2021 Summer Reading Report

beanstack

"**Beanstack** is now

crucial

to programming

during the pandemic."

We started Beanstack with our own family in mind, and our experiences as parents guide our ideals as a company. Encouraging a lifelong love of reading is our aim at home and our core mission at work—as is the goal of making reading more relevant and accessible to families of color and communities with fewer resources.

Like everyone else, we had our lives turned upside down in 2020. We saw in our own family how easy it is for kids to backslide with schools, libraries, and extracurriculars closed. And in the office, we experienced a huge rush of new Beanstack partner libraries, many of them jumping to online programming for the first time while struggling through closures and furloughs. Given our company value of inclusion, we also worried about the unequal opportunities facing families left behind by the twin blows of the digital divide and the equity gap.

Two years on, we all know that the pandemic worsened pre-existing disparities. During school closures, students of color were more likely to attend remote-only schools.[1] Technological barriers disproportionately held back BIPOC families, limiting parents' job opportunities and children's virtual classroom access. ESOL students' already challenging road to full educational participation suffered from abrupt shutdowns and a lack of digital resources.[2] Providing online access and quality virtual content is now more critical than ever.

Librarians are the unsung heroes of literacy, access, and opportunity, and we cheer your tireless work. Shoutout to Wicomico, San Diego, and many other public libraries who raced to launch hot-spot lending programs. To Winnsboro, Westford, and all those who extended library WiFi networks into neighborhood parking lots to reach isolated residents. To Fremont and Tulsa, who doubled down on the Beanstack mobile app to reach patrons with no PCs. Many of you told us that Beanstack was the only way you were able to do summer reading at all, and that Beanstack is now crucial to continuing your programming during the pandemic. We never anticipated that our software

and our company would be called upon in these circumstances, but we're fiercely proud to be here with the support you need in the fight.

As you'll read in this report, summer readership is bouncing back from the COVID slump of 2020 and, in many cases, exceeding the pre-pandemic numbers of 2019. We know that virtual reading challenges can be a powerful equalizer, helping overcome the equity gap and bolstering the joy in reading. We believe, deeply, that our efforts and yours align with our company values of love, inclusion, hard work, and awesomeness. Thank you for being a part of the Beanstack family and, as always, keep reading.

**With love,
Jordan and Felix**

Felix & Jordan

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[1] Smith, Ember & Reeves, Richard V. (2020, Sep. 23) "Students of color most likely to be learning online: Districts must work even harder on race equity." The Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2020/09/23/students-of-color-most-likely-to-be-learning-online-districts-must-work-even-harder-on-race-equity/

[2] Goldberg, Suzanne B. (2021, June 9) "Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students." U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights.
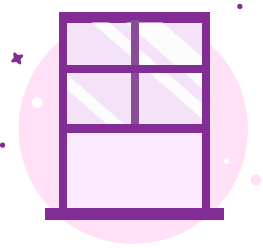
Overview:

Why a reading report?

Our widespread network of clients and users, coupled with our historical data from past summers, gives us the unique opportunity to pinpoint key trends for summer reading success.

We share our findings for three reasons:

Transparency

We have a long-standing commitment to opening our reading data analysis to the library community. That includes libraries who are not Beanstack partners—their mission is our mission, too.

Awesomeness

Beanstack will never be a "completed" product. It can only continue to be awesome if we evolve—which we do largely based on libraries' reading data and advice. The information in this annual summary is a key part of that process, and has led to recent improvements to our reports, admin dashboard, and logging flow.
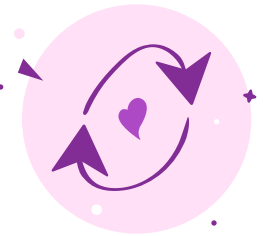
A Virtuous Circle

Our long-term value proposition to libraries lies not only in boosting patron engagement, but also in helping libraries demonstrate their reach and impact—which is especially critical in a time of escalating attacks on public programs and funding. The recommendations in our report zero in on strategies for growing key metrics via effective reading challenges.

Challenge = A virtual reading program, e.g., "Summer Reading" or "1,000 Books Before Kindergarten"

Methodology:

Where do we get our info?

With partners in small towns and big cities spread across the world, we have access to a treasure trove of data.

To understand what works, we use a two-part approach:

1 **Crunch the numbers**

We sift through our aggregate reading numbers to spot trends and glean insights across the industry. For summer 2021, that included reading and activity data from 1.4 million individual readers, representing over 10,000 library buildings from 1,759 systems.

2 **Watch the leaders**

To go deeper, we identify high-performing summer challenges in terms of enrollment and engagement and then zoom out to look for common strategies and challenge designs. We collect firsthand questionnaires to hear directly from the sources about their "secret sauce."

A note on 2020:

The first "COVID summer" was an anomalous time for library programs. Therefore, we weighed 2020 data less when looking at some of our long-term growth trends. We also added 2019-to-2021 comparisons, rather than just year-over-year numbers, to our analysis.
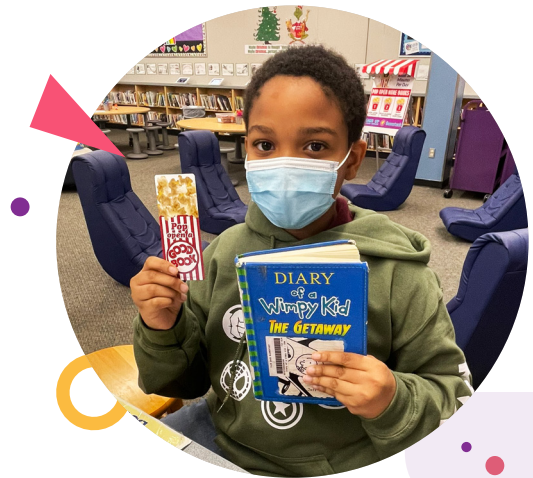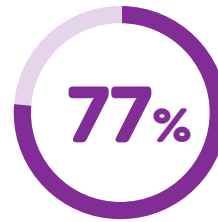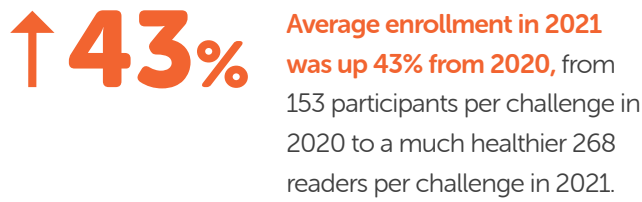
Enrollment = How many people signed up for summer reading

