

Family Reading Partnership Strategic Plan 2022-2025

Beginning in 2020, the Family Reading Partnership Board of Directors, staff, and community partners worked through a series of exercises to determine the community needs and priorities surrounding early childhood literacy in Tompkins County, NY.

Through Appreciative Inquiry, Network Mapping, “Nine Whys” thinking, Scenario Planning, and other less formal conversations, the group was prompted to build a new mission, vision, and set of principles to guide our path forward.

New Mission Statement: Connecting families with young children to the joy of books and read-aloud experiences to expand their horizons.

New Vision Statement: All children will have a love of books and strong language skills before beginning school.

New Principles:

Family Reading Partnership believes that:

- Literacy (the ability to read, write, and communicate) is a valuable tool in advancing individual opportunity and societal growth.
- The early years, from before birth through age 5, is the most crucial time for building the foundation on which all future learning relies.
- The pre-literacy skills needed to learn to read are built through:
 - Strong and early relationship building via back-and-forth communication, read-aloud interaction, and playtime with loving caregivers.
 - Exposure to a wide variety of inclusive and diverse books that both provide representation and give children a wider view of the world.
 - Positive examples and associations with books and reading.
 - The early opportunity to hear and practice with a wealth of vocabulary and language.
 - Physical movement and play in indoor and outdoor environments.
- Equity in educational resources is crucial to ensuring that children in our community have the opportunity to learn.
- Families are best served when formal and informal social services networks work as a team to empower community members.

We strive to stay true to these principles by:

- Distributing free new and gently used books to all young children in Tompkins County.
- Carefully selecting books to be diverse and age appropriate for children at each developmental stage from before birth to age five.
- Partnering with local medical practices, childcare providers, teachers, libraries, and social service agencies to determine need and connect families to resources.

- Offering free interactive Story Walks, updated seasonally and spaced across Tompkins County.
- Building special programs that focus on low resource families and young parents in order to interrupt the cycles of poverty and educational inequity.
- Hosting events and developing resources that encourage child/caregiver interaction with reading, music, and play.

Over the next three years the FRP team will focus on the four main themes that emerged from our strategic planning process. We have created “promises” for each of the priority areas below. We intentionally call them promises, rather than goals, because we are accountable to our community and committed to producing results.

Priority areas:

Partnership and Collaborations
 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
 Digitally Communicated Content
 Evaluation and Impact

Partnerships and Collaborations

Tompkins County, NY is a large and diverse area with a plethora of community service agencies. As early childhood literacy development awareness has grown in recent years, many organizations have begun to incorporate literacy into their work with families. Supporting families requires a holistic approach with a circle of resources available to parents and young children. Partnership is a necessity to reach our goals and best utilize funding opportunities. FRP needs to expand our current network and ensure that we are supporting families most efficiently without duplicating efforts.

Promise #1: Develop and Grow Relationships

What:

FRP has a need to build a stronger and wider network of partners to better serve all families in Tompkins County. There may be overlapping services that need to be consolidated and/or discontinued, better ways to reach young children and their parents, or needs that FRP is not aware of that need to be explored and acted on. The primary effort will be to get more books into the hands of families with limited access, by working with existing networks and programs run by community organizations.

How:

The first step in this process will be to complete a County-wide inventory of who is distributing books to local families. We need to know who else is doing similar work, for

what reasons, and with what outcomes, to determine potential new partners as well as consider our own program needs.

Step two will be to create a comprehensive list of our current partners as well as a list of partners with whom we should be connected. We anticipate this list to be extensive, and include local food pantries, faith communities, mutual aid networks, and others. There is also a need to strengthen relationships with some existing long-time FRP partners. A list will be created of current partners with whom renewed communication would be helpful, and staff will conduct personal outreach meetings with those identified.

Who:

The FRP staff and Board of Directors will work together to produce an inventory of agencies distributing books as well as potential partners. The Executive Director will personally reach out to suggested new partners and, with the support of the Program and Outreach Coordinator, work to respond to the needs of these partners where early childhood literacy is concerned.

When:

Work will be ongoing and begin in the Fall of 2021. Inventories and lists of agencies will be complete by July 2022, and outreach will be continuous throughout that time.

