

Inyo County Free Library

Mission, Services, and Projects

WHAT ARE LIBRARIES FOR?

A brief overview.

- **Libraries are repositories of ideas from the past to the present.**
 - *This is the most important role of a library – collecting and preserving books and other materials for the benefit of people today and in the future.*
- **Libraries connect people to ideas and each other.**
 - *From an author writing a book, to children learning about the world, libraries provide ideas that generate positive impact.*
- **Libraries are private.**
 - *The erosion of personal privacy is one of the most distressing aspects of the information age. Libraries are constrained by law and tradition to treat each person with respect and privacy. Who comes to a library, what they ask, and what they read is only available to the librarians unless a judge orders access.*

- **Librarians answer many questions, and any kind of question.**
 - *Librarians encounter many kinds of questions and seek answers to the best of their ability. No question is out of bounds, and all patrons are treated with confidentiality.*
- **Libraries are community spaces.**
 - *In a world increasingly devoid of gathering spaces and opportunities, libraries are the places where people can quietly read or connect with each other.*
- **Libraries provide services.**
 - *From WiFi to copy services and proctoring tests, libraries assist the public with essential services. Increasingly, library staff link people to mental health and other social services.*
- **Libraries support sustainability.**
 - *We share books! And seed libraries, recycling and reuse within the library, and educating the public about sustainability are important components of libraries now.*

- **Libraries encourage trust between people.**
 - *We are a public institution that buys things and loans them out on good faith. Library lending is a tacit agreement (with explicit rules) between the patron and institution that the public's books will be cared for and returned. People within our library spaces trust each other to behave appropriately so that each person can pursue their particular need. Most importantly, libraries provide accurate materials within each discipline, but do not privilege one view above another. With increasing distrust in society, the library is a neutral space, a modified public sphere, where freedom of expression is not only expected, but is codified in the Library Bill of Rights.*
- **Libraries support Liberty.**
 - *Our Republic was founded with the expectation and requirement that the electorate is not only literate, but educated. As Founder James Madison wrote, "What spectacle can be more edifying or seasonable, than that of Liberty & Learning, each leaning on each other for their mutual & surest support?" Public libraries are the University of the People, enabling every resident of the United States to inform themselves in the basis of governance and the obligations of citizenship. And we regularly check out the Federalist Papers and other political philosophy books because Inyo County's residents are diverse and interested in ideas.*

Inyo County Free Library's mission is to provide all residents of the county with access to materials which can improve their minds, broaden their lives, and fulfill their cultural, civic, intellectual, educational, and recreational needs.

Our Library's Mission



Inyo County Free Library Fun Facts

- ICFL was formed in 1913, the year that the Los Angeles Aqueduct was completed.
- ICFL has had 14 County Librarians. Miss Anne Margrave served for 29 years, from 1920 to 1949 and left her mark on many institutions in Inyo.
- ICFL has a Central Library, 5 additional branches, and an outreach van. At one point the Library had upwards of 40 small libraries at places like Ryan Mine and Haiwee. ICFL also ran the Mono County Library, and all of the school libraries.
- As one system with six branches, we share materials throughout the County, delivering an average of 140 boxes per month in FY22-23.
- Library staff answered 8,104 reference questions in FY22-23, ranging from the mundane to deep dives into historic newspapers and documents.
- The Library hosted 266 programs with 2,907 attendees in FY 22-23, primarily focused on children.
- Print Books still reign supreme in Libraries. From a recent ALA report, *“Print books are Gen Zers’ #1 preferred book format.”* <https://www.ala.org/news/2019/12/new-ala-report-gen-z-millennials-are-visiting-library-prefer-print-books> ICFL circulates about 3 times more print than e-books. Many patrons do both.

What is ICFL doing to fulfil the mission of libraries?