Engagement = Percent of enrollees who actively logged or completed an activity at least one time during summer reading
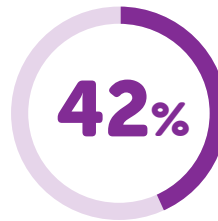
Back on track after 2020

It's clear that summer enrollment is on the rebound from the lows of 2020. And new features focused on engagement appear to significantly impact summer reading participation and engagement, even compared to pre-pandemic levels.

↑**43**% Average enrollment in 2021 was up 43% from 2020, from 153 participants per challenge in 2020 to a much healthier 268 readers per challenge in 2021.

77% 77% of **libraries** said they had more participation in 2021 than in 2020.

42% In raw numbers, **overall registration** in 2021 is up 42% from 2020.

63% 63% of enrollees actively **engaged in a summer 2021 challenge**, a jump from 57% in 2019.

2020

2021

👤 = 5 participants

In the summer of 2021, Beanstack helped…

1,759 library systems (comprising 10,000+ branches)…

…launch **5,453 summer reading challenges…**

…in which **1,465,884 readers of all ages…**

…logged **597,662,564 minutes.**

That's more than 1,000 years of reading!

> ## "Beanstack was the only way we managed to do summer reading at all."

During summer 2020, Beanstack became a lifeline for libraries and readers struggling with at-home and hybrid learning, tight budgets, and shuttered buildings. Many of our partners told us that "Beanstack was the only way we managed to do summer reading at all." While we were grateful to play that role, we strove to return to our mission statement in 2021: motivating people of all ages to read more, every year. The data shows that, despite obstacles from the ongoing pandemic, summer reading has returned to its pre-pandemic upward trajectory.

Summer readers are now logging more than they were pre-pandemic.

The average reader in a 2021 Beanstack summer challenge read 757 minutes, 19 days, 941 pages, and 14 books. **That's a marked increase from the average summer 2019 reader** —up 13% for minutes logged, 19% for days logged, 32% for pages logged, and 43% for books logged.

↑**43%**

↑**32%**

↑**19%**

↑**13%**

| Percent increase in logging from 2019 to 2021

Minutes   Days   Pages   Books
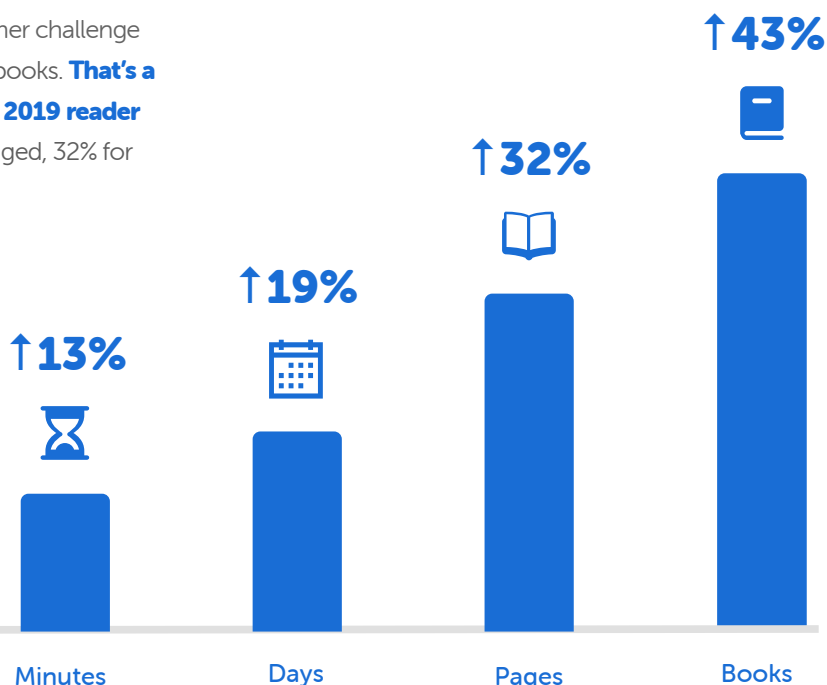
Zoomed In:

The 5 features that boosted summer engagement most

We rolled out a host of features and improvements aimed at stepping up summer reading engagement in 2021, such as including popular mobile app features in our web app and introducing reading streaks and achievements to further gamify Beanstack. When the summer dust settled, the following five features were linked most strongly with increased engagement.

The Mobile App

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Mobile app users are far and away more engaged summer reading participants than readers who exclusively log on the web.

Mobile readers currently make up:

25%   of all Beanstack participants

Yet they account for:

38%   of all readers logging 2+ days

...and a whopping

49%   of our most engaged readers who log 8+ days

Libraries attest that the mobile app is particularly effective in reaching rural areas with lower broadband coverage.

82% of top-performing libraries promoted the Beanstack mobile app directly to their communities, with nearly 50% of them "heavily promoting" its use. "The app is very important to our patrons," said Erin Schuelke, teen services librarian at Brazoria County Public Library in Texas. Their staff used Beanstack's customizable bookmark to show patrons how to download and access the mobile app, and included information about it in all their email blasts, paper logs, and flyers.
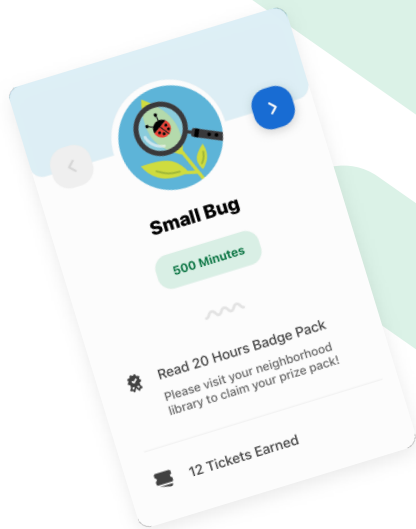
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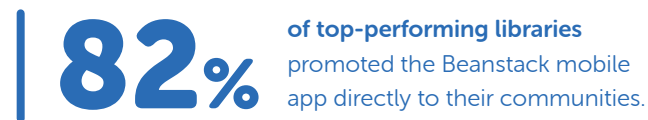
At every level of engagement, mobile users are more likely to stay in a challenge than their web-only counterparts.

