Adult Reading Incentive Programs
On a shoestring budget

Colleen Knight
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Introduction

When I took a job as Adult Services Coordinator in 2006, I had no formal training in adult programming. Indeed such classes were not offered in the library school I attended. All programming classes, as in most MLIS programs, were geared towards children or teen programming. Why? Are adults not as important as children? Do librarians just assume that because a child used the library, he will continue as an adult?

I had been working in a public library for 6 years that stressed adult programming, but this was my first job as a librarian, and the first time it would be my responsibility if a program failed. In order to improve my chances for success, I read any material I could find on how to plan and implement adult programming. I found a few sources, but most assumed a budget for one program that was larger than my budget for the entire year. Most were also not practical for a library the size of mine.

When asked by those outside the library world what my new job entailed, I responded that I was like Julie the Activity Director of the Love Boat. I thought I was being original, only to find Raymond Ranier had said the same thing in his book, Programming for Adults (Ranier viii). I realized that many of my colleagues in this unique area of librarianship also find themselves on the same boat, learning by trial and error, trying not to sink.

When I was asked to do a reading incentive program, I found even less material available than on adult programs in general. I was more fortunate than some of my colleagues who have been faced with the same challenge; I had a basic structure to work from. The library where I worked had been doing such programs since 2003, some of which had been more successful than others. I hope that writing this guide will help someone that is in the same boat not to sink.
Why Host a Reading Incentive Program

Why should kids have all the fun?

Remember the fun and excitement of participating in a library’s summer reading program as a child? Trying to read enough to win that prize and attending fun and interesting programs brought excitement to those hot summer days when school was out and our friends were on vacation. Adult reading incentive programs can bring that same sense of excitement and fun to an often ignored patron base. Lisa MacKinney, former assistant director of the Bartow County Library stated it this way, “Reading is not just for kids—why should reading programs be any different? Public libraries spend enormous amounts of time and energy planning special reading programs for youth—are our older audiences less worthy?” (MacKinney 10).

I had also pondered the same questions. A part of the Georgia Public Library Standards states that “The library provides programs for children and adults appropriate to the mission of the library” (GPLS Standards Committee). However, it is often difficult to convince libraries that adults are just as much a part of the library and the community as children. Raymond Ranier wrote a very good defense of adult programming in general. It is included in its entirety because it should become the mantra of those who do adult programming.

Adults have long been, so to speak, the neglected stepchild of public libraries, despite being responsible for two-thirds of circulation and a majority of the funding. Instead, they were viewed as chauffeurs for the real patrons: their kids. Get the children early, the reasoning went, and you had them for life. Not in the age of two-minute sound bites, instant gratification, and short attention spans, you don’t. Offer them the same old stuff you gave mom and dad, grandpa and grandma, and they might be lost for life, at least after they get out of school. Even if they do grow into adult library users, what of all the “lost souls” who view the library as a place to avoid? Do we give up? How do we convince them that the library is an asset if they won’t buy into the “book thing”? When we began our video collection at the Peabody Public Library, we deliberately placed it in the back of the building, much as a supermarket puts its bread, milk and other staples in back so that you have to pass by the other stuff. When we began programming, our thoughts were much the same: if we can just get them here inside the door, they will see what a treasure they have in their community. (Ranier 2)

Children’s summer reading programs have been around since the early beginnings in 1898 and now 95% of all public libraries host such programs (Fiore viii). It has become a
mainstay of libraries. A reading incentive program can promote reading for pleasure, and lifelong learning, and is just plain fun for the patron. For the library, it can increase circulation, highlight new or special areas of the collection, increase program attendance, and create goodwill in the community. Libraries are now realizing that the benefits of a children’s reading program can be extended to an adult program. In 1997, 20% of libraries host adult reading incentive programs (Ranier 3). It only took 100 years!

**Patron Benefits**

Reading for pleasure is not something that just children enjoy. Most of the patrons who originally enrolled in our adult reading programs were our regular patrons who were already reading. Why not reward them for doing something they enjoyed and being regular readers? However as our program expanded and grew, we began to hear stories of patrons who had enrolled because they wanted to win that prize and discovered (or were reminded) that reading can be fun.