Budgetary implications:

Variable depending on outreach results. This work could lead to new or expanded program opportunities for FRP. There is strong potential that partners will request additional materials. All efforts will be made to fund any additional program material expenses through grants and sponsorships. This work will take place as a regular responsibility of the ED. Additional operational costs could include meals, mileage, or other meeting costs and printing of materials, not to exceed \$1,000/year.

Tangible Outcome:

- List of all known entities distributing books to families in Tompkins County.
- New and renewed program partners.

Promise #2: Strength in numbers

What:

FRP will explore multiple opportunities to better utilize local funding and improve services to local families including but not limited to: shared physical space, mergers and acquisitions, and expanded collaborative programming.

How:

Conversations with local early childhood leaders and family support networks have already begun around the need for more collaboration. There is a local need to centralize early childhood/family support services and share resources in order to increase effectiveness and reach. The ED will continue these individual meetings to see where common needs emerge. Staff will be encouraged to be creative with outreach efforts and to continually seek out new partnerships to support their work. FRP will continue to participate in the Early Childhood Development Collaborative, Cradle to Career, Collaborative Solutions Network, Better Together Coalition, and other groups to stay aware of current needs and projects taking place in Tompkins County and identify opportunities for combined efforts.

FRP's current physical location is detrimental to our ability to provide services, stay relevant in the community, and attract staff and volunteers. It will be a top priority to responsibly relocate our operations to a more central location, with a specific goal to ultimately be in close proximity to other early childhood family resources.

Who:

These efforts will be led by the Executive Director, with input and participation as needed from the staff and Board of Directors.

When:

Ongoing, with a goal for relocation by June of 2023.

Budgetary implications:

This work will take place as a regular responsibility of the ED. Costs could include meals, mileage, or other meeting costs and printing of materials, not to exceed \$1,000/year. The largest potential expense is an increase in monthly rent if FRP decides to relocate.

Tangible Outcomes:

- A new location for the FRP offices.
- Deeper and more collaborative relationships with community partner agencies.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Family Reading Partnerships recognizes the imperative to ensuring that our internal functions, as well as our outward work in the community, enact intentional change on issues of systemic racism, white supremacy, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, neurodiversity, and [linguistic racism](#).

Family Reading Partnership has identified areas for improvement within our organization and its programs where diversity, equity, equality, and inclusion are concerned. Over the time period covered by this plan, the following steps will be taken or explored to ensure that DEI is at the core of our work and internal functions.

Promise #1: Center Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in FRP Programs and Outreach

What:

Family Reading Partnership recognizes the imperative to ensure that our internal functions, as well as our outward work in the community, enact intentional change on issues including but not limited to systemic racism, white supremacy, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and linguistic racism.

We will create a program review and development audit process that centers DEI when designing or updating FRP literacy outreach. Current and emerging projects will all be subject to initial and annual review under the new criteria.

How:

The FRP staff will together evaluate current program guidelines and approaches, materials selection criteria, public access, and outreach methods. Using the “Reviewing Policies for Equity” questionnaire document as a starting point, and input gathered from partners and participants, our team will design our own program audit process to ensure that FRP projects are all addressing DEI issues. Each of our programs will undergo initial scrutiny and then be reviewed on an annual basis. FRP needs to be accountable and work harder to reach underserved families with materials that are designed to meet their needs. This goal will focus on outreach efforts both as a part of our core programs as well as additional approaches that are intended to increase accessibility and desired content for local families.

As a result of our strategic visioning process, several gaps in FRP’s services were identified. The outreach and programming associated with this promise will be constantly evolving and be in response to community needs. We often receive requests for specific types of books, distribution points, and audiences from local community groups, teachers, etc. One request that has been growing for years in Tompkins County is the need for more multi-lingual children’s books, and for those books to be

distributed to specific populations (No Más Lágrimas, international students, and refugee families are all among those who have expressed increased need). Another is the need for increased book distribution in isolated communities, such as rural trailer parks where transportation is often limited.

Who:

FRP staff will develop the equity audit policy, with the oversight and approval of the Board of Directors and Program Planning and Evaluation Committee. We anticipate that new emerging needs will be identified by staff, board members, volunteers, and community members. As requests are considered, FRP's Executive Director, Program and Outreach Coordinator, and Early Childhood Specialist will select and distribute materials, with the help of the Operations and Program Assistant.

