2026 APPLICATION GUIDELINES

Prime Time Family Reading is a national program serving 6- to 10-year-old kids and their families. Participating families build early literacy skills, engage in critical thinking, and connect with each other through the act of reading and discussion.

Prime Time Family Reading gatherings take place in-person once a week over six consecutive weeks. During each session, families share a meal together, enjoy a children's book reading by a storyteller, and discuss the story with guidance from a trained facilitator. These discussions encourage kids and adults alike to find personal connections to the themes in the story and talk through big ideas like empathy, justice, and compassion.

Featuring lively storytelling and conversation, these gatherings are opportunities for families to bond, think deeply, and have a lot of fun with books and reading.

••• TIMELINE •••

Prime Time Family Reading programs take place in either the fall or spring of 2026. Applicants can indicate their preference for fall or spring programs in the application and must attend training prior to the program's implementation.

- Applications open – October 1, 2025
- Information session – October 23, 2025
- Application deadline – December 3, 2025
- Award notification – December 2025

	Spring 2026 Programs	Fall 2026 Programs
Team orientation with NJCH	Early January 2026	June 2026
PTR national training	January 17 & 24	July/August 2026 (dates TBA)
Implementation period (Six consecutive sessions must take place between these dates)	March 1-June 30, 2026	Sept 1-Dec 30, 2026
Pre-launch team meeting with NJCH	One month before first session	One month before first session
Final report	Within 30 days of final session	Within 30 days of final session

Exact dates for gatherings will be determined by each host site and are subject to approval from NJCH. NJCH will provide the documents required for final reporting to each host site.

··· ELIGIBILITY ···

- Prime Time Family Reading awards from NJCH are open to New Jersey-based public libraries. The library may work in partnership with other nonprofit organization(s) in their communities, but the award will be made to and must be administered by the library.
- Libraries with an open NJCH grant or other program award (such as Community History, Humanities Lab, Informed NJ, or a Sponsorship) are not eligible to apply for this program until until the final report on the open award has been approved and the award has been closed.
- Eligible host sites must have facilities with ADA-accessible spaces for approximately 50 participants to gather in-person and share a meal, as well as a separate area for younger children to gather for their stories and activities. Libraries may hold their sessions at a separate site that meets these criteria.

··· PROGRAM TEAM ···

Host sites are required to staff a program team fulfilling the following roles, which may be made up of staff, volunteers, or community members. NJCH recommends having most program team members identified at the time of application. If you are having difficulty identifying someone to fulfill one of the roles, we will do our best to assist you.

Training through the Prime Time national network is required before any individuals may serve in any role in the program. Training workshops take place virtually and team members will receive manuals and other training materials in advance of the workshop.

PROGRAM COORDINATOR ($1,000 STIPEND)

Manages the planning and implementation of Prime Time at the host site by gathering the program team, coordinating all logistics (book purchase, meals, door prizes, etc.), promoting the program and recruiting participants, and handling all administrative needs with NJCH. This person must be an employee of the library.

We include a recommendation for stipend amounts for each of these positions for the duration of the program, below. Ultimately host sites will determine the final amount each program member will be paid in the budget created before program implementation.

SCHOLAR ($1,000 STIPEND)

Facilitates post-story discussion of humanities themes and issues found in the books and eagerly transmits their love of reading and talking about books to audience by modeling techniques for initiating and encouraging conversation. Must be comfortable working with participants with limited reading skills and those who may not have experience talking about books.

STORYTELLER ($1,000 STIPEND)

Reads the stories at each session, demonstrating read aloud techniques for parents. Assists the Scholar with post-story conversation. While this person should feel comfortable presenting to a large group, it is recommended that they not be a trained actor or storyteller.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZER ($500 STIPEND)

Assists the program coordinator with recruitment of families to participate in the program. Assists with the preparation of the space for each session. Welcomes families and assists with their needs during each session (serving food, making nametags, giving directions, troubleshooting problems).

PRESCHOOL COORDINATOR ($300 STIPEND)

Attends to the needs of younger siblings who attend the programs. Presents age-appropriate books and activities related to the theme that will engage this age group during stories and discussion for older siblings and their adults.

Beyond the program team, libraries may recruit volunteers to assist with program activities such as checking families in, sharing information, serving food, or wayfinding.

⋯ FUNDING AND EXPENSES ⋯

Prime Time Family Reading hosts receive an award of $6,500 to support the planning and implementation of their programs. Sites are responsible for covering the following expenses:

- Program team stipends (as needed, particularly for non-staff).
- Food for each meal and serving materials (plates, cups, utensils, napkins, etc.).
- Marketing and outreach for the program.
- Program supplies, including prizes and giveaways.
- Expenses associated with the site (for example, rental fees, security, overhead).
- Translation (if needed).

NJCH is responsible for covering the following expenses in addition to the program award:

- Annual participation fees to national network for each site.
- Training fees.
- A full set of books for the selected series.
- Any expenses related to NJCH staff's attendance at program events at each site, including transportation, parking, and staff time.

Each site will be responsible for developing a budget to submit to NJCH ahead of the program's implementation and will report on how funds were spent as part of the final report. No match of awarded funds is required. However, host sites must track any funds matched by the host site (both cash and in-kind) and include that information in their final report.

ELIGIBLE EXPENSES

Eligible expenses include:
- Salaries and benefits
- Fees and honoraria
- Local travel
- Books
- Book bags
- Publicity and marketing expenses (including postage, printing, video/audio recording, or photography related to the program)
- Food and beverages
- Gift cards
- Other supplies and equipment directly related to the program (check with NJCH staff if you're not sure what might fit in this category)

INELIGIBLE EXPENSES

Ineligible expenses include:
- Travel not directly related to program implementation (for example, to professional conferences or workshops)
- Academic courses, workshops, or training
- Capital expenses, including construction, preservation, or renovation
- Purchase of equipment not directly related to or necessary for the completion of the program
- Acquisitions or cataloguing outside established Prime Time curriculum
- Lobbying and fundraising activities
- Expenses incurred before the established award period
- Ticket fees
- Food or beverages not directly connected to Prime Time programs

⋯ SELF-FUNDED PROGRAMS ⋯

There will be a limited number of spaces available for libraries that wish to participate in this national program and are able to self-fund its implementation. NJCH will cover the fees associated with joining the network and training, and we can provide books if desired. We will not provide any additional funding to the libraries that choose a self-funded option. If you are interested in going this route, please email Gigi Naglak, Director of Programs, at gnaglak@njhumanities.org.

CONTACT US

If you have questions about this program, please contact Gigi Naglak, Director of Programs, at gnaglak@njhumanities.org