Lifelong learning is part of many libraries mission statements because it is that important. The reading incentive program gives patrons an opportunity to learn about different topics and ideas for free. A workshop might be given on the basics of investing or how to bead a necklace. It is all learning. Many of the patrons who originally attended a program because they wanted a chance to win that prize have become regular patrons of all programs, not just the ones with prizes, because they found value in the information offered and wanted to learn more.

Is having fun at the library a terrible thing? Our patrons don’t believe so.

**Library Benefits**

It comes as no surprise to anyone who has worked circulation during the summer months that reading incentive programs can increase circulation. Since adult reading programs are fairly new in existence, no research has yet been done to tie such programs to circulation. Indeed very little research has been done about adult programming at all. However, our library does have evidence that programs can increase circulation of specific areas of books. We track our top circulating titles and authors, and most of the time the top titles are the latest bestsellers. However when we hold a book discussion or other programs, those titles make it to the list.

This leads to the next library benefit, highlighting new or special areas in your collection. Recently my library invested in a series of college courses on DVD. This was something new that we had not offered before. We used the winter reading program to introduce and highlight them by asking patrons check one out and write a review. The courses flew off the shelves.

Reading incentive programs can also increase individual program attendance. Our library requires the attendance of least one program to be eligible for the grand prize.
Attendance is up 188% in two short years. We also allow patrons to enter the grand prize more than once by completing the requirements again. We have patrons that attend every program trying to win that coveted prize. However, it also introduces those patrons to the programs we offer, and many return to other programs even when we are not offering prizes.

“I didn’t know libraries did that” or “I wish my library did that” are some of the comments we hear every time we host a reading incentive program. Adults that feel included and enjoy programs offered specifically for them are more willing to support the library financially. The work involved is a small price to pay for creating community goodwill by hosting an adult reading program.
Financing on a Shoestring Budget

Budgets

Reading incentive programs do not have to bust the budget. There are several creative ways to host one when there is no money allotted in the budget; there are your local Friends’ group, businesses who want to support the library but just need reminding we’re here, donations of used, pristine books that can be used as prizes, local presenters that are willing to do programs for free, and a host of other ways to stay within a limited budget.

As an example, the Bartow County Library System hosts both a winter and a summer reading program. This is a system that is financially strapped and every bit of extra money is needed for staff and materials. The Adult Services budget is extremely small. However despite a small budget, the library hosted 171 adult programs and 2 reading incentive programs in FY08 and still did not spend all the budgeted money for FY08.

The summer reading program of FY08, Pursue Your Dreams, was our most successful to date with registration for the program up 57% from the previous summer’s program. Everyone who registered for the program received a complimentary book bag, a pencil, a bookmark, a coupon for a free waffle, and a paperback book. A door prize was given away at each program; that summer 30 individual programs were held. Some programs had more than one prize. The grand prize included a $50 BP gift certificate and a $100 Marriot Gift Certificate. Below are two tables, one is what it would have cost the library if everything had to be paid with library funds. The second is the actual cost to the library not including staff time:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pursue Your Dreams Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book Bags</td>
<td>$159.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pencils</td>
<td>$72.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Marks</td>
<td>$14.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Door Prizes for Programs</td>
<td>$657.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Prize</td>
<td>$249.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>$200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional printing: Brochures</td>
<td>$420.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house printing: Individual programs</td>
<td>$15.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paperback Books</td>
<td>$1,585.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food rewards coupon est. value</td>
<td>$947.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$4,322.77</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pursue Your Dreams Library Cost

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book Bags</td>
<td>$159.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pencils</td>
<td>$72.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Marks</td>
<td>$14.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Printing: Brochures</td>
<td>$420.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-house Printing: Individual programs</td>
<td>$15.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>$ 682.76</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So how did we do it? Donations! Donations! Donations!

**Prizes and Supplies**

The library receives donations of used books by the truck load every month. The library cannot possibly use all of them and most go into the quarterly Friends of the Library book sale. However, the Adult Services department saves the best of the paperbacks that are not going to be cataloged. These are pristine and look new, but yet the library system already has enough of the titles in the system. Those are the ones given away in our book bags.

We put in a request for the Friends to help fund a portion of the reading incentive program. This helps cover the cost of any food served at programs and some of the prizes. Library vendors have also been generous. Many were happy to help with prizes for such programs; we have received audio books, DVD’s, books, and other prizes.

