



Little Free Library
Indigenous Library Program Assessment

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Contents

Executive Summary	3
Background and Approach	3
Findings	5
Conclusion	7

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from an observational study that examined the influence of the Little Free Library Indigenous Library Program on access to books, attitudes towards reading, and reading habits in an Indigenous community that experiences significant barriers to accessing books. The assessment, conducted from December 2025 to May 2026, captures experiences with the Little Free Library Indigenous Library Program in the [Tohono O'odham Nation](#), a federally recognized tribe residing on tribal lands in Southwestern Arizona and Mexico. The assessment was conducted by Pier Partners and the Native American Advancement Foundation (NAAF) with approval from the Tohono O'odham Nation Institutional Review Board (IRB-P24-004).

The assessment found that Little Free Library's Indigenous Library Program increases access to books, addresses common transportation and travel distance barriers to accessing books, and supports reading among families and children. Families highly value the books provided through the program and children accessing books that reflect Indigenous identities, languages, and values. By locating book boxes in community destinations that community members already visit, **Little Free Library book boxes reduce the average distance required to access books by approximately 68 miles, helping families avoid transportation costs of an estimated \$40 per trip to physical libraries off the Nation.**

Little Free Library's
Indigenous Library Program
increases access to books.
Over one-third of families
with children read more
frequently because of the
book boxes.

Background and Approach

Little Free Library (LFL) has made a positive impact across the United States through its book box programs: Impact Library, Indigenous Library, and Read in Color. Through LFL's Indigenous Library Program (INLP) LFL grants no-cost book-sharing boxes on tribal lands and in Indigenous communities in the United States and Canada. LFL works with Indigenous community leaders and members to place the book sharing boxes in locations where book access is important to improving literacy. Through the INLP, LFL aims to strengthen community, inspire readers, expand easy book access, support positive literacy outcomes, and make book boxes available in high-need locations serving Indigenous Peoples. The objectives of this assessment were to better understand awareness and use of the LFL book boxes in an Indigenous community, assess the influence of the book boxes on book access and reading habits, and identify opportunities to strengthen LFL's INLP.

The Native American Advancement Foundation (NAAF) partners with LFL to provide book sharing boxes in the Tohono O'odham Nation to increase community members' access to high-quality and culturally connected books. The Tohono O'odham Nation is a federally-recognized tribe that includes approximately 28,000 members occupying tribal

lands in southwest Arizona and Mexico. The Nation is approximately the size of Connecticut and very rural, with long travel distances on difficult road conditions to the nearest commercial centers. NAAF pursued an initial book box grant through the LFL INLP in 2023 in response to requests from members of the Tohono O’odham Nation for access to books. Through INLP, NAAF has received 12 book boxes and book packages, each including 50 books. LFL has also granted NAAF \$1500 for the purchase of additional books. The books provided through INLP are curated and showcase contemporary Indigenous experiences, culture, and identity, increasing access to books that may not otherwise be available.

There is limited prior research on programs to increase book access in Indigenous communities. LFL knows through its work with INLP partners that Indigenous communities experience unique challenges related to book access, including low levels of book ownership, long travel distances to public and school libraries, and a lack of culturally aligned books. Prior research on book access in Indigenous communities highlights persistent barriers to book access, but studies assessing the impact of interventions to improve access are limited. Research on the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services’ Native Communities Grant Program show that Indigenous libraries are persistently underfunded, understaffed, and lack books that are culturally aligned ([IMLS](#), 2024).

To inform the design of this study, the research team held key informant interviews with LFL staff and INLP partners, completed a desk review of existing LFL evaluation and program materials, and conducted an environmental scan of existing research. [Key findings](#) from the interviews and environmental scan were provided to LFL and NAAF, and informed the development of the study approach and IRB protocol (IRB-P24-004) approved in September 2025.

Data Collection

Pier Partners and NAAF conducted an observational study from December 2025 to May 2026, collecting quantitative and qualitative data on the experiences and reading habits of adults who use LFL book boxes in the Tohono O’odham Nation through a brief anonymous survey. The survey captured information about use and experiences with book boxes that were already in place in the Tohono O’odham Nation. The book boxes on the Nation had been in place for one to three years at the time of the survey. The survey was administered by NAAF staff, who are enrolled members of the Tohono O’odham Nation, to adult members of the Nation with approval from the District Council and the Tohono O’odham Nation Institutional Review Board. The survey was administered in English and the O’odham language. The survey was designed to capture the following measures:

Intermediate Outcome Measures:

- Awareness of book boxes
- Use of book boxes
- Location preferences for book boxes
- Alignment of books with reader preferences
- Attitudes about owning books versus borrowing books
- Understanding of the ability to own books from book boxes

- Attitudes toward looking at books and reading

Primary Outcome Measures:

- The number of books community members have access to since using a book box (change in book access)
- The number of days per week families spend time looking at books (change in days spent looking at books)

Analytic Methods

This observational study employed descriptive analysis of original survey data collected by the research team from December 2025 to May 2026. The analysis includes descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, sub-group analysis, and correlation to summarize and interpret the survey data. Surveys completed in O’odham were translated into English prior to analysis.

