

How to write a Program Planning Guide

Welcome

This document was created as part of a Virginia Library Leadership Academy project by Elizabeth Land, program coordinator at York County Public Library. A presentation on the journey of YCPL was given at the 2017 VLAPAF Conference. Notes and handouts from that program are online at www.vla.org/2017-vlapaf-conference-session-documents-slideshows. For questions, please email Elizabeth Land at elizabeth.land@yorkcounty.gov.

PURPOSE OF LIBRARY PROGRAMS

The Library's Purpose

Library programs are just one of the many tools the library has for serving its community. From encouraging patrons to use your resources to supporting the educational, cultural and recreational needs of your community, library programs are an important part of the public library. At their core, libraries are about information, and programs are another avenue through which library staff can bring information to our patrons.

Community Awareness

Another outcome of providing library programs is to raise the profile of the library in the community. The word-of-mouth marketing, as well as press release and news coverage, which often accompany the offering of programs in the library, can go a long way in increasing the public's knowledge of the 21st Century Library.

CREATING A PROGRAMMING POLICY

Mission statement and objectives

Your library's mission statement and general objectives will be vital to you as you seek to guide your program planning. Talk to your library's director and board to identify your library system's mission, vision, general objectives and strategic priorities. You should also have a library staff member approach your county or city leadership to see what strategic priorities the library is able to support.

Once you have these tools, you can craft a programming policy and identify objectives that will guide current and future program planning staff.

The following is our Programming Policy, which we adapted from *Adult Programs in the Library* by Brett W. Lear. To check out a list of other print and online resources we have used to improve our programming, see [Program planning Resource List](#).

YCPL Programming Policy

- A.** A library program is an event that promotes the use of library materials, facilities, or services and/or offers the community an educational, recreational, or cultural experience. Programs are planned for the interest and enlightenment of York County citizens and surrounding communities.
- B.** York County Public Library strives to offer a variety of programs for all ages that support the mission of the library and reflect the broad range of community interests. Programs may be planned and presented by library staff or by individuals or groups with the library acting as sponsor. Programs may be offered in Library meeting rooms as space permits or at other locations designated by the Library.
- C.** Selection of library program topics, speakers, presentations, and resource materials will be made by library staff on the basis of the interests and needs of library users and the community.
- D.** Programs will not be allowed to serve as a platform for generating income for any sponsoring group or individual, except funds to support the library. Library programs must be noncommercial in nature. Although a businessperson or other professional expert may present a program, no solicitation of business is permitted. The sale of products at an adult library program is not allowed. There are two exceptions:
- 1.** Writers, performers, and artists may sell their own works at the library following library programs in which they are featured.
 - 2.** The Friends of the Library may sell items at library programs they sponsor.
- E.** Library sponsorship of a program does not constitute an endorsement of the content of the program or the views expressed by the participants.
- F.** Attendance at library sponsored programs is open to the public and shall not be restricted because of racial, religious, socioeconomic or political status.

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR GUIDE

- Library Policies
- Community Profile
- Staff contact information
- How you plan programs
- Planning and marketing timelines
- Budget and staff considerations
- Resources at your disposal
- References for your staff
- Copies of Surveys, Planning tools, and Evaluation Tools

BUILD A COMMUNITY PROFILE

CENSUS RESEARCH

We used American FactFinder, which gathers information from the 2010 U.S. Census, to look up a number of demographics we thought might help us as we brainstormed programs. The following is a list of the data points we retrieved from FactFinder:

- **Population**
- **Median Age**
- **Gender**
- **Race**
- **Households**
- **Education**
- **Employment**
- **Income:** Including median income and poverty information.
- **Business & Industry**
- **Veteran Status**
- **Disability**
- **Number of immigrants:** whether they are naturalized and when they immigrated.
- **Language spoken in the household**

You can go further and use the free version of PolicyMap to show you visually where in your county or city these demographics are located.

SURVEYS

Check with your library and locality to see if there have been any surveys distributed to patrons or residents recently. York County had distributed a Satisfaction Survey in 2015 which was beneficial to our understanding of how our residents view the library (positively) and its programming (poorly).