We also solicit help from local businesses. We send out a letter asking them to support the reading incentive program. We ask for anything that might help: prizes or monetary donations. There are two example letters at the end of this section. Because the library also sends out letters to help with the children’s programs, we have started doing a joint letter with the children’s department so that local businesses would not be overtaxed. Be sure and give proper recognition and thanks to all donors. All donations are recognized in our brochures and on the website.

**Presenters for Programs**

Finding and justifying money for presenters can be a challenge to any library. How many times have you paid for a presenter and had only 3 people show up? Is this the best use of the library’s money? However if just 3 people show up for a presenter that you did not pay, while still embarrassing, it did not waste taxpayer dollars. If you look, you would be surprised how many local people are experts on a subject that would be willing to supply their time to the library.

Find a local stockbroker who will put on an Investing 101 workshop; a genealogist who will do a workshop on basic genealogy; the local craft shop owner who can do a program
on card making; the skydiver who will present a program on the risks and the fun of skydiving. Many of Georgia’s authors will speak for free or for just mileage reimbursement. The options are unlimited.

**Other Cost Saving Tips**

The examples in previous sections are from one library. However, libraries have found other ways to pay for reading incentive programs. Grants can be written to help with the cost of some programs. Some save the cost of professional printing by printing brochures and other promotional materials in house. The reading incentive can be structured differently with fewer prizes. Some do not give away anything until the patron has finished the program. Prizes do not have to be elaborate. However your library decides to do a reading incentive program, it does not have to break the bank.

For example, if the Bartow County Library had chosen to use less elaborate prizes, the cost of the book bags, pencils, and bookmarks could have been covered by the monetary donations received. If they had chosen to print all materials in-house, the cost would have dropped even more.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pursue Your Dreams for Less</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In-house printing: individual programs</td>
<td>$ 15.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in-house printing: brochures</td>
<td>$ 222.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$ 238.27</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With just staff time and effort, it is possible to host a reading incentive for very little money.
Donation Letter Samples

October 24, 2007

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Anytown Library System believes in the importance of fostering lifelong learning as expressed in our mission statement. As part of our commitment to this ideal, we offer a winter reading program especially tailored for adults designed to encourage literacy and learning through reading and special programming.

This year’s program, themed Get a Clue @ Your Library, will provide programs with incentives to encourage adults to keep reading and learning during the cold winter months. The weekly programs offered in keeping with this theme are a mystery author, a mystery theater, a bounty hunter, a business seminar series, and many other learning and recreational programs! Prizes will be given away at each program with a grand prize drawing in Mid-March for those completing the program.

In order to make this program a success, we desperately need our community businesses and organizations to support it. The library is in special need of donations, monetary or otherwise, to reward those completing the program. Anything would be appreciated. Each sponsor will be recognized with publicity at the library, on our library website, and throughout the community. Donations to the Anytown Library System are tax deductible.

If your business is able to help in some way, please contact me at 770-xxx-xxxx ext. xxx or library@anytownlibrary.org. The library system will be happy to make arrangements to pick up any donations. Donations can also be mailed to the library at 111 Main Street, Anytown, Georgia, 30000. We thank you in advance for your past and continuing support of the library system and its reading programs for Anytown citizens of all ages.

Sincerely,

Adult Services Coordinator
March 1, 2008

Local Business
Anytown, GA 30000

Dear Business,

Throughout the year, Anytown Public Library offers exciting literary and arts based programs for children, teens and adults. We are glad to be an educational beacon in our local community promoting literacy and providing a fun and safe gathering place for adults and families.

One such activity we offer is our extensive vacation reading program. This is an excellent way to promote reading and lifelong learning for people of all ages. For children and teens, participation in a vacation reading program strengthens their reading literacy skills and helps prevent them from becoming academically behind. Adults have two programs, the winter and the summer reading program. Their participation not only serves as a positive reading example to children and family members as to the importance of reading, but it also continues to foster and promote individual lifelong learning.

We are in need of assistance in order to continue to provide the level of quality programming and services our community deserves. The cost of performers, supplies and new book purchasing rises every year. In addition, we offer rewards and incentives to encourage completion of individual reading goals. Any donation, whether monetary or otherwise is greatly appreciated. Anything and everything helps! All donations are tax deductible and each sponsor will be recognized through the publicity at the library and on our website.