The final analytic sample (n=145) includes adult residents of the Tohono O’odham Nation. Of the 145 complete responses, 104 individuals answered questions about their experiences using a book box. Full sample and subgroup analyses included a review of key intermediate outcomes (books box use, attitudes toward reading) and the primary outcome measures of book access and time spent looking at books. Analyses of quantitative survey data on these key outcome measures were complemented with qualitative analyses of open-ended survey questions that captured residents’ experiences and feedback on the LFL book boxes in their community. The research team developed and implemented a qualitative coding scheme and coded open-ended responses to capture key themes.

Findings

The Little Free Library Indigenous Library Program Improves Access to Books

The assessment shows that the LFL INLP is improving access to books for families living on the Tohono O’odham Nation, who otherwise face significant barriers to accessing books. The program has achieved broad community reach, with 81 percent of respondents reporting that they or someone in their household has used a Little Free Library book box.

9 in 10
families report improved book access
because of the LFL book boxes

Families overwhelmingly report that the book boxes improve their access to books, with 89 percent of respondents indicating they have access to more books because of the program.

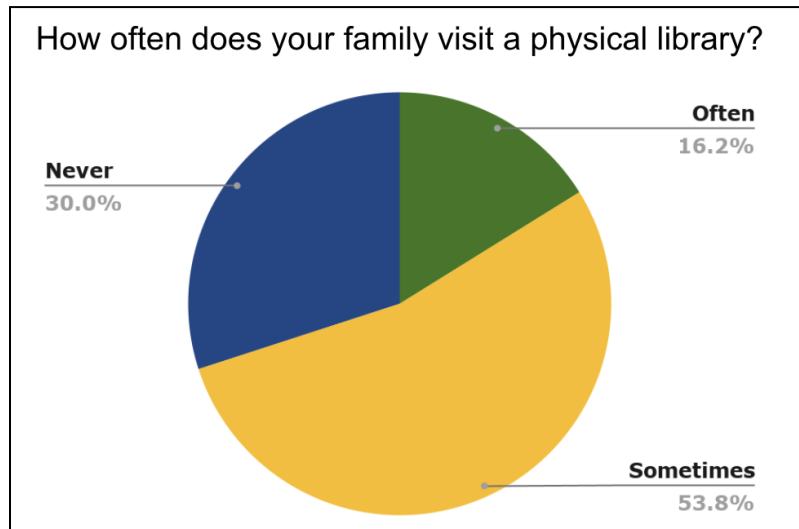
Nearly all families (96 percent) report finding books they are excited to read in the book boxes. Families highly value books, literacy, and reflections of Indigenous identity and culture in books. Most families (92 percent) report they keep books in their home and all families (100 percent) indicate it is important for Indigenous children to see their identity, culture, and values reflected in books written by Indigenous authors. These findings show that the book boxes are effectively connecting families with books to meet an otherwise unmet need.

The Little Free Library Book Boxes Address Significant Transportation and Distance Barriers to Accessing Books for Members of the Tohono O’odham Nation

The book boxes provided through the LFL INLP address significant geographic and transportation barriers that limit access to books through traditional libraries (e.g., public libraries, school libraries, mobile libraries) for members of the Tohono O’odham Nation. Most families are not able to regularly visit physical libraries located off the Nation.