You can also conduct your own surveys. We recommend targeting both patrons and non-patrons. We accomplished this by distributing surveys at both in-house programming and at outreach events. See [Appendix A: Programming Survey](#) for the survey we distributed at these events.

EVALUATIONS

Evaluations are vital for future program planning. Patron evaluations can tell you when a presenter was good or bad, whether the program's topic was beneficial, and they can often bring ideas for new programs. See [Appendix B: Patron Program Evaluation](#) to see the paper program evaluations we distribute at events.

If your library has more than one individual planning programs, staff evaluations will become necessary to ensure any lessons learned about a program type or presenter is available to all planners, and during staffing transitions. These staff evaluations can help you understand how much time your team is putting into program planning, which can affect how many programs you attempt each year. See [Appendix C: York County Public Library Staff Program Evaluation](#) to view the evaluation our program planners fill out.

Finally, if you choose to create a program planning guide, which we recommend, you should plan to evaluate the final product on a regular basis so that its information and lessons remain relevant and updated. We evaluate our guide every year for basic information that might change (such as staff or budget changes). We plan to evaluate the guide as a whole, including the community profile information and strategic priorities, every 3-5 years to ensure it is meeting the needs of the library and community.

HOW WE PLAN PROGRAMS

PROGRAMMING TEAM

The York County Public Library Programming Team was created to help distribute the responsibilities of program planning, as well as encourage a system-wide approach to planning. The team is responsible for brainstorming ideas for programs, as well as identifying potential community partners and generating ideas for marketing programs.

Team Members

We recommend trying to create a diverse team from different backgrounds and experience levels. This tactic increases the chance of widening the perspective of your team and coming up with innovative programs. It also serves to support the professional development of staff members with less experience in program planning.

We built our Programming Team to represent multiple departments and levels of leadership within the York County Public Library. The team includes the Yorktown branch manager, the Head of Reference from the Tabb branch, the Head of Youth Services, one full-time library assistant at the Tabb branch (who also serves as the Programming Coordinator) and two part-time library assistants from the Yorktown branch.

Responsibilities

After an initial period in which the team met monthly, we now meet every other month. Each team member should make a meaningful contribution, whether that involves generating ideas, identifying possible presenters, booking presenters or creating marketing materials.

What if it is just me?

We feel your pain. We lived your situation not too long ago and it is one of the reasons we chose to embark on this journey.

Even if you do not have a programming team, a guide can still be beneficial in understanding your community and your library's policies regarding programming.

It will also be useful institutional knowledge that will last if you choose to move on from your position or if you eventually get more staff to help with planning programs.

As you plan programs, we would also recommend that you understand your own limitations and aim for quality over quantity in your program planning. One quality program a quarter is better than no programs at all or poor programs every month.

TIMELINE

While not always easy, program planning doesn't have to be a daunting task. The following is a general timeline that we use for planning programs. Times may vary, but we have found this timeline to be the most beneficial for hitting marketing deadlines and avoiding issues that can arise from planning at the last minute, namely low attendance.

- **Brainstorming** – Ideas can be generated at any time.
- **4-6 months in advance:** *Picking a topic* – Specific topics should be solidified 4 to 6 months ahead of the event. Check out [Appendix D: Program Planning Worksheet](#) to see a worksheet that planners can use to answer important questions during the process.
- **3-5 months in advance:** *Contacting Presenters* – Presenters are contacted 3 to 5 months in advance, depending on the number of presenters needed for an event.
 - For an email template for making first contact with a possible presenter, please see [APPENDIX E: Contacting presenters for the First Time](#).
 - See [Appendix F: Program Partner Form](#) for a document that can help planners outline expectations for partners and the library.
- **3 months in advance:** *Booking the space* – Rooms are booked no later than 3 months in advance. This timeline supports marketing and space availability.
- **2 months in advance:** *Marketing Design* – The program information must be sent to the designated designer two months before the event at the latest. This allows for leeway in the following design schedule:
 - One week to **draft a flyer** and then send drafts out
 - One week for everyone to **review**
 - One week to make corrections and print/submit **final flyers**