If you would like to help in some way, please contact me at (770) xxx-xxxx or at youthcoordinator@anytownlibrary.org, or adultcoordinator@anytownlibrary.org. We would be happy to make arrangements to pick up any donations, or they can be mailed to the library at the following address:

Anytown Public Library System/SRP
111 W. Main Street
Anytown, GA  30000

Thank you for your continued support of the Library!

Sincerely

Youth Services Coordinator

Adult Services Coordinator
Format and Planning: How the game is played

Format

The first item on the agenda after deciding to host a reading incentive program is to determine what type of program best fits the needs of the library and community. There are as many variations of reading programs as there are libraries that host them. There are no hard and fast rules. Some libraries require patrons to read any type of book, a certain genre, or several genres. Unlike the children’s program, adult reading programs are not limited to the summer: a winter program, a spring program or whatever works best for your community.

Reading incentives can be just as varied. You can give them a prize just for registering. You can give prizes to everyone who completes the program or hold a drawing for prizes. You can give away expensive prizes or something small and less costly. A lot will depend on your budget and how much money you can raise.

Be sure to give some thoughts to the rules. Make sure they are specific and easy to follow and that staff and patrons can understand them. If the rules are too convoluted or the prizes too difficult to obtain, it will affect your success. One library discovered this when it required 10 books in a 10 week period; most patrons with busy lives could not complete this lofty goal (Saricks 1897).

Our library has found great success allowing staff to participate and win prizes as well. Why should staff be excluded when we want them to be reading too? Allowing staff to participate has increased their willingness to promote the program. Front line staff has a good deal to do with the success of all library programs. If they are excited about a program, they will promote it.

Types of Reading Incentive Programs

There are three types or formats of reading incentive programs: basic, full, and comprehensive. There are variations that can be made to all formats. The formats serve as a guide to help with planning and implementing.

Basic
This format is best described as “Read X number of books and get a prize”. It is the simplest format to plan and implement. There is no program attendance requirement; indeed there need not be any individual programs that accompany it. According to Joyce Saricks, “adult clubs need not be as elaborate [as children’s summer programs] to be fun
“and successful” (1897). Most adults read for pleasure; why not reward them for doing just that!

**Full**
This format not only has the basic component of reading a certain number of books but also has adult programs that compliment the theme. No program attendance is required for the reading prizes. This is very similar to the children’s summer reading programs. A patron who just wants to read is given a chance to win, but individual programs are focused around the theme of the reading program.

**Comprehensive**
This format has reading requirements, individual programs that compliment the theme, and also program attendance requirements that are necessary for the patron to be eligible for prizes. While this format can be more costly in money and in staff time, it can increase not only circulation but also program attendance.

**Planning Time**
Whichever format your library chooses, advance planning is crucial. Time needs to be built into the schedule to allow for the creation of themes, graphics, reading logs, and marketing material. Time is needed to schedule programs, book presenters, send out donation letters, buy supplies and prizes, and publicize events. Below is a timeline of the schedule my department tries to maintain. The library’s program is a comprehensive format with a full schedule of individual programs. All patrons who register receive a registration book bag with goodies inside. All individual programs have a door prize given away, and a grand prize drawing is held for all patrons who complete the program.

| 4 months Out | Choose theme  
Create graphics  
Formation of Rules  
Brainstorm for program ideas  
Contact program presenters |
|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 months Out  | Send out donation letters  
Solicit donations from library vendors  
Solicit donation from Friends  
Contact program presenters  
Book programs  
Start Reading Club brochure and other marketing materials  
Start individual programs marketing materials |
| 2 months Out  | Order book bag, pencils, etc...  
Make sure all programs are finished  
Double check schedule  
Gather all donated prizes and decide prize package |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Purchase any remaining prizes  
Finish Brochure |
| 4-5 weeks out | Send Brochure out to printer  
Write thank you notes to all donors  
Finish any outstanding projects |
| 2-3 weeks out | Write PSA's and contact media outlets  
Take brochures and other publicity to area outlets |
| 1-2 weeks out | Stuff book bags with registration packet  
continue to promote |
| During Program | Promote  
Give away prizes  
Have fun! |
| after program | Statistics  
Evaluation |
Themes and Graphics: Do I really have to be creative?