Percentage of readers who logged 1, 4, and 8 days

- Logging on mobile
- Logging on the web

75% 📱   57% 🖥
44% 📱   23% 🖥
27% 📱   12% 🖥

1 Day   **4 Days**   **8 Days**
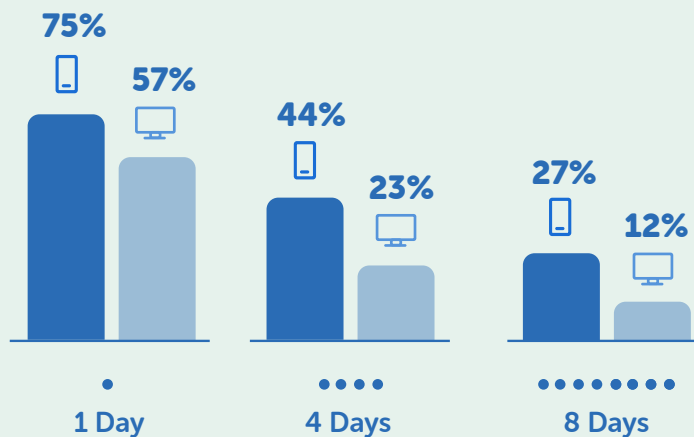
"Those who use it love the app! The barcode scanning is probably their favorite feature."

Kim Angotti, Youth Department Operations Administrator at Kansas City Public Library
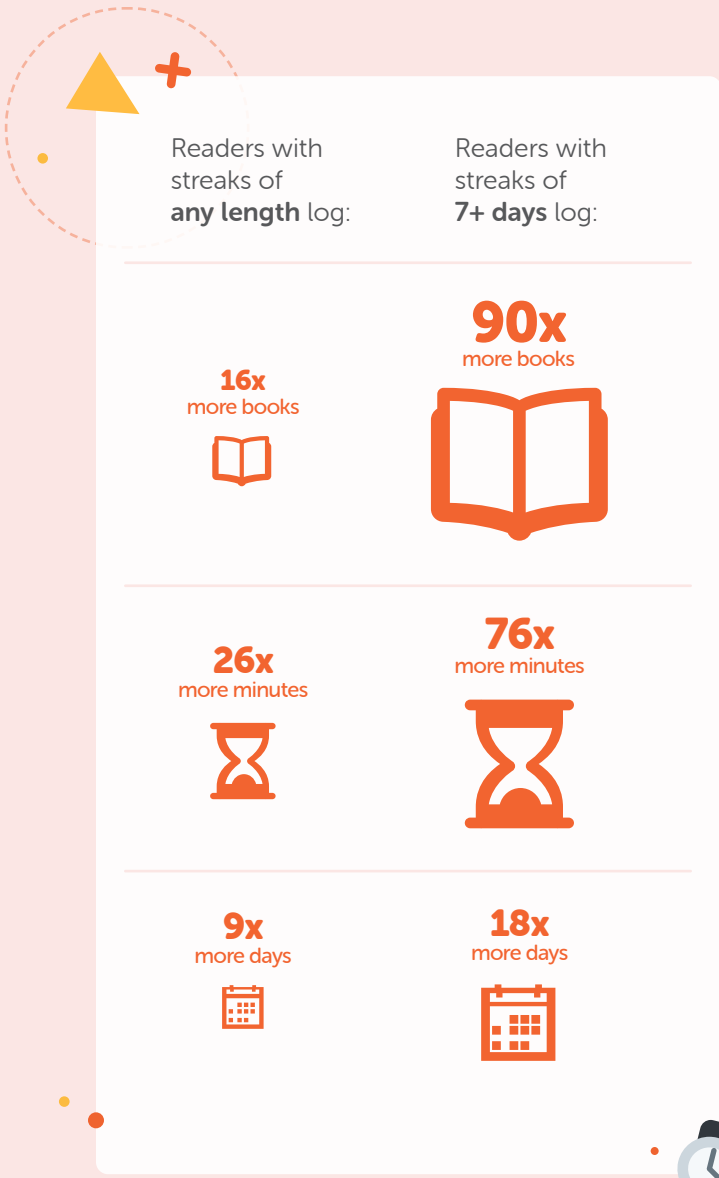
Reading Streaks

No other new feature has been more habit-forming than reading streaks. Streaks grow as readers log more consecutive days of reading, creating an internal motivation for readers to log consistently when they would otherwise skip a day. Also, streaks can be a great equalizer, as the amount of time spent reading and the level of material read doesn't matter. All that counts is that the user reads!

Our data shows that readers who start a streak, no matter its length, read far more than other patrons.

Correspondingly, challenges with higher levels of readers with streaks of any length see higher levels of engagement. Challenges in which 75% of participants have streaks see 81% of readers log at least once, while challenges with only 50% of participants with streaks have 64% engagement.

The correlation is dramatic. **While it's not clear whether streaks are solely driving reading or if there's a "virtuous circle" of reading leading to streaks leading to more reading, we heard repeatedly from librarians and patrons alike about the power of streaks.**

Readers with streaks of **any length** log:

Readers with streaks of **7+ days** log:

16x more books

90x more books

26x more minutes

76x more minutes

9x more days

18x more days

"It's motivated me to read more than I would have before."