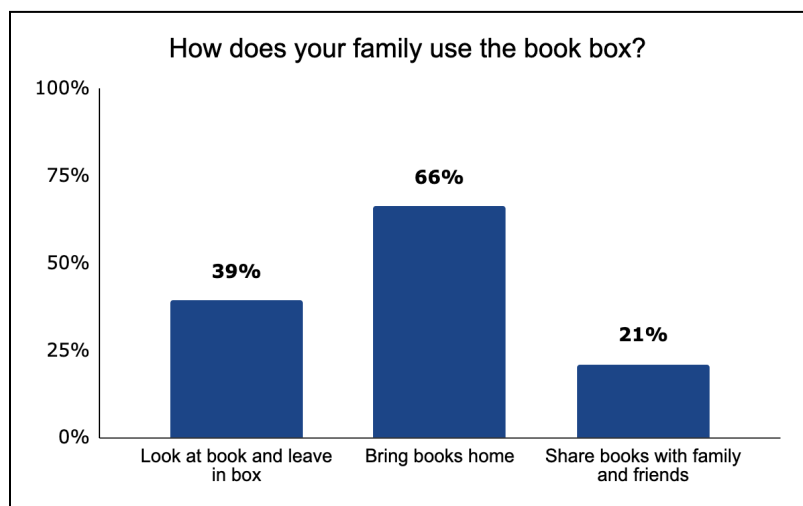
Families report that travel distance and transportation challenges are the primary barriers to accessing a physical library, with some community members living as far as three hours driving distance from the nearest public library. By locating book boxes at community destinations that residents already frequent, such as the central community store, gas station, schools, and recreation centers, the program reduces the average distance families must travel to access

free books by approximately 68 miles. This reduction represents avoiding an average \$40 roundtrip transportation cost to an off-Nation public or school library, which is cost prohibitive for many families.



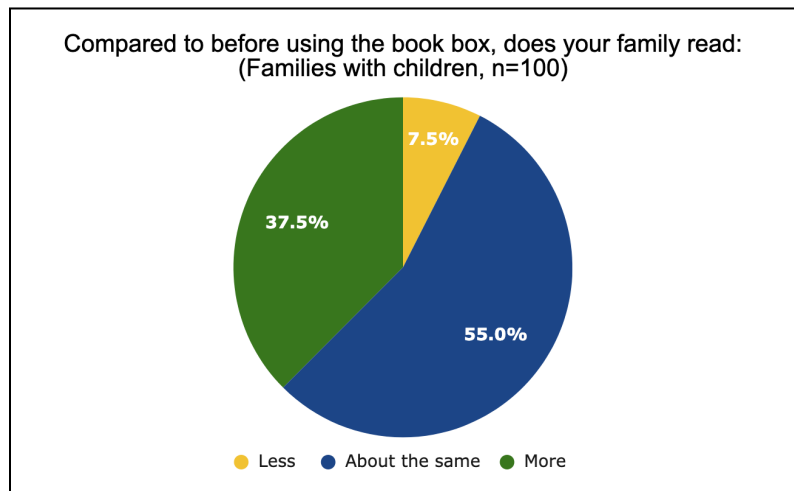
The Little Free Library Indigenous Library Program Supports Reading Among Families and Children

The increased availability of books through the LFL INLP program is translating into more time spent looking at books or reading, particularly among families with children. Families most commonly use the book boxes to take books home (66 percent), browse books while visiting community locations (39 percent), and share books with family and friends (21 percent). Although most families visit the book boxes once a month



or less, they typically browse multiple books and take one or two books home during each visit.

Importantly, this increased access to books is resulting in more frequent reading among many families. More than one-quarter of all families (28 percent) report reading more since using the book boxes and 38 percent of families with children report reading more. Families whose children have used the book boxes are also more likely to read together on a weekly basis than families whose children have not used the book boxes. Together, these findings suggest that the LFL INLP is not only increasing access to books, but also fostering reading and supporting literacy.



Conclusion

I like that books are now readily available. There is a book box within walking distance of my house that makes it easy for me to get books. [...]

When my grandchildren come to my house I read a book to them. This is quality time we spend together.

- Member of the Tohono O'odham Nation

This assessment provides evidence that the Little Free Library Indigenous Library Program increases access to books, addresses common transportation and travel distance barriers to accessing books in rural Indigenous communities, and supports reading among families and children. The assessment findings underscore that families highly value books and children accessing books that reflect Indigenous identities, languages, and values. Families describe the book boxes as valuable, convenient, and beneficial to their families and community. Further, by locating book boxes in community destinations that residents already visit, the book boxes reduce the average distance required to access books and help families avoid transportation costs and travel time. The assessment found evidence that increased access to books is translating to increased reading, particularly among families with children.

Community members expressed interest in expanding the Little Free Library Indigenous Library Program in the Tohono O'odham Nation, including adding more book boxes, increasing the variety of books available, and offering more Native-authored and O'odham-language books. The primary opportunities identified through the assessment include:

- Increase the number of book boxes across the Nation
- Expand the size of existing book boxes
- Provide a wider variety of books, particularly books for children and adolescents
- Increase the availability of books by Indigenous authors
- Expand collections of O'odham-language books and materials

Notably, requests for improvement generally reflected a desire for more book boxes and books. This reinforces strong community demand and support for the Little Free Library Indigenous Library program.