How to pick a theme

Themes and graphics will help unify your program and help with marketing. The disadvantage to not having a statewide program like the children’s summer reading program is that there are no prepackaged slogans, graphics, and fonts. The advantage to not having a statewide program is that there are no prepackaged slogans, graphics, and fonts. You get a chance to show your creative side and to come up with your own.

As I was researching material for this guide, the dearth of resources available for adult reading incentive programs led me to read a lot of sources on how to plan a children’s summer program. One of the sources, Running Summer Library Reading Programs by Carole D. Fiore, has this to say in regards to selecting a theme and creating graphics:

> Trying to create something unique and professional looking can be time consuming at the least and many times turns out to be frustrating; it can also turn out to be very expensive in time and money, if you and your staff must start from scratch. If you have the needed resources, such as a graphic artist, lots of ideas, a substantial printing budget, and the ability to process the necessary paperwork generated by such a project, and your community needs has specific needs that prepared programs just don’t meet, then feel free to develop your own program and promotional material.

After reading that, why would you even try?

I also have to admit that when I accepted the job as Adult Services Coordinator, this is the one aspect that terrified me. I had no training as a graphic artist; I barely knew how to use Microsoft Publisher; I had always considered myself analytical, not creative. My Director assured me that all this can be taught, and it was not as difficult as I was making it out to be. However, I had seen what she and a former assistant director had done in previous years and was unsure if I could do it. Now, after a few years of choosing themes and creating graphics, I have to say she was right. It is easier than I thought!

My first try was with our winter reading program of 2007. Since it ran Jan 1st until Feb 28th, I began thinking of New Year’s Resolutions. I came up with the theme of Resolutions: Read and Learn. Next came trying to come up with a graphic to use on all marketing material. I had a basic idea of a notebook with someone writing their resolutions down. I used basic Microsoft Office clip art and received a lot of help from our Youth Services Coordinator who showed me how to break a clip art into pieces and just use what I want.
After several programs, I can now choose a theme and come up with a graphic in about 4-5 hours. Usually I come up with several graphics and allow other library personnel to choose the one they like best. It is now fun, as I have learned I can be creative. Creating the brochures, posters, and other marketing material has become my favorite part of the process. Don’t be afraid to try!

If you are having trouble coming up with themes on your own, the Internet and other libraries are a great resource. California did a summer reading program in 2007 for adults entitled “Summer Sleuthing @ Your Library”; they have a great Internet toolbox full of ideas for programs, fonts, and graphics (California Library Association). In Michigan, the Kent District Library has a winter reading program that is themed “Let it Snow” every year but the graphics changes (Marketing Library Services). You do not have to be creative when others have been for you. Be sure and obey any copyright restrictions.

Another tip for choosing a theme is to base it off the children’s summer reading program. For instance when the theme was “Catch the Reading Bug”, some libraries chose adult summer reading themes such as “Pollinate Your Mind” (Orion Township Public Library) or “The Buzz @ Your Library” (Glendora Public Library). When the children’s theme was “Reading Takes You Everywhere”, our library chose “Take a Journey With Us” as an adult reading program. This way all programming, children and adult, coordinates off the same basic theme.

When choosing a theme and graphics, keep your target audience in mind. Too cutesy may appear too childish, but too stuffy will appear serious and not fun. The same can be said of fonts. You want a font that says “this is going to be fun” without being too childish or unreadable. On the other hand, fonts like Times New Roman, while readable, will appear serious and will not say “this is fun”.

**Why choose a theme at all**

Themes, slogans, and graphics help unify your program so it is not just random individual programs that have no relation to each other. They also help market your reading incentive program by creating a unifying look to publicity and make it easier to promote. Yes, there are some libraries that just call it the Adult Summer Reading Club, and some have been successful. If your library is planning just the basic format in a reading incentive program, a theme is probably not as necessary. However if your library is planning the full or comprehensive format, themes will make your job easier and give the programs some cohesiveness.

Case Study: The Bartow County Library

The library started the adult reading incentive program with a comprehensive format in the summer of 2003. While individual programs had low attendance, the general reaction from the public was extremely
positive. This continued for the winter program and the following year’s summer program. Each program was more successful than the previous one, and all had great themes and graphics.

Then came a renovation and construction project, and the adult reading incentive program was discontinued until winter 2006. There were also some staff changes during this time, and the person who planned the earlier programs was no longer there. The library had lost the patron base from earlier programs and had to begin again.