A reader in Cleveland

"He went from hating to read in March 2020, to reading for fun now."

A parent in Tennessee, about her son's 50-day reading streak

"Patrons loved challenging themselves to maintain a streak."

A librarian at the City of Wolfforth Public Library in Texas

"A lot of patrons used the reading streak option, especially when they backdated their reading."

A librarian at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library in Virginia

Year-Round Challenge Templates

Libraries with top-performing summer challenges share a common strategy: they keep their readers "in practice" during the off-season. 82% of top-performing libraries during summer 2021 also offered at least one other challenge outside of summer reading—and many offered year-round programming for multiple age groups.

Running challenges year-round builds a more engaged base of summer reading participants. Readers with an existing reading habit are more likely to enroll and log in a summer challenge.

> **"It helps that we have held challenges every season, so our communities are familiar with Beanstack and stay engaged yearlong."**

Susan King, Coordinator of Youth Services at Fort Bend County Libraries in Texas

As an on-demand service, Beanstack makes it easy to publish challenges anytime in the year. We offer **over 300 different** out-of-the-box challenge templates, from Winter Reading to Women's History Month. "Ongoing" challenges that award patrons for their reading accomplishments all year long, such as New Horizons or 1,000 Books, are easy options to keep readers in the practice of logging their reading.

82%

of top-performing libraries during the summer of 2021 also offered at least one other challenge outside of summer reading.

Badge Books

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Digital tracking is an essential component of Beanstack, but coupling a virtual reading challenge with a physical logbook remains a popular and powerful way to bridge the digital divide and lighten virtual fatigue. The pandemic made physically connecting with patrons more difficult; in-person activities had to be replaced with carefully prepared take-home kits, while weekly storytimes moved to video streams.

We developed Badge Books to help fill the gap. As an in-hand activity books stuffed with stickers, calendars, extra reading prompts, and creativity-building activities, **Badge Books offer tangible rewards throughout a reading challenge and give kids ownership over their progress in a lively way.**

86

Library systems gave out Badge Books to

75,000+

families

In summer 2021, 86 library systems gave out Badge Books to more than 75,000 families as a supplement to summer reading. Many partners saw an increase in participation as a result. "Many families that usually would not go online signed up with the book," said youth services librarian Lorie Van Hook at Dighton Public Library in Massachusetts. Librarian Danielle Eilert at the Community District Library in Michigan echoed those sentiments, sharing that "[Our] increase of participation was due to more in-person events and the Badge Books."

We saw some libraries use Badge Books as a reward for "super readers," or as a prize for event attendance or early challenge registration, like at Rolling Hills Consolidated Library in Missouri. "We used the

Badge Books as a 'special' incentive for voracious readers," said library director Michelle Mears. "Kids who did it loved the Badge Book." Other libraries handed out the book en masse to classes, patrons coming to the library or for curbside pickup, or to families with kids in certain age ranges.

> ## "I should have ordered more Badge Books, they were a hit at our bigger branches!"
>
> Cassandra Baldwin, Youth Services Coordinator at Bedford Public Library in Virginia
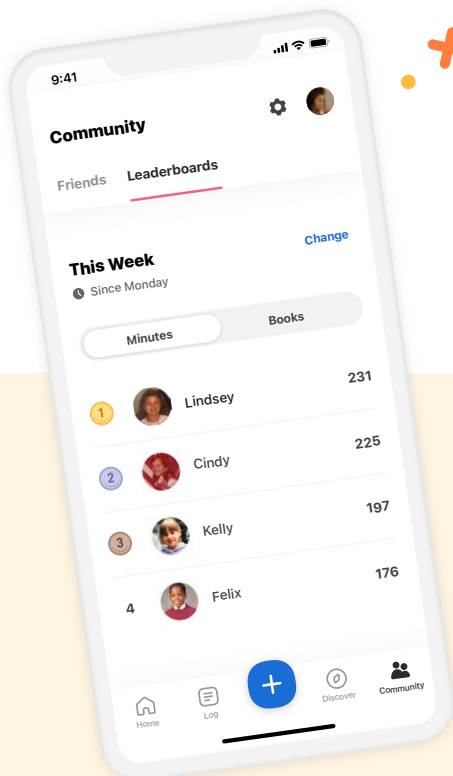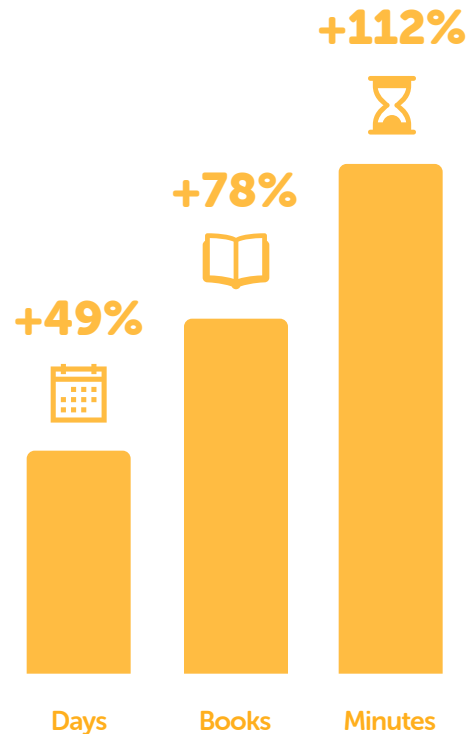
Friends & Leaderboards

Social connection and competition are powerful motivating forces. To fuel readers' sense of community, we introduced our Friends & Leaderboards feature in 2021. It allows patrons at the same library to:

Add each other as friends

View each other's reading and challenge histories

Track their reading progress against each other

Our summer data shows remarkable reading gains among readers with friends. On average, readers who add at least one friend log 78% more books, 49% more days, and 112% more minutes than readers without any friends added.

Readers who add friends to their Beanstack account are reading more—a lot more!

+112%

+78%

+49%

| Days | Books | Minutes |

Graph: Total logging compared to readers who did not add a friend.

