

PRIMER

for a

Rural Community Library



Librarians of India



Table of Contents

SECTION 1

Foundational Principles and Planning

INTRODUCTION AND VISION	03
COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT	04
LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE FORMALITIES	05
SPACE: IDENTIFICATION AND ALLOCATION	05
CONSTRUCTION/RESTORATION/REPURPOSING	06

SECTION 2

Operational Framework and Sustainability

BOOK AND RESOURCE CURATION	07
TEAM: RECRUITMENT, TRAINING, AND MANAGEMENT	08
ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMING	09
BUDGETING, FUNDRAISING, AND SUSTAINABILITY	10
MONITORING AND EVALUATION	10

This primer provides a detailed outline for setting up and running a rural community library in India. The approaches and ideas suggested here are derived from our experiences, and are indicative and may vary across different contexts. We hope that this guide can help and inspire others who wish to serve their community through a library or an educational resource centre.

Section 1: Foundational Principles and Planning



Introduction

The **Right to Read** is an inalienable right of every human being. It is the means by which people empower and equip themselves within a democracy. Access to knowledge and accurate information is key to a healthy society and should not be contingent on a person's caste, class, gender, religion, disability, identity or orientation. Free, public-access, community-owned, and excellent libraries are the means for these rights to be delivered at the grassroots. In India, a rural framework of such libraries is a critically-needed vehicle for social empowerment and justice. The journey toward educational transformation often begins in places like the rural landscapes of Hardoi district, Uttar Pradesh, where the need for such resources is most acute. This primer is designed to support and guide individuals and groups in their efforts to establish these vital community hubs.

Community libraries across the world perform nodal functions of acting as a repository of knowledge as well as community building. They familiarise the community with their right to read and imbue a culture of reading for pleasure. Due to socio-economic disparities, rural and remote India is often left wanting better access to reading resources.

BROAD AIMS OF A RURAL COMMUNITY LIBRARY



Support formal learning:

Provide academic resources to learners enrolled in schools or colleges.



Host non-formal learning programs:

Offer workshops, classes, and activities that build skills not taught in a formal curriculum.



Create spaces for meaningful informal learning:

Promote a culture of reading for pleasure and lifelong learning.



Engage the community in socio-legal awareness:

Serve as a platform for civic engagement and a source of information on public health, government policies, and legal rights.

We encourage those interested in starting a library to first conduct a thorough community needs assessment to ensure these aims are rooted in the current realities and aspirations of the community you wish to serve.



Community Needs Assessment

Before identifying a space or procuring books, it is crucial to understand the community's specific needs, aspirations, and existing resources. This assessment will inform every decision, from book curation to activity planning.

METHODS OF ASSESSMENT:



Informal Interviews: Talk to community members of all ages, local teachers, village elders, and panchayat members.



Surveys: Use simple, accessible questionnaires to understand reading habits, preferred genres, educational needs, and skill gaps.



Focus Groups: Organize small, informal gatherings to discuss what a library could mean to the community.

Key Questions to Address:

- What are the educational levels and goals of the community's youth and adults?
- What are the most popular topics of interest (e.g., competitive exams, farming techniques, health)?
- What are the existing reading resources, if any?
- Are there existing community spaces that could be repurposed?

Legal and Administrative Formalities

Establishing a library requires a solid administrative foundation. This primer suggests a few key considerations:



Legal Structure: Decide on the legal form of your initiative. Options include registering as a **society, trust, or non-profit organization**. This will be crucial for opening a bank account, receiving donations, and applying for grants.



Permissions: Obtain necessary permissions from the **Panchayat** or District Administration for using land or a building. Clearly document all agreements.



Financial Management: Set up a dedicated bank account for the library's funds and maintain transparent records of all income and expenses.



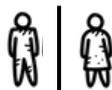
Space: Identification and Allocation

The next task is to identify or procure a suitable space. This is a critical step that requires thoughtful consideration of the community's geography and daily life. The Panchayat or District Administration is a good starting point if no other resource persons are available.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:



Accessibility: The location should be easily accessible to most of the village and surrounding communities. A public place, preferably in the center of the village, is ideal.



Utilities: Ensure access to potable water, existing washrooms, and a reliable electricity connection. These are non-negotiable for maintaining a functional and comfortable space.



Community Buy-in: Involve the community in the decision-making process for the location to foster a sense of ownership.

Construction/Restoration/Repurposing

Whether you are building from scratch or repurposing an existing structure, the design of the space should be welcoming, functional, and conducive to learning.