- **Flyers are printed at Tabb and sent to Yorktown.** If necessary, they are distributed to targeted locations, i.e. Star Trek Trivia Night flyers were brought to a comic book shop.
 - **Digital slides** are sent to the Head of Reference, who adds them to both Tabb and Yorktown slideshows and submits them for distribution on County TV station.
 - A small **web graphic** is sent to the marketing coordinator to include in the homepage slideshow and to include in press releases as needed.
 - The event is added to the **Event Calendar** and a press release is sent to the marketing coordinator for distribution to the County information office.
- **1 month in advance:** *Distribute marketing materials* – Post flyers and open registration on the online Event Calendar.
 - **1 week in advance:** *Confirm with presenter* – Three days to one week before the event, confirm the date and time with the presenter. Let them know how many have registered so far so they can estimate how many flyers they may need.
- **Day of the event**
 - Set the room up **30 to 60 minutes ahead** of start time.
 - Open the room to attendees **15 minutes ahead** of start time
 - Introduce the speaker, mention if there are extra resources and flyers for future programs available for participants, and encourage attendees to fill out evaluations and suggest ideas for future programming.
 - Count the attendance.
 - Afterwards, collect evaluations and thank the presenter.
- **Next day** - Send evaluations to the Programming Coordinator.
 - **Within a Week** - Fill out the Staff Evaluation within a week to ensure that the event is still fresh in your mind. Submit it to the Programming Coordinator.

BUDGET & COSTS

Revenue

- **Annual**
 - Contribution from the library budget (if any)

- **Occasional**
 - Friends of the Library
 - Library Foundation
 - Grants
 - Community Partnerships
 - Organizational Sponsorships
 - Volunteer time, including presenters who choose not to get compensated
 - For more ideas on generating funds, see *40+ New Revenue Sources for Libraries and Nonprofits*, written by Edmund A. Rossman III.

Expenses

Speaker Fees

- *To pay or not to pay:* We generally prefer presenters who are willing to provide their services for free, but also understand that quality presenters sometimes require compensation.

- *General Fee:*
 - The general fee is flexible. However, we have an average fee in mind based on our budget. Most speakers who have required a fee have been paid anywhere from \$50 to \$400, depending on the number of programs, distance traveled and whether lodging was required.
 - When negotiating a fee, we allow a presenter to throw out a number first and then we suggest an alternate number that we can afford.

- *Sales:*
 - Presenters cannot use a library-sponsored program to sell a product or solicit from attendees.
 - *Exception:* Authors, artists and musicians are allowed to sell their books, music or art after an event. The presenter is responsible for taking and safeguarding any money for sales of this type. The library must be notified ahead of the event if the author, musician or artist plans to sell items.

FACTORS TO KEEP IN MIND

TIME

Staff Constraints

When deciding to plan a program or scheduling staff, remember to include the time it takes to plan and set up the program, as well as how many staff may be required to run a program, in your decision. If you are going offsite, discuss with your library director whether travel to and from an offsite venue needs to be included in staff time.

FACILITY

Space Constraints

Identify where you can host programs, whether they be in your library or outside your library. Keep in mind how many people can fit in a room according to your fire code. Finally, make sure you take parking into account as you decide on the type events you want to hold. A limited parking lot might make it difficult to accommodate festivals or other events that can draw a large crowd.

OTHER ASSETS YOU CAN TAP

Human resources

- Staff are often a hidden source of knowledge, skills, passions, and connections
- Community partnerships: From one-time programs or donations to funding sponsorships, there are plenty of opportunities to create a two-way street of support between you and community businesses and organizations.