9:41

Community

Friends   Leaderboards

This Week
Since Monday

Minutes   Books

231
1 Lindsey

225
2 Cindy

197
3 Kelly

176
4 Felix

Home   Log   Discover   Community

We use Friends & Leaderboards ourselves for our company-wide reading challenges. The reigning company champion: Director of Library & Corporate Accounts, Lindsey Hill!

Zoomed Out:

The 6 most successful decisions in 2021 challenge design

Designing an engaging challenge can be as simple as adopting Beanstack's premade summer template, but fine-tuning the details can make a big difference. Here are six design choices that had the most measurable impact on enrollment and engagement.
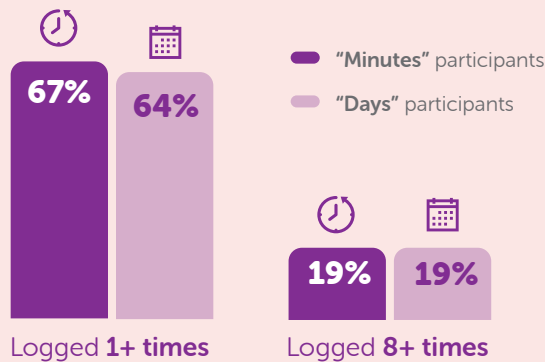
Log Type Matters

Each library, community, and challenge is different, so Beanstack gives partners a wide spread of challenge customization options. When it comes to logging reading, challenges can track books, days, minutes, or pages read. Patrons can also log non-reading achievements such as activities and book reviews.
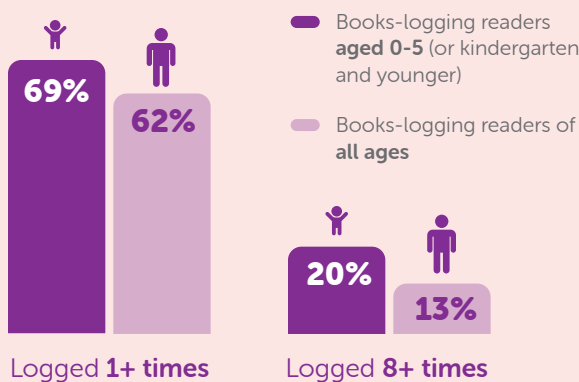
During the summer of 2021, we found that minutes and days logging drive the most sustained engagement for all but the very youngest readers.

The strong engagement rates for days and minutes challenges hold up when looking at challenges for middle-grade kids, teen readers, adults, or "all ages."

Minutes challenges and days challenges both perform well.

- **"Minutes"** participants
- **"Days"** participants

67% **64%**
Logged **1+ times**

19% **19%**
Logged **8+ times**

Logging by books doesn't work quite as well for "all ages" challenges.

- Books-logging readers **aged 0-5** (or kindergarten and younger)
- Books-logging readers of **all ages**

69% **62%**
Logged **1+ times**

20% **13%**
Logged **8+ times**

Did you know?

Patrons can track their reading session in their browser in real time, rather than logging in later. And for reading list challenges with in-app reading content, like our 2022 Winter Reading Challenge, Beanstack automatically tracks the time patrons spend reading those e-books.

Challenges for the youngest readers (ages 0-5) appear to benefit from logging by books, which makes sense given the prevalence of short, digestible picture books for this cohort.

The lowest engagement rates of all? Challenges that _only_ include activity badges and no logging badges. Only about 45% of readers in activities-only challenges log at least once, and only 3% log eight or more times. Challenges that only track activity completions don't capitalize on the reading gamification tools, like streaks and leaderboards, hardwired into Beanstack.

Minutes were far and away the most popular log type in summer 2021 challenges.

Minutes
60%

- 60% Minutes
- 23% Books
- 7% Days
- 9% Other (i.e. activities)
- 1% Pages
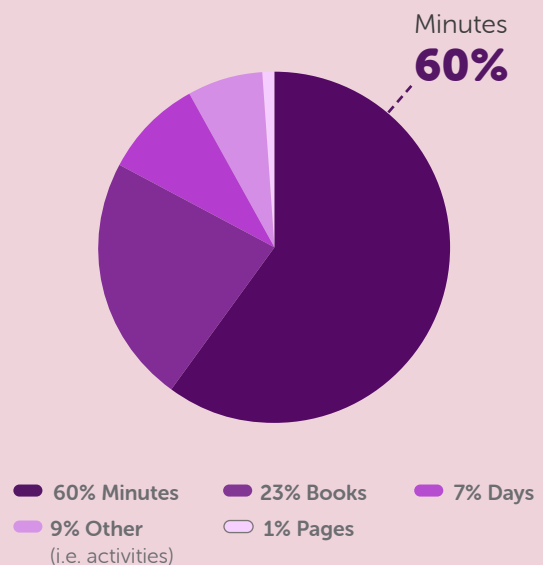
Boost the Badges

Badges are a key gamification component of Beanstack, giving intrinsic rewards to readers and motivating them to level up and reach the next badge. They can be awarded for reaching logging milestones, completing enrichment activities, attending library events, or even reading certain genres or titles.

We found that challenges with more than 10 badges encourage more readers to log—and to keep logging for longer. Challenges that underutilize badges see significantly lower engagement rates.
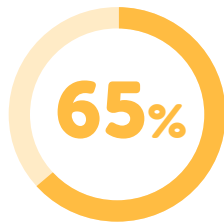
That gap widens when looking at sustained engagement over time.