Winter 06 and Summer 06 had no theme, just the Adult Reading Program. Individual programs had no cohesiveness; they were just the regular unconnected programs. The format of the program was also scaled back from the comprehensive format to the basic format. This confused the few loyal patrons of years past, and the program was floundering.

In the winter of 2007, the decision was made to go back to the original comprehensive format, with themes, graphics, and program attendance requirements. In just two short years, the adult reading incentive program registrations grew over 344%. Attendance at individual programs during the adult reading program grew 188%.

Of course, not all of the success of the case study can be attributed to just themes and graphics. However, it did contribute a great deal and marketing the program became easier.
Some Adult Reading Program Themes

Book Your Escape
Lights! Camera! Read!
Express Yourself...Read
Resolutions: Read and Learn
Take a Journey with Us
Get a Clue @ the Library
Pursue Your Dreams
Bringing You the World
Summer Sleuthing at Your Library
Let it Snow
Achieving Your Personal Best
Master the Art of Reading
These Books Were Made for Walking
Pollinate Your Mind
Vacation Readers Go Everywhere
The buzz @ your library
Get in the Game: Read
Relax and Read
Transform your World at the library
Book a Trip
Goodies for Grownups

Bartow County Library Sum 03
Bartow County Library Win 04
Bartow County Library Sum 04
Bartow County Library Win 07
Bartow County Library Sum 07
Bartow County Library Win 08
Bartow County Library Sum 08
Bartow County Library Win 09
California Libraries Sum 07
Kent District Library, MI
Ferguson Library, Stamford, CN Sum 01
Ferguson Library, Stamford, CN Sum 08
Newport Public Library, RI Sum 08
Orion Library, Lake Orion, MI Sum 08
Arlington Library, Arlington, TX Sum 08
Glendora Public Library, CA Sum 08
Downers Grove Public Library, IL Sum 08
PMLC, Charlotte NC Sum 08
San Mateo County, CA Sum 08
West Caldwell Public Library, NJ Sum 08
Williamsburg Regional Library, VA Sum 98

Other Resources for Themes


This has an appendix with children’s summer program themes, some of which can be adapted to adults.

Kan, Katharine. Sizzling Summer Reading Programs for Young Adults. Chicago: ALA, 1998.

This book is for teen summer reading programs, some of the themes can be adapted for adults.
Examples of Past Graphics

- Resolutions
  1. Read
  2. Learn
- Take A Journey With Us
- Adult Summer Reading Program
- Get a Clue @ Your Library
  Winter Reading Program for Adults
- Pursue Your Dreams
Individual Programs

Cohesiveness

As stated in previous chapters, having individual programs to go along with your reading incentive program can bring cohesiveness to the entire program.

Choose programs that go along with your theme, or that can be made to fit. If you have a good idea for a program but it doesn’t seem to fit the theme you have chosen, don’t necessarily discard it. Sometimes all that is needed is a little creativity. For example, the theme of one winter’s reading program was “Get a Clue @ your Library”. Some of the programs that were done that winter were a mystery author visit, a mystery book chat, a murder mystery game, candle making, soap making, Etowah Indian Mounds presentation, and a documentary of the Iraq war. At first glance some of the programs listed do not match the theme (candle making, soap making, Etowah Indian Mounds, and documentary); however, it is all in the way the program is titled, and the promotion is written.

Light Your Way with Candle Making
Candles can light the way to great clues.

Clean Up the Scene with Soap Making
Even CSI’s need a clean scene

No End in Sight
Get a clue about Iraq and U.S. involvement in this 2007 Sundance Film Festival Special Jury Prize for Documentary

Trace the Evidence: Etowah Indian Mounds
Trace the evidence of past cultures with this fascinating history in our own community.

Now those four programs compliment the theme and do not seem random. There any number of programs and topics patrons can “Get a Clue” about.

