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**Babies With Books Multi-Site Read-A-Thon Process Guide**

**September 8-18, 2025**

By Eric Jia, Benjamin Olshin, the Babies With Books team

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***“Reading in the NICU gives families a way to help their baby and have a positive, "parent-like" NICU experience.” -* NICU Nurse**

Hello! We are so excited your NICU is participating in the Babies With Book (BWB) multi-site NICU Read-A-Thon. The Babies With Books Read-A-Thon is a friendly reading competition between NICUs across the globe to encourage shared family reading and improve the NICU experience. Please use this guide and its resources as a reference for your Read-A-Thon and adjust your approach to meet your NICU’s needs.

**Introduction**

The Babies With Books Read-A-Thon is a competition between NICUs for the greatest amount of reading with NICU babies. We will identify three “winning NICUs,” defined as the centers with the greatest average # of NICU reading sessions/infant/day during the Read-A-Thon. We hope this event will build camaraderie within NICUs while families and providers support NICU reading.

**Background**

The BWB Read-A-Thon was piloted in September 2020 and engaged 39 NICUs. This Read-A-Thon (September 8-18, 2025) builds on last September’s event in which 224 NICUs participated and there were a total of 61,054 reading sessions over the 11 day period. For more background on the Read-A-Thon, see [babieswithbooks.org/readathon](https://www.babieswithbooks.org/readathon).

**Timeline**

* Read-a-thon Dates: Monday, September 8th - Thursday, September 18th, 2025
  + You may shorten the duration of your NICU’s Read-A-Thon if needed.
* Midway Virtual Celebration: Friday, September 12th, 2025 (time TBA)
  + We will meet briefly with other NICUs to share surprises, challenges, and successes during the first half of the event. See “Midway Virtual Celebration” below.
* Final Virtual Celebration & Winners announced: Thursday, September 25th, 2025 (time TBA)
  + We will celebrate all participating hospitals, announce the Read-A-Thon winners, share stories, and more. See “Final Virtual Celebration” below.
* Read-a-thon Results & Feedback Survey (**required)**:
  + Please submit your completed Read-a-thon Results and Feedback Survey (# counts and narrative feedback only, no Protected Health Information) [here](https://form.jotform.com/241902971358361) **by Tuesday, September 23rd, 2025.**

**Measuring and Reporting Your NICU’s Read-a-thon Results**

On the [Read-A-Thon Results & Feedback Survey](https://form.jotform.com/250945621429561), please report the total # of reading sessions (measured by reading tickets - see “Reading Ticket: BWB Read-a-thon” in folder), the average daily NICU census during the Read-A-Thon, and the # of days of your NICU Read-A-Thon, as follows:

| **Total # Reading Sessions**  **(or Tickets)** | **Average Daily Census during Read-a-thon** | **# Days of Read-A-Thon** |
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BWB will calculate each NICU’s average # of NICU reading sessions/infant/day during the Read-A-Thon (=total # reading sessions/average daily census during Read-A-Thon/# days of Read-A-Thon). For example, if a NICU has 100 reading sessions (=100 reading tickets) during their 11-day Read-A-Thon and their average daily census during the Read-A-Thon is 6 babies, this NICU’s average # of NICU reading sessions/infant/day is 1.5 sessions/baby/day (100 reading tickets/11 days of Read-A-Thon/6 babies).

Each time a baby is read to, the reader (family or provider) enters a reading ticket for the Read-A-Thon. A “reading session” is defined as any attempt by a family member or NICU provider to read with a baby, regardless of duration.

**Daily Tracking:**

We are looking to understand how levels of reading change over the course of the Read-A-Thon. So, for NICUs that are able, we ask that you track and report your number of daily reading sessions and your daily census (in addition to the total number of reading sessions and average daily census). It will not affect your participation if you cannot track daily reading and daily census. To track reading per day, our English and Spanish reading tickets include a date field. We recommend using the "Template Reading Ticket Tracking Sheet” document in the process guide folder to track your daily reading and daily census, as this will be helpful in filling out the results survey at the end of the Read-A-Thon. The results survey is available [here](https://form.jotform.com/250945621429561).

Reading Tickets: At the start of the Read-A-Thon and for babies admitted to the NICU during your Read-A-Thon, provide each baby a packet of reading tickets. Keep extra tickets available in an accessible location for families and providers to use when needed. NICUs can print multiple tickets on a single sheet of paper and cut these into individual reading tickets.