Challenge Engagement Rate
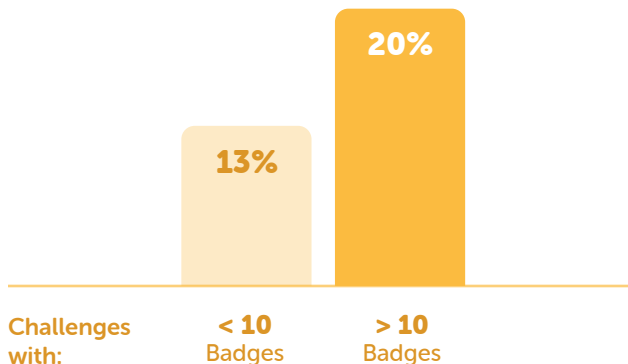Percent of challenge participants that logged 1 or more times

58%

Challenges with 5 or fewer badges

65%

Challenges with 10 or more badges

Portion of Readers Who Logged 8 or More Times

13%

20%

Challenges with:	< 10 Badges	> 10 Badges

The average summer 2021 challenge featured:

- **25 badges, including:**
- **16 logging badges**
- **8 activity badges**
- **A challenge badge for registering**

The majority of challenges offered between 11 and 30 badges. Similarly, Beanstack's pre-designed templates all use between 11 and 29 badges.

Global Achievements

To help boost the number of badges readers can earn in Beanstack, we introduced global achievement badges for summer 2021. Achievements are surprise badges that readers earn for reaching overarching reading milestones, like reading for 20 days straight, or for reading on special days, like High Five a Librarian Day. They are separate from the badges within a challenge, which readers can see and work toward.

Activities Can Help Library Resources Shine

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Activities within a reading challenge create deeper patron interaction and engagement beyond logging reading. **Multiple top-performing libraries reported that incorporating library resources into activities made a marked positive impact on their use.**

In the kids' summer reading challenges at a library in Southern California, young readers and their parents followed activity links to early education tools and a nature scavenger hunt to earn raffle tickets towards a grand prize.

↗ **200%**

A library in Southern California reported seeing a 200% increase in use for those library tools linked in their activity badges.

In summer 2021:

73% of challenges **used activity badges,** with...

10 **badges on average** per challenge, comprising...

29 **total activities** on average per challenge.

Activities are completely customizable, so the possibilities are endless. When used alongside logging badges in a reading challenge, **activities drive increased participation in library resources.** They are a powerful way to engage patrons with all the tools a library has to offer.

A few actual activities librarians used in 2021 to steer readers to other library offerings:

★ **Check out a staff-picked book**

👣 **Visit a local storywalk**

♫ **Listen to a digital song from the media collection**

✂ **Complete craft kits**

🔊 **Tune in to virtual storytime**

📱 **Download an ebook through the library's portal**

🌱 **Attend a library garden talk**

🔨 **Use the library's makerspace**

ZOOMED OUT:

Fun for the Whole Family

Kids' reading challenges are the bread and butter of most libraries' summer reading programming; our annual data consistently shows that enrollees ages 0 - 11 outnumber enrollees of all other ages combined. While that's good news for battling the summer slide, an exclusive focus on elementary-aged kids' challenges can not only leave teens and adults by the wayside, but it may actually reduce engagement for young readers as well.

When whole families can participate in challenges and log their reading together, engagement goes up across the board. We found that 88% of top-performing libraries offered programming for all ages in the summer of 2021, which kept families engaged and invested in summer reading.

> ## "We had a ton of families comment that the family time the [all-ages] program offered was their favorite part."
>
> Kristine Spyker, Library Services Manager at Auglaize County Public Library District in Ohio

Among the top performers we identified, there were many different approaches to offering challenges for all ages. Some libraries kept things simple and offered one challenge for all ages. Each reader in a family could then participate in the same challenge, earn the same badges, and complete the same activities together or on their own. Others created separate challenges for each age group, with age-specific goals, rewards, and activities. A few libraries even separated their challenges by reading level, rather than age; parents could choose whichever option best suited their children's reading skills.

88%

of top-performing libraries offered programming for all ages.

Hit the Reward Sweet Spot

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Summer reading rewards, whether physical—like books, coupons, or raffle entries—or intangible— like community recognition or posting reader book reviews—are nearly universal among our partners' reading challenges. The average 2021 summer reading challenge included eight rewards.

When we break down challenges by their number of rewards, **we see that some rewards impact engagement—but it doesn't take a lot to have an effect.**

> **"Giving a book as an enrollment prize is a great way to encourage participants to come into the library once they have enrolled online. They come to get their book and check out more books to read."**
>
> Lori Holewinski, Deputy Director of Impact at Hamilton East Public Library in Indiana

Challenges with four or more rewards see higher sustained engagement, with 70% of participants logging two or more days.

Challenges with zero rewards, on the other hand, have 60% of readers log at least twice.

60%

70%

0
Rewards

4+
Rewards
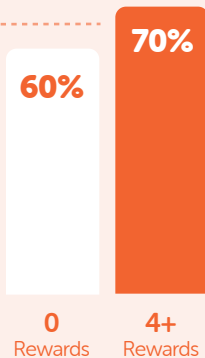
That 10-point difference holds steady regardless of how many additional rewards above four are available in a challenge. In other words, it's not necessary to flood readers with rewards. Our summer numbers show that selectively using one to four rewards over the course of a challenge works well to motivate continued reading and engagement.

Staff Training and Outreach Are the "Secret Sauce"

Staff buy-in and community excitement are essential components of any successful program, and especially so for libraries in the virtual age. Without as many in-person opportunities, having a confident and trained staff and an active summer reading promotion plan is more challenging, but also more critical.

Engaged and knowledgeable staff combined with a widespread public outreach campaign substantially boost participation and engagement in summer reading. Two-thirds of top-performing libraries labeled staff training/ outreach as the single most important ingredient in their success. And many shared their tips for how to support staff learning and spread the word about their summer challenges.

"We work hard to make the process easy for customers, and also for staff to be able to assist the customers," said Keisha Portis, digital experience director at Charlotte Mecklenburg Library in North Carolina. "We build a lot of live training, training modules, and training documents to make sure everyone understands … the ins and outs of our particular program as well as Beanstack." Other libraries similarly emphasized keeping participation "easy to explain," and many mentioned building robust training guides and how-to guides for staff and patrons.

Stories poured in of librarians going above and beyond to motivate their community. The staff at Hamilton East Public Library in Indiana did in-person outreach at area parks and released videos starring staff members' pets recommending their favorite books. Fort Bend County Library in Texas ramped up their online promotion with an active Facebook and Instagram strategy and sent video promos for their youth and middle school challenges to local schools.