When:

The equity audit design process will be complete by December 2022. Programs themselves, as well as the process, will then be reviewed annually by FRP staff to ensure adopted methods are addressing emerging issues and current community needs.

Budgetary implications:

These efforts will require attention from the staff, so project focus will be shifted to allow for time. As our staff grows in familiarity with FRP programs and volunteers are trained to conduct day to day work, more time is opened up to address emerging community needs. Materials will be an added cost, however, and new projects can only be completed if grant and sponsorship funds are secured. Some projects may also allow for pooled funding with other organizations, or collaborative grant proposals.

Tangible Outcomes:

-An equity audit process that can be applied to current and new programs to ensure inclusion in materials and methods.

Promise #2: Ensuring Structural Equity

What:

Grow Board and staff understanding and responsiveness to DEI issues and how they impact the early literacy landscape and internal policies and procedures. Update FRP methods and documents as a result of discovered inequities.

How:

Our team will first utilize the Social Justice Glossary and other resources to gain a common language and understanding. Once basic terms and concepts are understood, the team will move on to evaluation of current policies and practices that the organization uses to guide our work.

We will use the lens of the “Reviewing Policies for Equity” document, as well as other resources shared by the [National Council on Nonprofits](#), to determine whether current practices are equitable and encourage diversity and inclusion within our staff and board structures. We will conduct formal reviews of the following policies/procedures (including but not limited to): The FRP Bylaws, Board participation requirements/commitments, Board recruitment, our staff hiring and termination practices, and our staff handbook. Updated policies will be developed and then reviewed annually to ensure we are following through on our commitments.

Each committee of the Board of Directors will take responsibility for determining to DEI issues surrounding their particular work (including the above policy review) and build a plan to review/implement needed changes and areas for growth.

The staff will more primarily focus on DEI and how it affects early childhood literacy work and impact. They will complete this work as a part of DEI Promise #1, while reviewing current programs and policies. The staff will look to other early literacy projects for successful approaches and barriers faced, as well as engage with local residents and organizations to identify gaps and issues with current FRP services.

In addition, the FRP Board of Directors will develop an equity statement to be shared and prominently displayed on the FRP website and materials.

Who:

All board members will participate in this process as a regular part of full board and committee meetings. All staff will participate as a regular part of team staff meetings. Additional trainings by outside consultants may be needed for some or all of the FRP team.

When:

This work will be ongoing with a first review of each of the above policies completed by December 2022.

Budgetary implications:

Limited. As much of this work will be the responsibility of the Board of Directors, costs incurred will be slight. The work of the staff will be included in their day-to-day workload and staff meetings. Costs could include external training consultants, not to exceed \$2,000/year.

Tangible Outcomes:

- FRP policies will undergo full review and updating to grow internal equity.
- Board and staff will gain a shared language and goals for equitable practice.

Digitally Communicated Content

Digital media use among caregivers and young children has increased drastically in recent years. Based on consistent research findings, FRP has maintained that most “screen time” with children under two years old can be damaging to their brain development and holds little benefit for literacy skill development. Families are relying on digitally communicated content more and more to assist in parenting and education and FRP needs to find new and innovative ways to help families navigate the landscape and use technology to their benefit.

Promise #1: Increase parent resources related to “screen time” and young children

What:

Parents are constantly seeking out support and advice from all manner of supposed experts regarding child-rearing. FRP is uniquely qualified, after 25 years of practice and participation in the early childhood literacy arena, to offer our wealth of information with caregivers. FRP can offer concrete ideas to families to help guide their decisions around “screen time” with their young children.

How:

The beginning stages of this promise have already been completed. We began by compiling current research around digital media use with young children and infants, as well as any information we could find on how parents are using digitally communicated content to inform their own ideas around child development. The results were no surprise, but it was important to confirm that research supported our beliefs around infants and “screens.” The next step will be to survey local caregivers to determine their real-world experiences with “screens” as it relates to their parenting. The survey has been created and will soon be distributed via a variety of local online list-servs, parenting group sites, and medical partner networks. While this data will not necessarily change our beliefs around digital media use, it may inform how we approach the topic and adequately support local families as they navigate difficult scenarios.