We have a robust collection at six physical sites

- *ICFL has 5 branches and a Central Library. The branches are outlets within the communities of Bishop, Big Pine, Lone Pine, Furnace Creek, and Tecopa. In addition to being a branch, the Central Library in Independence provides supplies, purchases and catalogs materials, coordinates the rotating collection, curates the local history special collection, conducts complex research, creates and implements programming, oversees deliveries, manages grants and budgets, pays bills, and does payroll.*
- *We provide an array of e-services, including Overdrive, the Palace App, Kanopy films, Medici.tv performances, educational software, and the state-funded New York Times.*



Lone Pine Branch 2015



**Furnace Creek Branch
2024**



**Bishop Branch shortly after
construction – Built 1953**

SOME OF THE BRANCH LIBRARIES

Challenges with buildings

- All of the libraries have had serious space issues for years. Lone Pine was expanded in 2014-15, and Bishop was rearranged and upgraded in 2012-14, both through the Supt of Schools Library Refresh Project. Construction is beginning today on the long-awaited access ramp at Lone Pine Library.
- Furnace Creek Library is in a borrowed house, which is a major upgrade from our old single-wide trailer, but Death Valley National Park needs it for housing. Superintendent Mike Reynolds is very supportive of the Library and is looking at options. We recently were able to hire a librarian after flood delays and difficulty in recruiting. On May 22 we had an open house there with about 20 happy attendees, with many new patrons. We now have the unexpected challenge of a broken air conditioner, but Park and County Maintenance are working together to fix it. Until that is done, we cannot open as the temperatures inside the building are in excess of 100 degrees.
- Tecopa Library is in a small single-wide trailer which needs cooling and ramp upgrades. Ideally, it should be replaced with a new climate-resilient library that incorporates community spaces.

The Central Library has been too small for decades. With all of the multiple and necessary functions carried out at a central library, space is required for staff, materials handling, housing significant collections, programming supplies, etc. Previous county librarians planned on expansion into the remainder of the ground floor, but the courts remain in use of that space. In 2008 the State Library visitor identified the Central facility as the primary challenge ICFL faced - with no room for programs, technical services, and adequately housing the collection.

Because the Central Library was not included in the SOS Library Refresh program, Public Works identified funds to replace flooring, necessitating packing and storing the bulk of the collection. The Library funded painting and shelving to more efficiently house materials. The COVID emergency began at the same time, presenting an enormous challenge to the remodel as well as to two major grants, and extending the timeline considerably. Staff shortages and absences have been a major underlying limitation for years also. Lighting in the reading room and floor anchoring shelves remain to be done.

After finally moving back into the library spaces, the Courthouse HVAC project started in April 2024. This requires the library to vacate people and material from areas in every room, so we are once again navigating a chaotic situation while continuing with library system operations.

ICFL has an Outreach Van

- *The outreach van was acquired through a State Library grant. Due to its size, it is not a book mobile, but deploys a small book collection, outreach event supplies, children's programs, and the memory lab. Even with staff absences and shortages, we have been to parades, memory lab workshops, Inyo Associates, open houses, and a health fair. It has carried the seed library, books, memory lab equipment, and generates interest and library card signups wherever it goes. ICFL will be deploying the van and the memory lab in partnership with the California State Library's California Revealed's Memories Without Borders, a California Civil Liberties Public Education Grant.*