65% of top-performing libraries pinpointed outreach, staff, and/or training as their "secret sauce" for success during summer 2021.

"Our secret sauce with Beanstack is steady incremental progress in community adoption, along with consistency...and also the absolute necessity of centering the online option during the ongoing pandemic."

Leah Weyand, Teen Services Coordinator at Oklahoma's Tulsa City-County Library

"Our really amazing librarians … will wear animal ear headbands all summer and ring bells in the library when kids complete the challenge and just generally go all out in creating an exciting environment," said Leah Weyand, teen services coordinator at Oklahoma's Tulsa City-County Library. "Our secret sauce with Beanstack is steady incremental progress in community adoption, along with consistency … and also the absolute necessity of centering the online option during the ongoing pandemic. It's starting to reach saturation level."

Evolving Beanstack:

The 8 advancements we're implementing now

With all of our takeaways from summer 2021, our roadmap for Beanstack in 2022 and beyond is buzzing with new ideas. We want to share how we're planning to level up to even better serve our partners and their patrons.

The 8 advancements we're implementing now
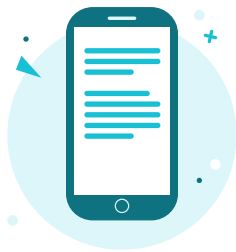
We introduced a completely new type of reading challenge in December 2021: **reading list challenges.** These allow libraries to design a list of titles, such as a state booklist, staff picks, recent award-winners, genre selections, etc. Patrons earn badges by reading from those specific books. Our debut reading list challenge, Winter Reading 2022: Read for a Better World, also allowed readers to access in-app reading content for featured titles.

To provide readers with **a new way to get book recommendations,** we created an option for friends to view each other's full reading logs—including recently read titles and all-time read titles. (Readers are informed of what will be shared with their friends, and can easily opt out if they prefer.)

We are continuing our work to bring the most popular aspects of the mobile app to the web experience, and vice versa. For example, we are rolling out the ability to **log multiple books and multiple days at one time on the mobile app**—features already widely used on our web app.

In recognition of the importance of summertime staff training, we are rolling out a customizable template for libraries to use as a **staff "cheat sheet"** for the summer of 2022, based on the inspiring examples we received from partners during 2021. Likewise, in 2022 we are launching a **revamped onboarding system** to better familiarize administrators with their Beanstack sites.

We heard that reading streaks were a game changer for summer reading 2021, and we want to make sure libraries fully capitalize on their power. We are exploring **reporting and tracking tools for administrators to see their users' reading streaks**. Our end goal is to make it easier for libraries to reward or promote readers' streaks to deepen engagement even further.

Badge Books made a huge debut this summer at our partner libraries. For 2022, a completely new **Summer Badge Book 2nd edition, with updated activities, refreshed content, a new design, and a matching challenge template, is already available for sample and pre-order.** The Badge Book retails in bookstores at $12.49 but we offer it at cost—$1.99—to all partner libraries as part of our service package.

We continue to refine the challenge templates we offer to our partner libraries in an effort to facilitate year-round programming. We now offer these **turnkey challenge templates at least once a month**, with top-notch badges and banners, book recommendations, creative activities, and accompanying marketing materials that can be customized for each library's specific challenge and site. Templates bring year-round challenges into reach for all libraries, regardless of staff size or programming budget.

Finally, though not directly tied to summer reading data, we will soon be expanding our popular school-based **reading fundraisers feature** to include libraries as well. It's a straightforward way for libraries to host read-a-thon-style fundraising campaigns within Beanstack. Readers can use their accounts from summer reading to track reading minutes and gain donations for library projects, like expanding collections or funding a new wing. It's another method of engaging the community of readers and creating value for our partner libraries.

You in 2022:

Short and practical ways to apply data-driven insights

Lofty insights are great, but how can you put them to work for you in concrete ways? For 2022, here are 22 boots-on-the-ground applications of our summer 2021 findings.

Short and practical ways to apply data-driven insights

Recruit Every Family Member

Our data shows that young kids log more reading when their older family members participate too.

Address All Ages

Have a challenge appealing to teens and adults—including badges and rewards suited for their ages.

Tailor the Log Type

Books-logging is great for kids 5 and under. Minutes-logging works better for teens and adults.

Family-Sized Activities

Include activity badges flexible enough for families to do together.

Play the Game

Gamify your challenge to get the most from your readers.

Go Streaking

Highlight streaks in your challenge promotion. Add longest streak prizes.

Be Prize-Wise

Offering more than 4 rewards seems to bring diminishing returns.

Bring on Badge Books

Offer Badge Books as enrollment prizes alongside the Badge Book Summer challenge template.

Make it Social

Promote Friends & Leaderboards to generate competition and inspiration. Make "Add a Friend" an activity.

Go Big on Badges

Digital badges cost nothing and spur readers just like physical prizes. 25 total badges is average.

Expand Access to Expand Equity

Diversifying your tools and marketing helps you reach different and new people, not just more people. Are there pockets of your community you haven't tapped into yet?

Mobilize

Promote the Beanstack mobile app to boost engagement, especially in low broadband areas. Hang a scannable QR code for one-touch download.

Activate Your Area

Set activity badge goals for museum visits, community gardens, or volunteer service.

Use Our Art

Beanstack's premade banners, flyers, and web images are ready to download and easy to customize.

Do it for the 'Gram

Expand your social media to cover multiple platforms. Beanstack offers marketing templates sized for Twitter, Instagram, and others.

Partner Up

Look for business sponsors serving communities you want to reach.

Think 12 Months of Summer

Don't let the summer muscles go soft in September. Capitalize on the off-season to drive more visitation, circulation, patron enrollment, and staff engagement.

"Cheat" to Win

Download Beanstack's staff cheat sheet template and distribute it early.

Challenge Year-Round

Keep hard-earned summer enrollees hooked with short challenges in the fall, winter, and spring.