Now that we have a basis of understanding about what we want to share with families around their children’s early literacy development as it relates to the use of “screens,” primarily, we need to find new ways to share this knowledge more readily and directly with new parents. Reaching families early is especially crucial, as media habits are difficult to change for both caregivers and children. Setting goals and providing positive role modeling early on in infancy sets the stage for the how “screens” will be a part of a person’s entire life.

We will first review, edit, and update the internally and externally produced information on the FRP website that relates to “screen time” with infants and young children. Language will be improved and updated to be more relatable and current, and the page itself easier to locate on the website. The content created for the website will then be synthesized into more concise tips and placed on rack cards, posters, and perhaps even advertising PSAs and billboards that families will interact with throughout the County.

Who:

FRP staff, with input from the Board of Directors. Research for this promise has already been completed by the Program and Outreach Coordinator and presented to the Board of Directors. The Early Childhood Specialist Consultant is currently reviewing content displayed on the FRP website and updating it to align with the new mission and vision of FRP. They will soon be coordinating with the Operations and Program Assistant to design physical materials that can be utilized to get the word out.

The Program and Outreach Coordinator, in collaboration with other staff, will produce and conduct a survey of local families and their use and opinions of technology in early childhood. Results of this survey will be used to adapt current programs to align with FRP’s mission and the realities of Tompkins County caregivers.

When:

The research review is complete, and the caregiver survey will be distributed during the winter of 2021-22. The website updates began in fall of 2021 and will be reviewed annually to include new resources and research.

The caregiver survey will be distributed in the winter of 2022, via a wide variety of direct and partner relationships. Once concluded, results will be reviewed by the staff and PP&E committee and goals set to update current programs accordingly. Any desired changes will be implemented by the end of the 2022-2023 fiscal year, and a program technology audit will be conducted annually by the staff to determine any needed updates.

Budgetary implications:

This work will be primarily carried out by the Early Childhood Specialist Consultant (ECS) at a cost of \$50 per hour. Currently, the ECS provides between 5 and 10 hours of work week, at an annual cost of \$13,000-\$26,000 per year. This cost includes work on other program materials as well as the Family Reading Corner blog.

Tangible Outcomes:

- Improved website “screen time” information page
- Physical handouts, posters, and advertising materials with tips for media use in early childhood.

-A technology audit questionnaire that can be used annually to review all FRP programs and outreach efforts and their relationship to/inclusion of digitally communicated content.

Promise #2: Reinvigorate planning to reach parents with literacy messaging via digitally communicated content.

What:

Several years ago, FRP began the process of developing an app to send SMS text messages to caregivers with information about literacy development and ideas for ways to engage with their infants and preschoolers to build pre-literacy skills. The pandemic essentially halted forward movement with this project, and it is time to revisit the concept with fresh eyes.

How:

Many hours were spent by staff and contractors creating original content for the app, which would have been produced by GOMO Health. We will now need to determine whether that partnership is still an option, and if it is not a new path forward will be explored. This project will almost certainly be completed in coordination with other local agencies working with families, and FRP will need to stay active and involved in current conversations around digital media platforms for early childhood resources in Tompkins County.

The caregiver survey around “screen time” in promise #1 will help determine the value of such a program to local families. The path forward will very much depend on outreach to the app developers, results of the survey, and conversations with other local early childhood focused entities. What we do know is that much of the previously created content is relevant and needs to be available to families, likely as digitally communicated content. How that is accomplished is dependent on the efforts mentioned above.

Who:

The Program and Outreach Coordinator will work to circulate the “screen time” survey and FRP’s Executive Director will talk with GOMO Health, Cayuga Birthplace, and Northeast Pediatrics to determine whether the previous plan is still an option. After this point, the Board of Directors, staff, and Early Childhood Specialist will work together to review the results and build a plan with next steps.

When:

Work to determine a path forward will begin in the winter of 2022. The timeline depends greatly on the involvement of GOMO Health and our community partners and a launch could begin as early as Spring of 2022. If a new plan needs to be established, it

is likely that the project will take time to redevelop with the input of community partners. The goal is to have a project launched/content shared by the end of the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

Budgetary implications:

This also very much depends on the involvement of a third-party company. GOMO Health was prepared to offer FRP a platform at no cost, a very large savings. If that partnership does not move forward, FRP and other community partners will need to consider the cost to impact benefit and determine how best to balance the expense. Grant funding would almost certainly be explored to launch a collaborative community program that would use FRP's content along with other relevant organization's content.