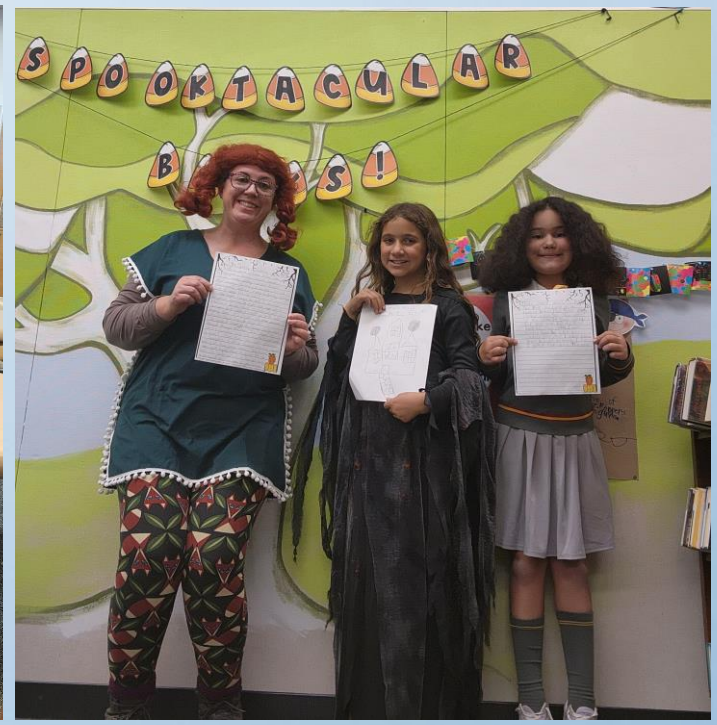
ICFL provides programs for children

- We operate an after-school program in Owens Valley Unified School District.
 - *Includes a Librarian-led reading program that incorporates volunteers. Participants in the after-school program experienced greater increases in their reading levels in the 23-24 school year as compared to students who did not participate in the program.*
 - *Includes educational maker-space, STEAM, and nature-focused learning.*
 - *Ideas created in this program will be used in other libraries and programs.*



LIBRARY AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM





We offer Summer Reading Programs, year-round children's story times, and readings within schools.



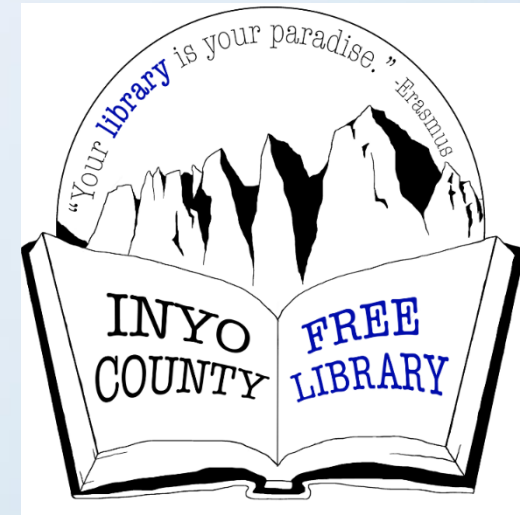
Learning about seeds in Lone Pine.