Assets you might already have

Make a list of the assets you already have that you can use for programs. Here are examples from our own list:

- Coffee maker and an urn to keep coffee or water warm
- Legos
- Licensing for movie screenings
- Assorted decorations
- Button Maker
- Technology: Laptop, Projector, Microphone, iPads, computer lab, scanner, 3D printer

PROGRAM PLANNING RESOURCE LIST

PRINT RESOURCES

- Adult Programs in the Library**, 2nd Edition, Brett W. Lear, 2013 — Excellent resource for creating library policies, planning worksheets, and evaluations.
- Adults Just Wanna Have Fun: Programs for Emerging Adults**, Audrey Barbakoff, 2016 — Ideas with supplies list, budget, process and time needed.
- Year of Programs for Millennials and More**, Amy Alessio, 2015 — Ideas for each month, with each entry including a supply list, budget, process and time needed.
- Film Programming for Public Libraries**, Kati Irons, 2014 — Best explanation of the copyright rules involved in screening movies. Includes plenty of theme ideas.
- Fostering Family History Services**, Rhonda L. Clark & Nicole Miller, 2016—Very in-depth look at family history research, including ideas for programs.
- 40+ New Revenue Sources for Libraries and Nonprofits**, Edmund A. Rossman III, 2016 — Not strictly about programming, but it is a detailed list of fundraising ideas.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- ProgrammingLibrarian.org—Step-by-step ideas for all library types and budgets.
- Creative Library Programs** (creativelibraryprograms.blogspot.com) — Includes a variety of practical resources, including book clubs discussion questions and trivia night resources.
- Facebook Programming Librarian Interest Group** (<http://bit.ly/2goSBPI>) — Forum for tapping the creativity of programming staff across the country.
- PLA's Project Outcome** (ala.org/pla/initiatives/performanceevaluation) — For libraries hoping to implement outcome-based evaluations.
- The Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries** (www.libraryvision.org/) — Includes an Action Guide that helps libraries understand their communities.
- SPLC's Guide to Community Asset-Mapping** (<http://bit.ly/2pHb5LW>) — Written for nonprofits, this guide helps you identify community partnerships.
- SuperLibraryMarketing.com — Excellent blog for all marketing experience levels.
- Canva.com (Nonprofit version) – Online tool for designing free marketing materials.
- US Census Bureau's American FactFinder** (factfinder2.census.gov) — Great place to pull census information for your community profile.
- Policy Map** (www.policymap.com/maps) — The free version lets you see where demographics fall in your locality, but you can only see one at a time.

APPENDIX A: PROGRAMMING SURVEY

York County Library Programming Survey

We are contemplating the expansion of our programming offerings for adults and young adults. Below are different ideas for book-related, social, informative, and demonstration-based programming.

Please select the activities you are most likely to attend. Check all that apply.

Book Programming

- Book Clubs (Themed, Single Book, etc.)
- Graphic Novel Club
- Author Talks

Social Programming

- Movies
- Adult Coloring Club
- Trivia Nights
- Board Game Nights

Informational Programming

- "How-to" Talks
- Makerspace Events
- Writing Workshops
- Computer classes
- Tech Hour
- Gardening Talks

Please circle the time frame(s) you would be most likely to attend a library program.

Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Weekdays

Weekends

Demographic Information

Please circle your preferred library branch: Tabb York

Please circle your age range: 18-29 30-49 50-69 70+

Comments/Suggestions

APPENDIX B: PATRON PROGRAM EVALUATION

York County Public Library Program Evaluation Form

Program Name _____ Date _____ Library _____

1) How did you hear about this program?

- York County Citizen News Advertisements/Flyers in the Library
- York County Library Facebook York County Library Website
- Local Newspaper Flyer at an event (Market Days, etc.)
- _____ Other (Describe)

2) How would you rate this program? (With 5 being the best and 1 being the worst)

1 2 3 4 5

3) What type of program would you be most likely to attend in the future?