Tangible Outcomes:

-The content previously created for an SMS messaging app will be updated and utilized to reach caregivers in Tompkins County.

Evaluation & Impact

Over the last 25 years FRP has conducted periodic evaluations of programs to determine their value to local families. These efforts have assisted in decision-making around program discontinuation and improvement. The time has come for another round of in-depth evaluations, as well as to design more routine evaluations to be built into regular program operations.

Promise #1: Create and Carry Out Evaluations

What:

FRP staff and Board members will develop and institute regular and ongoing evaluation for FRP's core programs in order to ensure intended impact and areas for improvement. During the period covered by this Plan more in-depth evaluations of the Bright Red Bookshelf and Books to Grow On programs will also be conducted.

How:

The FRP Program and Evaluation (PP&E) committee will first explore evaluation methods of other nonprofit, literacy, and early childhood educational programs to discover new ways we might measure our impact. Committee members and staff are working with the College of Human Ecology at Cornell University, the Cornell Institute of Public Affairs (CIPA), and the Community Based Project Evaluation Group to develop and implement new comprehensive evaluations, primarily for the Bright Red Bookshelf and Books to Grow On programs. This work is ongoing, and data collection will likely begin during the 2022-2023 fiscal year and is likely to include focus group with community members, in-person conversations with participants at points of access, surveys etc..

A new user survey will be implemented for the Story Walk program in the winter of 2021-2022. A QR code will be placed at the end of each Story Walk linking visitors to an online form where they can give feedback based on their experience. Suggestions will be reviewed and changes made regularly to improve program quality and impact.

Who:

The PP&E committee will lead the effort with the support of the ED. Staff will assist to develop evaluation tools, conduct the evaluations, and report of findings to the Board. Volunteers may also assist in data collection, etc. Cornell students and staff from the CIPA and Community Based Project Evaluation groups will assist to design evaluations methods and sort data.

When:

Program evaluation review by the PP&E committee has already begun, and planning with Cornell groups has just started. By the end of the 2023-2024 fiscal year both of the

in-depth evaluations will be complete and plans for regular program evaluations will be in place.

Budgetary implications:

This work will be largely carried out as a regular responsibility of the Program and Outreach Coordinator and PP&E committee. With the help of Cornell, we hope to utilize grant funds to reimburse students for their time, as well as enlist volunteers to assist with data collection.

There are likely to be costs associated with compensating community members for their participation, costs of printed materials (surveys, etc.), and additional contractor and/or staff time. As these efforts ramp up, FRP may consider shifting our Program and Outreach Coordinator to a full-time 40 hour/wk position in order to manage the additional workload.

Tangible Outcomes:

-Evaluation reports for Bright Red Bookshelves and Books to Grow On with recommended areas for improvement.

-Ongoing data sets and participant feedback from built-in evaluation of the Talk, Sing, Read, Play with Me and Story Walk programs.

Promise #2: Ensure community need, impact, and best practice of FRP core programs.

What:

FRP will make program and outreach changes in response to discoveries made during program evaluations and discussions with partners and community members.

How:

After thorough review of the data collected from program evaluation, similar literacy program's research and evaluation, the programs equity audit findings, and via conversations with local partners, continual program improvements will be made and determinations made regarding program continuation.

Who:

FRP PP&E committee, all FRP staff, Early Childhood Specialist consultant.

When:

The process to determine program need will be ongoing and has already begun. We plan to have survey and evaluation results coming in throughout the 2022-2023 and

2023-2024 fiscal years. Any major adjustments to program offerings will be made during the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 fiscal years.

Budgetary implications:

Effects to the budget are likely to be significant. Several programs stand to need additional materials purchased and distributed, adding to both operations and programming budgets. As potential changes are explored, funding sources will be identified.

Tangible Outcomes:

-Clear action steps to improve program quality and community access.

Conclusion

The Family Reading Partnership team has spent close to two years determining our next steps, and this plan is the result of their hard work and curious inquiry. We are eager to get started on this journey to improve our impact and response to community needs!