Go for a Test-Drive

Run a full, staff-only challenge before summer. Leave time to get feedback from staff before you finalize your summer challenge design.

Outreach Early and Often

Partner with local schools for back-to-school, winter, or spring break reading challenges. Find community sponsors for off-season challenges to line up summer business partners in advance.

Promote Thyself

Beanstack has never been just a summer reading tool. Use it to benefit and boost your library in broader ways as well.

Steer the Crowd

Create activities that use other aspects of the library, like "Check out an ebook," or "Build something on the 3-D printer."

Read to Raise

Our forthcoming fundraisers feature can drive funding directly to your library to help boost collections and staffing.

Get Granular

Dive into your summer data and make your own recommendations. Beanstack's reports have tons of insightful shortcuts to keep you far away from spreadsheet quicksand.

Always Be On

Running a year-round "always-on" challenge keeps patrons engaged for the long-term—and then their summer reading can earn them twice the badges.

Make a List

Launch a reading list challenge to drive circulation of your featured titles and under-appreciated gems.
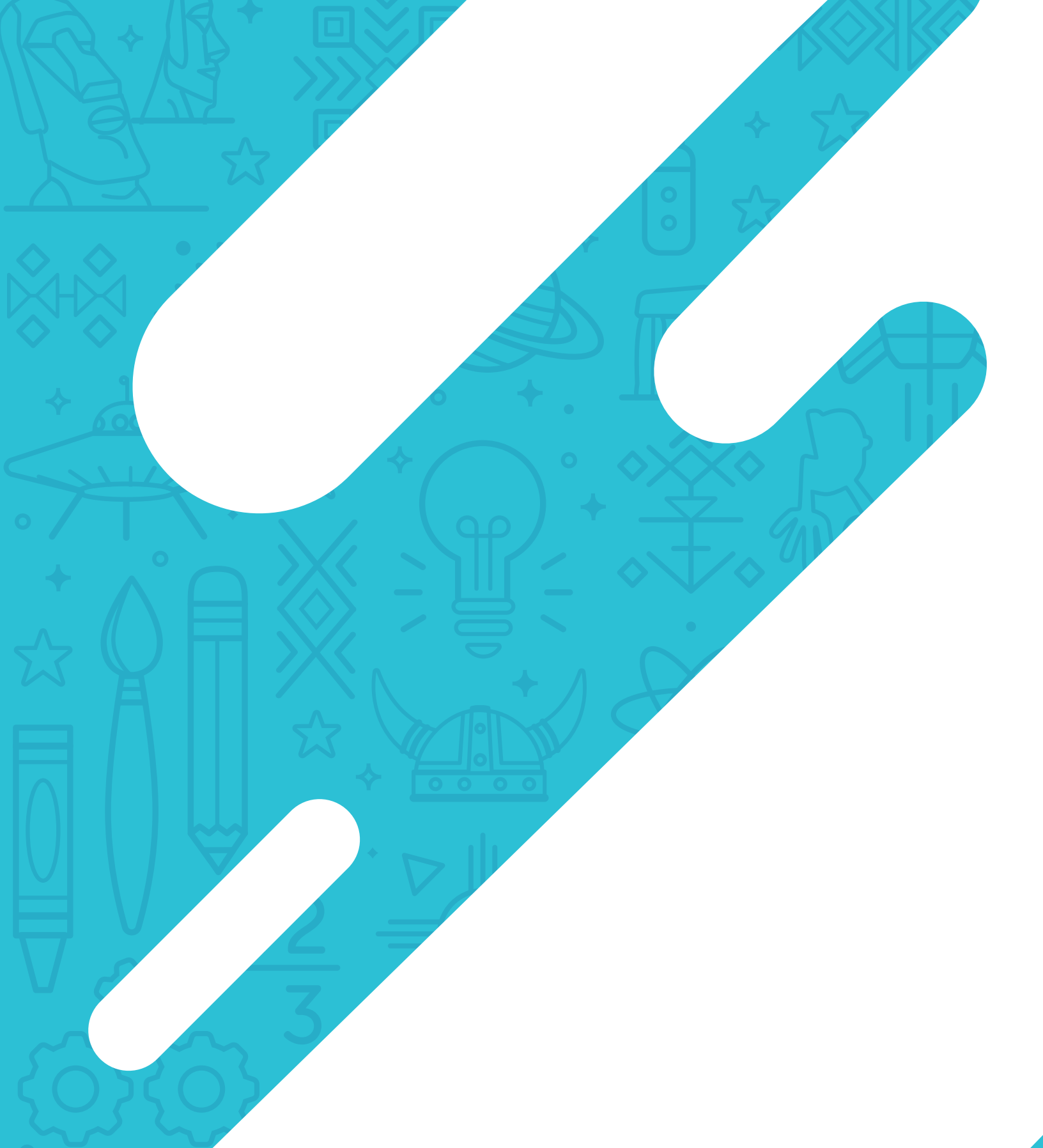
And Remember...

Some of these ideas may be old news to your library; others may be items you've touched on, but haven't explored fully. We offer these suggestions with the acknowledgement that these are approaches that work at libraries in general. Even among the top-performing summer challenges, there's a huge range of challenge choices and strategies that work to deeply engage readers. We designed Beanstack to be flexible, robust, and easy enough to work for any library, regardless of size, budget, reader demographics, staff numbers, or the dozens of other qualities that make one library so different from another. **Your own staff will always be the best judge of what suits your specific reading population and your unique goals.**

Last Thought:

Our shared mission

Ultimately, all these features, tools, and tips simply harken back to our shared mission: motivating people of all ages, demographics, and levels to read more. Summer after summer, we are proud to see the number of readers engaging with their libraries through Beanstack rise to new heights. And we continue to look to you, our partners, to give us the same type of open feedback, suggestions, and information that we hope this annual report offers in turn. With transparency, honesty, and an ongoing spirit of improvement, we will continue to bring the love of libraries, the habit of reading, and the benefits of both to ever more people.

Notes

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