Death Valley's super readers



Summer Reading in Bishop Branch



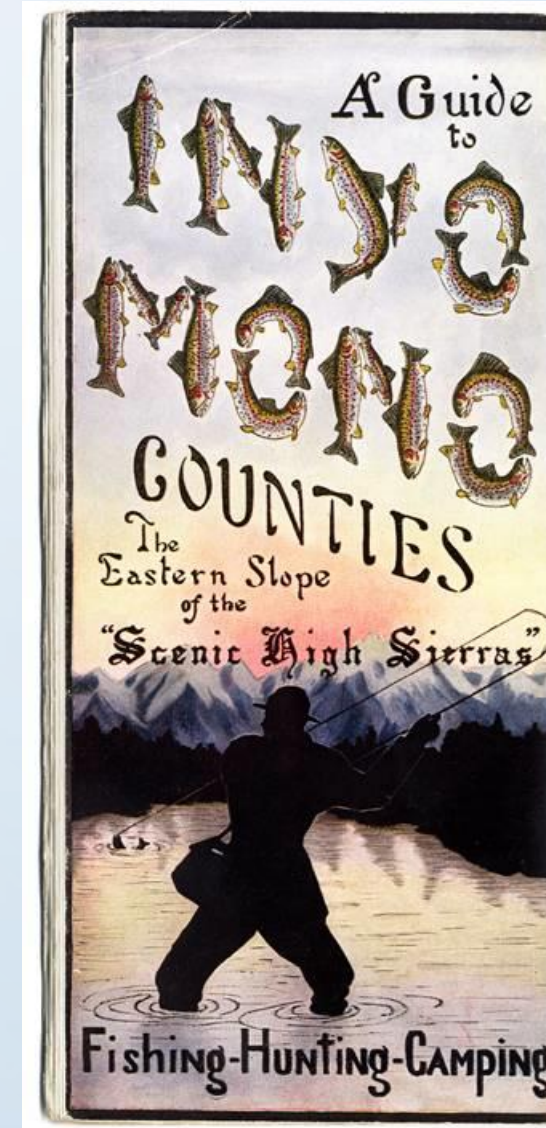
Storytime crafts at Bishop Branch



SUMMER READING PROGRAM INDEPENDENCE

ICFL has a significant Local History Special Collection

- This important collection includes water history, mining, Mary Austin, Manzanar, and government documents, among much other content.
- We partner with California Revealed to digitize items of importance to California.
<https://californiarevealed.org/>
- We have a grant-funded Memory Lab that can digitize old formats such as VHS or 8mm film. We use the outreach van for a mobile Memory Lab.
- We welcome researchers from everywhere. Some journey from other countries to access our knowledge and collection.
- Cultural partners include Eastern California Museum, Manzanar NHS, and the Inyo County Clerk-Recorder's Office. We work collaboratively to meet the needs of researchers and community.



ICFL provides essential services

- We offer WiFi and internet to residents and visitors, and assist them with using computers. Many people are not computer-literate, and we help them navigate job applications, government forms, and anything else.
- We provide copiers, scanning, and yes, faxing services.
- We proctor tests.
- We try to facilitate online meetings for patrons – difficult without private areas.
- We help people access social services as needed.
- We host through hikers for cooling, internet, and assistance with forms.
- We have Seed Libraries in four branches, a school, and a food bank. We share seeds with Eastern Sierra Land Trust for a yearly event. This was developed as part of a multi-year state-funded nature grant that began in 2020. It is a very popular service that increases food security and can alleviate some of our food deserts.



Hikers at the Central Library in June 2024

ICFL does outreach through Grants and Events

- We host open houses and speaker events to introduce residents to the library.
- We attend events such as Inyo Associates to spread the word about library services and education.
- We seek grants that support outreach and access. ICFL, in partnership with High Sierra Energy Foundation, has received a Sustainable Libraries grant, *The Inyo County Sustainability Series*, for the upcoming year which will include field trips and circulating materials to educate Inyo's residents on energy conservation and impacts.
- We seek grants that collect, preserve, and protect local history. The Mobile Memory Lab will be a key component of California Revealed's *Memories Without Borders* grant, documenting Japanese American internment.



Library staff at Big Pine Open House

Challenges to be Overcome

- ICFL has been perennially under-staffed. The Library personnel budget was cut by 30% in 2014, with people working in the Library going from 16 in 2008 to 7 in 2014. Some gains have been restored as we now have 10 staff plus the director (9.2FTE). But another person is needed.
- During the very low staffing time, programming was minimal, as keeping the doors open was a priority. Through extraordinary effort, we managed to complete the automation of the library, implement an array of e-services, and remodel two libraries.
- Now we are pushing hard to get out into the community with children's and adult events to fulfil the important educational function of libraries, but that requires dedicated staff for development and deployment.
- Grants are great! They have allowed us to do things we only dreamed about. But they require writing, planning, deploying, accounting and reporting – all staff time.
- Books are the Brand of Libraries. ICFL is dedicated to continuous improvement of collections and facilities as has been the case for sixteen years. Having the long lens of improvement has allowed us to lay the groundwork for changes years before funding is available.



**“Weapon of Mass Instruction”
Brazilian Artist Raul Lemesoff**