistic targets for fundraising are established at start of fiscal year</li><li>• Grant and fundraising opportunities are sought all year long</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Funds from a variety of sources to cover budget needs are sought and hopefully secured</li></ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- National Council of Nonprofits: [www.councilofnonprofits.org](http://www.councilofnonprofits.org)
- Council on Foundations: [www.cof.org](http://www.cof.org)



# Standard 7



See and Be Seen

## Guideline 7: See and Be Seen

Marketing is an important aspect of ensuring your toy library will be sustainable. You might have the best toy library for miles around, but if people don't know about it your work is for naught. This section asks you to consider your image, promotional tactics and marketing avenues for a variety of audiences – the public, members, professionals, local businesses, funders and others. It will help you determine whether your marketing tool kit is complete and whether your marketing program is as effective as it should be. Promotional materials (both online and offline) don't have to be flashy and expensive, but they do have to carry a distinctive, clear and honest message.



*See and Be Seen includes three guidelines*

7.1	The toy library has distinctive branding
7.2	The community knows about the toy library
7.3	Professionals know of and promote your services

## 7.1 The Toy Library Has Distinct Branding

Your brand should quickly communicate your toy library’s essence. A good brand uses consistent phraseology and design, (including typography, color, word choice and logo art) that shows visually why your organization is distinctive and matters

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A name that clearly identifies the toy library and is not confused with other organizations</li> <li>• A logo that is used on all materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The message you use about your program in the public arena is clear, fresh and honest</li> <li>• A design style (typography, color schemes, word choice, logo) is adhered to in all marketing materials – published and online</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your brand is recognized and respected by the community at large</li> <li>• Your branding program is periodically reviewed and updated as needed</li> </ul>

## 7.2 The Community Knows About the Toy Library

Even if your toy library has been around a long time there will be many families that don’t know about it. Employing multiple forms of communication will help your community learn about your program.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information about your toy library is available both online and in written materials</li> <li>• Information about your toy library is up to date in the Directory of Toy Libraries on the home page at <a href="http://www.usatla.org">www.usatla.org</a></li> <li>• Your facility signage is clear, professional and visible to the public</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff and volunteers are involved in community events to help raise the profile of the toy library</li> <li>• Information on website is up-to-date and mobile phone friendly</li> <li>• Information on Google Search, social media and local directories is accurate and up-to-date</li> <li>• Contact with your toy library can be made through email, text and telephone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Toy library is well-known, well-regarded and an integral part of the community</li> <li>• Marketing plan exists and is updated regularly</li> <li>• A variety of branded materials, targeted to specific audiences, are available for distribution</li> <li>• Promotional material is disseminated in many different forms</li> <li>• Street signage directs users to the toy library</li> </ul>

## 7.3 Professionals Know of and Promote Your Services

Professionals who work with families are a great source of referrals to your toy library.

### *Benchmarking Standards*

Minimum	Recommended	Ideal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotional material is distributed to related local services, such as childcare centers, medical facilities, maternal health clinics, public libraries, etc.</li> <li>Special membership options are made available to professionals in related fields of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regular contact is made with other local services for young children, such as childcare centers, maternal health clinics, public libraries, recreational centers</li> <li>Membership options (such as financial discounts) are created for professionals in related fields working within the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Toy library leaders join early childhood professional networks and stay involved, assuming leadership positions</li> <li>Outreach to local media – television, YouTube, radio and social media – is an integral part of the marketing program</li> </ul>

### *Useful Resources*

- The Branding Journal, [www.thebrandingjournal.com](http://www.thebrandingjournal.com)