For NICUs that also want to host a friendly competition for the baby who was read to most often, enter each infant’s name on each submitted reading ticket (see “Site Celebrations”). This will enable you to determine winners within your NICU.

At the end of the Read-A-Thon, please use the form [here](https://form.jotform.com/250945621429561) to enter the # of reading sessions, average daily census during the Read-A-Thon, and the # of days of your Read-A-Thon.

**Reading Ticket Collection & Reporting**

Suggested Method 1: Place a reading ticket box in a central location for families and providers to place tickets into each time they read. At the end of the Read-A-Thon, count and report the # of reading tickets on the Read-A-Thon Results and Feedback Survey [here](https://form.jotform.com/250945621429561). Many hospitals from the previous Read-A-Thons reported that this method was preferable since the centralized location prevented ticket loss.

Suggested Method 2: Place a cup in each baby’s room or at their bedside table for families and providers to place reading tickets into each time they read. At the end of the Read-A-Thon, collect all cups then count and report the # of reading tickets on the Read-a-thon Results and Feedback Survey [here](https://form.jotform.com/250945621429561).

**Read-a-thon Results & Feedback Survey**

In addition to reporting your NICU’s Read-A-Thon results, we request your feedback on the Read-A-Thon **by Tuesday, September 23rd, 2025.** BWB will collate and share these results and feedback with all participating NICUs, on the BWB website, and potentially in presentations and publications.

Many NICUs routinely collect and share quality improvement projects and will consider this Read-A-Thon data collection exempt from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. If you are unsure about your data collection or about sharing your center’s Read-A-Thon results with BWB, please check with your IRB.



**Read-a-thon Resources & Materials**

**The documents referenced below (underlined) are located in the “BWB Read-a-thon Process Guide” folder.**

* **Invite/challenge other NICUs to join:** Amplify your impact by inviting/challenging other NICUs to join the competition. Read-a-thons are even more fun when participating with people you know, so invite/challenge other NICUs to join! Consider inviting one or more partner, referral, local, or other NICUs (ex. where you, your staff, or other providers trained) to the Read-A-Thon. You can use this document as a template and adapt as you see fit! The BWB team will address all logistics with the NICUs you invite.
* **Read-a-thon Results & Feedback Survey (required):** Access the form [here](https://form.jotform.com/250945621429561). Please submit this form **by Tuesday, September 23rd, 2025** to be included in our Read-A-Thon report and eligible to win.
* Template Reading Ticket Tracking Sheet:This reading ticket tracking document can help you track your progress during the Read-A-Thon (data ultimately must be entered into the “Read-a-thon Results & Feedback Survey”).
* Family Read-a-thon Information & How and Why to Read in the NICU\*: This document introduces the Read-A-Thon to families, describes how families can participate, and explains how and why to read in the NICU.
* Spanish Family Read-a-thon Information & How and Why to Read in the NICU\*: This document provides the same information as above, translated into Spanish.
* Healthcare Provider Read-a-thon Information & NICU Reading Rationale\*: This document introduces the Read-A-Thon to healthcare providers, describes how providers and families can participate, and details the rationale behind reading in the NICU.
* BWB Family and Child Photo Release: This document is our release form for any photos/videos of any families . We can only use your photos if there is a photo release for every person photographed.
* BWB Hospital Staff Photo Release: This document is our release form for any photos/videos of any staff. We can only use your photos if there is a photo release for every person photographed.
* English Flyer: This flyer can be posted around your NICU to advertise the Read-A-Thon.
* Spanish Flyer: This document provides the same information as above, translated into Spanish.
* Reading Ticket: You may use this reading ticket to track reading with babies during the Read-A-Thon.
* Book Suggestions: This is an extended list of book suggestions for reading with babies.
* Material Suggestions: This list includes items that may be helpful in conducting your Read-A-Thon.

\*BWB developed some of its provider and family reading materials in partnership with [Reach Out And Read®️](https://reachoutandread.org/).

**Books & Reading Materials for NICU families**

* Consider providing each family at least one book along with verbal and written information on how and why to read in the NICU. See the “Family Read-a-thon Information” and “Healthcare Provider Read-a-thon Information” documents in the folder. If traditional books are unavailable or you want to supplement them, the enclosed links ([here](https://monkeypen.com/pages/free-childrens-books) and [here](https://freekidsbooks.org/age-group/stories-age-2-5-years/?pop=desc)) provide free, downloadable children’s stories and additional reading resources. If you do not already have books in your NICU, consider reaching out to your hospital foundation, hospital volunteers, and/or healthcare providers for funding or donations of new or gently used and disinfectable books. Check with your hospital’s infection control leaders regarding whether only “new” books can be used or if gently-used/disinfected books can also be used.
* Consider asking local bookstores and libraries to provide discounted or free books for your Read-A-Thon.
* If allowed by your hospital, encourage families to bring in books from home to read with their baby.
* Although reading from a book with high contrast pictures is best for babies, any materials can be read aloud to babies including young adult books (ex. Harry Potter), adult books, hospital-provided information, e-materials/books, religious texts, even hospital lunch menus!