DESIGN PRINCIPLES



Dedicated Zones:

As far as possible, keep separate rooms or areas for silent reading, group discussions, and children's activities.



Natural Elements:

The library should be **well-lit with natural light** and well-ventilated to suit the general weather conditions of the region.



Accessibility:

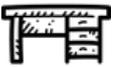
Incorporate ramps or other features to ensure the space is accessible to individuals with disabilities.



Aesthetics:

Paint the library in bright and welcoming colors. One of the walls could feature aspirational texts such as the **Preamble to the Constitution of India** or a quote from a respected figure.

FURNISHINGS



Procure **basic furniture** like tables, chairs, desks, and bookshelves. **Source them locally** as far as possible to support the community's economy.



Section 2: Operational Framework and Sustainability



Book and Resource Curation

Populating the library with books is an ongoing process that begins with a thoughtful selection based on the community's needs.



CURATING THE COLLECTION

- The collection should be **diverse** and include books for all ages and reading levels.
- Balance academic materials with books for **reading for pleasure** (fiction, biographies, picture books).
- Include books on skill-building, local history, culture, and social issues.



ACQUISITION STRATEGIES

- **Purchasing:** Create a detailed list of books and magazines and purchase from local shops, book fairs, and online stores.
- **Donations:** Organize **book donation drives** with the help of organizations like Pratham. You can also create an Amazon Wishlist.
- **Discounts:** Reach out to organizations like the **Free Libraries Network (FLN)** for discounted rates.



DIGITAL RESOURCES

- Procure a good personal computer with a webcam, router, and speakers.
- Ensure robust internet connectivity to facilitate online interactions, e-learning, and access to digital libraries.

Team: Recruitment, Training, and Management

The team is the heart of the library. It requires a dedicated on-field team and a supportive back-end team to succeed.



ON-FIELD TEAM

- This team includes librarians and administrative/maintenance staff. They are responsible for day-to-day operations.
- Recruit staff from the local community, as they will have a better connection with the readers.
- Provide training for librarians, emphasizing their role as book curators, educators, and community mobilizers, not just clerical staff. FLN can provide training in best practices.



BACK-END TEAM

- This core group plans activities, promotes the library on social media, and provides necessary support.
- They are crucial for fundraising, building a network of supporters, and organizing online events like volunteer teaching programs and expert lectures.



STUDENT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Establish a council of active student members. This fosters a sense of ownership and initiative, giving young readers a say in the library's daily affairs.





Activities and Programming

A library is more than a repository of books; it is a center for vibrant community activities.



READING PROGRAMS

- **Read Aloud:** An effective activity for children to build vocabulary and comprehension.
- **Book Clubs:** Organize groups for readers to discuss a shared book or article.
- **Author Visits:** Invite authors to speak with readers, making reading and writing a dynamic process.
- **Quiz Competitions:** Engage students with reading-list based quizzes.



NON-FORMAL LEARNING PROGRAMMES

- Leverage e-learning resources for classes in arts, dance, and foundational literacy.
- Organize workshops on **legal literacy, financial literacy, and public health**.
- Screen educational movies with community discussions afterward.

Budgeting, Fundraising, and Sustainability

A sustainable financial model is essential for long-term success.



RECURRING EXPENSES

Plan for monthly operational costs, including:

- Honorarium/Stipend for staff
- Housekeeping
- Electricity & water bills
- Internet, newspapers, magazines
- Stationery and event costs



FUNDRAISING AND OUTREACH

- **Community Contributions:** Encourage small, regular contributions from the community to foster a sense of ownership.
- **Grants and Foundations:** Research and apply for grants from philanthropic organizations that support education and literacy.
- **Individual Benefactors:** Create a dedicated group of patrons and supporters. Use social media to amplify the library's requirements and share its impact.
- **Monthly Reports:** Maintain detailed records of visitors, activities, and expenses. Share a monthly report with benefactors and supporters to keep them engaged and informed.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure the library remains effective and relevant, it's important to track its impact.



KEY METRICS

- Number of visitors and new registrations per month.
- Book circulation data.
- Attendance at activities and workshops.
- Qualitative feedback from community members and students.



REPORTING

Use this data to create a clear narrative of the library's success and challenges. This information is invaluable for securing continued funding and support



Once you get started

This document is a comprehensive guide to help you build a successful rural community library.

Team Bansa Community Library would be glad to provide up to three months of pro bono consultation. For any other information or queries related to the topics covered in this primer, please feel free to reach out to contact@arunamithleshfoundation.org