Make it easy for patrons to participate

Patrons have full, busy lives so make it easy for them by varying the day and time of programs. Do a craft program in the afternoon and then do another one in the evening. Include some programs on Saturday. This way people with busy schedules can find a program that works with their schedule. If the individual programs are just on Thursday evening, then the patron who wants to participate but works on Thursday evening will not be able to.
Still having trouble getting patrons to come to programs? Give them an out. If there is a new or special part of your collection you want to highlight, count that as a program. For instance, our library recently obtained downloadable audio books. A patron could download an audio and write up a review of the process (was it easy, were the instructions clear, etc.) and count that as a program attended for the summer reading program. This accomplished three things: it highlighted a new collection in the library; it gave the library much needed feedback on the new service; and it made it easier for patrons who could not find the time to attend a program a way to participate.

Also, try to do a balance of program types i.e. informational programs, crafts, book discussions, movies, etc... A patron who would be interested in a feature film may not be interested in a documentary. If only one type of program is included, it will limit the appeal to some patrons. The goal is to appeal to a broad spectrum of patrons.

Try to appeal to all age groups. Our library is actively trying to increase the number of patrons between the ages 20-30 who use the library. This age group in our community has no interest in attending book discussions, crafts, or informational programs. We have tried gaming and an AnimeCon with great success. Also a murder mystery dinner (like a live Clue game) worked very well. We still do the other types of programs, but adding some programs with younger appeal has helped broaden the spectrum of patrons that participate in our reading incentive program.

**Presenters for Programs**

As stated in the financing chapter, presenters for programs do not have to cost more than the library can afford. According to Raymond Ranier,

> People are out there waiting for you. They have something important to say, but they can’t say it until you call…. These are the speakers, both amateur and professional, whose job it is—at least in part—to disseminate their special knowledge to the public. In the daytime, they might take on the secret identity of an engineer, a banker, a clergyman, or even a mild mannered reporter. (21)

All we need to do is find them and make the call. Many are willing to supply their time for free or just mileage reimbursement.

Presenters do not have to be professional speakers for programs to be interesting and successful. Our children’s library assistant told me of an interesting conversation she had with a mother who attended one of her story times. The lady was from Brazil and had very interesting stories to tell. The theme for our next reading incentive program was “Take a Journey with Us”, so I contacted her about possibly doing a program on Brazil. This lady was great! I immediately booked her do to a program entitled, “Brazil: Beyond the Amazon”. It was a very successful program. She brought in native food, some artifacts, and proceeded to give one of the best talks I have heard. Did you know that
Wilbur and Orville Wright did not invent the airplane? In Brazilian schools they teach that the first manned flight was done by a guy in Brazil.

Utilize your staff. Library personnel are used to speaking in public and do so as part of their regular jobs. Can you or someone teach a workshop on how to use GALILEO or one of the individual databases such as Ancestry Library? As part of my job, I routinely do Reader’s Advisory; I planned a program that helped patrons find reader’s advisory websites that so that they can get “Clued into Books”. I am not a “crafty” person and could not possibly break down a craft well enough to teach it; I can barely do them myself. However, several people on our staff can. It sometimes requires creative scheduling to allow them time from regularly scheduled activities to plan and implement a program, but it can be done.

Presenters can be found in a wide variety of places. Your local historical society, your genealogical society, Chamber of Commerce, colleges and universities, police department, city hall, author websites, and humane society to name a few.

**Resources for Programming**

Running out of ideas for programs? Check other libraries websites and see what they are doing. Why reinvent the wheel? Listed below are several resources that are helpful.


WebJunction Georgia. [http://ga.webjunction.org/1](http://ga.webjunction.org/1)
A Few Final Words

OCLC’s study “Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources” in 2005 found that frequency of library use declines with age (53). Below are some comments from some of the people involved in that study.

“My mom loves the library and is there all the time but I never think of it. I think they should look into ways to bridge the generation gap.” 33 years old

“I haven’t carried a library card since I was in high school.” 59 years old

“I have forgotten about libraries since I left school” 30 years old

“The library has no purpose in my life. I guess it is more of a historical archive of old paper documents now. Who knows?” 50 years old

“If you don’t have kids or are not studying, you don’t often know what the library offers.” 33 years old

Many libraries have mission and vision statements to the effect of “providing educational, informational, and recreational needs of all citizens”. Yet all too often the adults are left out of the “citizens” equation when it comes to programs. Implementing a cost effective reading incentive program is one way to help balance the equation and to remind adults that the library is more than just about books and children.
Works Cited


Kan, Katharine. Sizzling Summer Reading Programs for Young Adults. Chicago: ALA, 1998.