**Who should read with NICU babies during the Read-A-Thon?**

Parents should read with their baby whenever possible since babies respond most to their parents’ voices and this experience can encourage the habit of parents reading with their child. In addition to parents, older siblings and grandparents often love to read to babies. When possible, hold the baby while reading with them. Babies unable to be held can be read to while in bed. If the family is not available to read with the baby, engage staff, physicians, and/or volunteers in reading with the infant.

**Engage Families and Providers in Your NICU Read-a-thon!**

***“Reading to my NICU baby never crossed my mind before BWB” -* NICU Family**

Below are some suggestions for engaging families and healthcare providers in your NICU Read-A-Thon.

* Talk with your NICU families about why you are hosting a Read-A-Thon and describe your method of tracking reading sessions (see “Reading Ticket Collection & Reporting” above). Our “Family Read-a-thon Information & How and Why to Read in the NICU” resource is in the folder.
* Talk with your healthcare providers about your Read-A-Thon. See “Healthcare Provider Read-a-thon Information & NICU Reading Rationale” in the folder. Information on the Read-A-Thon can be shared in e-newsletters; discussed in daily nursing huddles and shift handoffs; and posted on your quality board, at your NICU entry and handwashing stations, and in provider and family lounges.
* As the Read-A-Thon progresses, remind families to read with their baby and track their reading. Recruit a team of healthcare providers (nurses, OT/PT, parent liaisons, physicians, etc) to discuss NICU reading and the Read-A-Thon with families!
* Consider periodically reporting to families and providers on your Read-A-Thon’s participation rates during the Read-A-Thon to encourage continued engagement.
* Consider engaging nurses and/or other hospital staff in a competition for who can read the most with babies (this is especially great for babies whose families are less present). You can track each provider’s reading sessions and provide gifts at the end of the event to those with the most sessions.

**Read-a-thon Winners & Celebrations!**

|  | **Midway Virtual Celebration (optional): Friday, September 12th, 2025 (time TBA)**  Join other NICUs for a midway virtual celebration and problem-solving event. Meet with other NICU Read-A-Thon participants and the BWB hosts to share surprises, challenges, and successes during the first half of the event! The invite will be sent prior to this event.  **Final Virtual Celebration & Winners Announcement (optional): Thursday, September 25th, 2025 (time TBA)**  Join other NICUs for a virtual celebration of all hospitals, announcement of the Read-A-Thon winners, discussion of learning from other NICUs, and sharing final reflections! Midway celebrations build excitement and continue your Read-A-Thon’s momentum! The invite will be sent prior to this event. |
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**Competition & celebrations within your NICU (optional):**

Some NICUs may also want to host a friendly competition between babies (and their caregivers) for the greatest amount of NICU reading. For these NICUs, winners could be either the infants who received the greatest number of reading sessions OR randomly picked by drawing 1-3 reading tickets from the reading ticket collection box. This second method proportionately “favors” those who had more reading sessions while also allowing all babies who were read with to be eligible to win.

Celebrations within your NICU can be a great way to engage families and staff in promoting reading in the NICU. Similar to the celebration with multiple hospitals, consider celebrating your NICU’s Read-A-Thon participation midway and at its conclusion. Celebrations can be as simple or elaborate as you like. See Read-A-Thon celebration ideas below and on the “Material Suggestions” document in the folder.

Suggestions for midway and post-Read-A-Thon celebrations:

* Books: a book can be provided to all NICU babies midway through the Read-A-Thon and/or at its conclusion.
* Food: for healthcare providers and/or families. During COVID-19, consider individually packaged or single-service items (ex. sandwiches, salads, ice-cream bars, cupcakes).
* Banners or signs: consider including your NICU’s rate of Read-A-Thon participation.

**For Read-A-Thon questions, email** [**readathon@babieswithbooks.org**](mailto:Benjamin.Olshin@babieswithbooks.org)**.**

**Thank you so much for joining this Read-A-Thon!**

**Have fun reading!**