

Altruistic Summer Reading Programs: Good Fun + Good Works

California Library Association Collaborative Summer Reading Program

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What is an Altruistic Summer Reading Program?

It's just like a regular summer reading program, but with "altruistic experiences" in place of or in addition to material prizes as rewards for achieving reading/activity goals at the library.

Altru-whatsit?

"Altruistic experiences" are outward-focused activities that benefit a cause or person other than oneself.

Why do Altruistic Summer Reading?

- Offer a meaningful experience for program participants
- Encourage setting goals that go beyond personal enrichment
- Help develop life-long civic spirit and charitable outlook
- Benefit the library and the community through new partnerships and creative ways of serving
- Save money on ephemeral material incentives

How does an Altruistic Program work?

(1.) Select a beneficiary: the organization that will benefit from your readers' accomplishments. Example: local animal shelter.

(2.) Find a donor: the library itself, the Friends of the library, the organization, or a third party. The beneficiary organization may be able to suggest a donor. Example: pet food company.

Note: If approaching your Friends group for money, tread carefully. Some Friends groups have restrictions regarding how money can be spent; for example, funds can only be used for programs in the library.

(3.) Choose specific reader actions to correspond with specific goals. Example: When a reader completes 20 hours, the pet food company will donate 20 pounds of food to the shelter.

(4.) Decide whether the altruistic experience will be supplemental/optional to a traditional material incentives program, or whether to do a program with no material incentives at all. Think about how to match actions to activities that might cater to a specific audience. Example: kids' achievements result in dogs groomed, teens' goal is to feed dogs, and

adults read to provide spay/neuter funds.

(5.) Recruit participants through regular outreach - and ask the partner organizations/donors to market the library's programs as well. Look for other opportunities for partnership between the library and organization. Example: sponsor a pet adoption program at the library.

(6.) Share successes! Share reading statistics/program feedback with the partner organizations, share the donation information with your readers, and share both with elected representatives and community leaders. And share with your professional network - the library community needs to learn from your experiences!

How about some examples?

County of Los Angeles Public Library: "Bow Wow Reading Club"

The Library partnered with the County Animal Care and Control, the County Library Foundation, and the County Animal Care Foundation to offer dog grooming as an incentive for kids' reading. Children started with a "puzzle" game card and added a puzzle piece for every four hours they read. When the puzzle was completed (four pieces/sixteen hours), the child received a special certificate and a shelter animal was groomed -- valuable because groomed dogs are much more likely to be adopted. The program was piloted at ten branches and was offered as an alternative to a material incentive program.

San Diego County Public Library: "Read for a Reason"

The Library partners with the County Department of Animal Services each summer. In 2011, readers worked to provide safety collars for search and rescue dogs. For every completed reading log, one collar was donated, with the expense shared between the collar manufacturer and Animal Services. In addition, the search and rescue operation increased the value of the partnership by doing special programs in the library featuring dog/human team members demonstrating/discussing their work. These programs were a hit! Next steps include finding a corporate donor to increase the impact of the project.

What are some other potential partners/beneficiaries?

- animal shelters
- homeless shelters
- food banks/clothes closets
- school libraries
- nature centers
- recreation areas
- parks (local/state)
- senior centers
- youth organizations/clubs
- global nonprofits (e.g. Heifer International)
- charity athletic events (e.g. March of Dimes' March for Babies)
- carbon offset organizations

What are some other ways to partner?

- Taking a group of teens to play games at the senior center
- Sponsoring a library-affiliated team (staff and patrons) for a charity fundraiser walk
- Collecting like-new books to create a children's library at a family shelter
- Holding a librarians vs. readers basketball game at a rec center
- Reducing library fines when patrons donate canned goods for a food bank

What are other incentives that are altruistic or environmentally friendly?

- useful items as prizes: school supplies, reusable tote bags, book store gift cards
- a new book added to the library collection in honor of each person who finishes
- a healthy snacks party at the end of the summer
- a cumulative project such as adding an origami figure to an art display, a tile to a mosaic, or a plant in a garden for each game board completion

What next?

Start brainstorming--and dream big for summer 2012!

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