- Movies Game Nights Book Clubs Computer Classes DIY
- Music Workshops Author Talk Demonstrations or other classes
- _____ Other (Describe your idea)

4) Do you have a library card? Yes No

APPENDIX C: YORK COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY STAFF PROGRAM EVALUATION

Program Title:									
Type of Program:		Standalone			Recurring			Passive	
Presenter:									
Presenter Contact									
Location:									
Date/Time <i>(If Recurring, indicate the most recent meeting. If passive, indicate final date.)</i>									
Program Purpose:		Educational			Recreational			Cultural	
Target Audience:		Adults	New Adults	Families	Special Needs		Other:		
Program Lead:									
Significant Assistants (list all involved):									
Planning Complexity		Mindless ---	1	2	3	4	--- Just Wow		
Execution Complexity		Easy ---	1	2	3	4	--- Exhausting		
Should we Repeat it?		No Way ---	1	2	3	4	--- Absolutely		
Overall Satisfaction		Train Wreck ---	1	2	3	4	--- Amazing		
Participant Count:									
Cost: <i>If value is donated, indicate donation & cost:</i>									
Marketing Tools Used:	Press Release	Handout	Flyer	Facebook	Website	Citizen News	TV Slide	Other:	
Notes: What didn't go well? What went well? How would you change it? Any observations, thoughts, ideas, explanations, etc.?									

APPENDIX D: PROGRAM PLANNING WORKSHEET

Considerations	Comments
What is the purpose of this program?	
What are your goals for this program?	
How would patrons benefit from this program?	
Who is the ideal audience for this program? Be as specific as possible.	
Would the program require patrons to provide information, such as parental consent forms or other personal information? How would that information used, or protected?	
How might the library benefit from offering this program through a partnership?	
What can city, county, state or federal agencies; nonprofit organizations; community service groups; or businesses contribute to this program?	
How long would this collaboration last? Would it be for a single program, or event, or ongoing?	
How might the potential partner benefit from working with the library on this program?	
What is known about the conduct and reliability of the potential partner's staff?	
How might collaborations reflect on the library or impact the reputation of the library?	
What will the library's roles and responsibilities be in connection with developing and/or delivering this program? Be specific.	
What will the potential partners' role and responsibilities be in connection with developing and/or delivering this program? Be specific.	
What potential issues may arise when working with this potential partner and how can the program or relationship be structured to address them?	
What laws, rules, or regulations may apply to this program or partnership?	
What terms may need to be established in a written or formal agreement?	

APPENDIX E: CONTACTING PRESENTERS FOR THE FIRST TIME

EMAIL TEMPLATE FOR FIRST CONTACT WITH A BUSINESS

My name is [Insert your name]. I am a [insert your title] with the York County Public Library and I am working to put together a program at the library. We are hoping to offer our patrons a program on [provide a general description, for example, "heart healthy nutrition"] during the month of [insert month].

The library wants to involve local businesses in our programming as a benefit to both the patrons and the business, so we thought you might be a great presenter for this program. Our hope is that you could present this program at both of our branches. Library policy doesn't allow you to conduct business in the library, but you can provide information to interested individuals after the program.

If this opportunity interests you, please contact me at your convenience and let me know when you might be available and if you require compensation.

Thank you in advance.

Regards,

[Name]

[Title]

York County Public Library

[phone number]

[email address]

TEMPLATE FOR FIRST CONTACT WITH AN INDIVIDUAL

My name is [Insert your name]. I am a [insert your title] with the York County Public Library and I am working to put together a program at the library. We are hoping to offer our patrons a program on [provide a general description, for example, "heart healthy nutrition"] during the month of [insert month].

Our hope is that you could present this program at both of our branches. If this opportunity interests you, please contact me at your convenience and let me know when you might be available and if you require compensation.

Thank you in advance.

Regards,

[Name]

[Title]

York County Public Library

[phone number]

[email address]

APPENDIX F: PROGRAM PARTNER FORM

Program, project, or event details

Program Name:		Date(s):
Description:		
Goal(s):		

Partner details

Organization name:	
Mailing Address:	City/State/Zip:
Contact Person:	Title:
Email:	Phone:

Partner responsibilities

Completion date or time frame

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Library responsibilities

Completion date or time frame

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

Library and partner benefits

Describe or list the nature and value of the benefits each party receives from the partnership:

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Program Duration

___ Duration of the program	Start date:	End date:
___ Ongoing		