

Information for Grant Applications

This document provides reference information to support the preparation of grant applications for your local Imagination Library.

Project Information

About Dolly Parton's Imagination Library



Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (the Imagination Library) is an evidence-based initiative that promotes early literacy and strengthens family bonds. The Imagination Library engages children and their families in shared reading, a critical factor for early language and literacy development. By providing culturally sensitive, age-appropriate books monthly to children from

birth to five years, accompanied by a tip sheet for caregivers, the Imagination Library equips parents as their child's first teacher. Wraparound activities, including sessions for children at the library, integrate the program into the community, build social connections and provide modelling to families on how to engage with the books and their children.

About United Way Australia



United Way began in Australia 50 years ago. With a focus on education, United Way Australia (UWA) operates as a grassroots organisation, working to understand the complex issues Australian communities face, and collaborating with residents, businesses, government and philanthropy to build the foundations for

communities to thrive. Education is a powerful agent of change. It improves health, livelihoods, contributes to social stability and drives long-term economic growth. We understand that families, communities, businesses and governments all benefit when children start school with the skills and confidence they need to learn and succeed.

The Evidence

Groundbreaking global research by United Way Australia and Macquarie University show that children in the Imagination Library have a significant head start in their lifelong learning journey.¹ They have more books, greater interest in reading and a stronger reading culture in their family home:

- Children enrolled in the Imagination Library in Australia were **9x more likely** to be read to 4 or more days per week compared to children not in the program.
- In Australia, caregivers who read daily from birth were **5x more likely** to still read daily at age 3, and their children showed stronger early literacy skills.
- Caregivers were **7x more likely** to count images, **8x more likely** to describe images and **4x more likely** to let the child hold the book compared to caregivers not in the program.
- Children in Australia were **6x more likely** to demonstrate receptive and expressive vocabulary compared to children not in the program.
- The **number one benefit** reported by caregivers in Australia was that their children enrolled in the Imagination Library developed a strong love of books and reading.

Book-gifting from birth is a proven investment in children's futures.

United Way Australia now holds the world's largest dataset on shared home reading and is working with universities in Australia and beyond to develop further findings for families, educators and governments.



The Challenge

National information



Local information

Find your local Imagination Library details

If an Imagination Library is running in your area, visit [Find My Programme - Australia](#) and search for your community to see the number of children currently enrolled and eligibility criteria.

Find the number of children aged 0-4 in your area

Visit [Search Census data | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#). Search by location. Under *View QuickStats*, select *All persons* to see the number of children in your community aged 0-4. You can compare this figure with the number of children currently enrolled on the Imagination Library to assist with program planning and grant writing.

Check child development data for your area

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is a nationwide data collection that measures how children are developing when they start their first year of full-time school. Teachers complete an instrument for each child, which provides data on five areas of development: physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication skills and general knowledge. This data helps governments and communities understand and support early childhood development by identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

Access the data for your community by visiting <https://www.aedc.gov.au/> and using the Community Data Explorer to search by location. Use the filter box to get suburb level data. DV1 refers to children who are developmentally vulnerable in one domain, and DV2 refers to children who are developmentally vulnerable in two domains. This data will help provide context for a local Imagination Library program.

Once you have identified your local AEDC data, use this information to describe the key early development strengths and challenges in your community, and how the Imagination Library will help respond to these at a local level.

Example

In [insert community], AEDC data shows a higher proportion of children are developmentally vulnerable in the language and cognitive skills domain compared to the state average. This indicates a need for early, home-based literacy support before children start school. The Imagination Library will help address this by increasing access to books in the home, supporting shared reading routines, and strengthening family engagement with early learning.

Goals and Objectives

Objectives summary

The Imagination Library provides early language and literacy development, empowers parents to be their child’s first teacher, strengthens family bonds, and creates impactful community partnerships to support children and families.

Examples of objectives and goals

- **Goal:** Improve school readiness for [insert number] children by providing them with early literacy resources.
- **Objective:** Deliver monthly, age-appropriate books to [insert number] children in [insert location], fostering a love of reading and equipping them with foundational early literacy skills.
- **Goal:** Empower parents and caregivers to play an active role in their child’s literacy journey, strengthening family bonds and creating a positive home learning environment.
- **Objective:** Provide reading tip sheets and online resources, guiding families in shared reading practices that improve literacy outcomes.
- **Goal:** Build community capacity by collaborating with local partners like [insert local partners], ensuring the program is strengths-based and community-led.
- **Objective:** Engage local libraries, healthcare providers, playgroups and other community organisations to increase program reach and establish sustainable support networks for families.

Examples of measures of success

How will success be measured?

- Number of children enrolled on the program
- Enrolment growth rate year on year
- Number of books sent
- Number of local services partnering with the program
- Number of community programming sessions (e.g. rhyme time at the library)
- Parent feedback (collected by local partner)
- Service provider feedback and case studies (e.g. librarians, early childhood nurses)

Program Costs

Imagination Library Program

Book per month per child \$9	Per year (12 books) \$108
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Program Additions

Sample books (for use in programming) \$9 per book	Book at enrolment (gifted by nurse) \$9 per book
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1 Galea, Claire Melanie Anita (2025). The Impact of shared book reading on children and their Families: insights from Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. Macquarie University. Thesis. <https://doi.org/10.25949/30123745.v1>

2 Pham, C., Downes, M., Guo, S., Jahan, F., De Silva, S., O’Connor, E., Gray, S., Priest, N. & Goldfeld, S. (2024). Measuring vulnerability and disadvantage in early childhood data collections: Phase Two. Centre for Community Child Health. Melbourne, Victoria. <https://doi.org/10.25374/MCRI.26300749>

3 Yu, M. & Daraganova, G. (2015). Children’s early home learning environment and learning outcomes in the early years of school (LSAC Annual Statistical Report 2014 – Chapter 4). Australian Institute of Family Studies

4 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. National Results. <https://www.acara.edu.au/reporting/national-report-on-schooling-in-australia/naplan-national-results>