

1. Program Overview

The Henrico Community Author Showcase is a public library program that allows local authors to present and promote their books and discuss and connect with other writers and readers in the community at a Henrico County Public Library (HCPL). A unique feature of this program is that it operates as “self-serve.” The program allows local authors to sign-up and share their books during a 90-minute evening time slot at an area library. Authors can read, discuss their writing process, sell, sign, and promote their book. The program enables authors to donate a copy of their book to the library’s collection for checkout and to make an optional donation to the Friends of the Henrico County Public Library.

The program is mutually beneficial to authors and libraries. Local authors are happily accommodated and achieve their goals for promoting their books at libraries. Library staff can welcome local authors instead of denying their requests as was done in the past. As a partner, the Friends of the Library receive monetary donations through a new revenue stream. Meeting room and library use increase. Free books are added to the library’s collection. Attendees and authors become more engaged at the library and build a community of writers and readers. The Henrico Community Author Showcase meets all three key points of the library’s mission via this program: promoting reading, connecting people with the information they need, and enriching community life.

2. The Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Local Authors often want to make their books available for checkout at the library. They also want to present programs or host book-signings to market, promote, and sell their books. Local authors naturally think of the public library as a place to share their books. However, most often, their books do not meet the public library criteria for purchase into the library’s collection, which

requires publisher reviews and specified quality standards. Even if local authors are willing to donate their book free of charge, libraries do not usually accept them for the same reason. Local authors are often left disappointed and frustrated when told their books cannot be added to the library’s collection and that, further, they cannot sell them or host a related program or book-signing.

These authors are readers and writers and “book people”, and they are a logical group for the library to support within its mission. They are an ideal community for libraries to build, and, yet, prior to this program, Henrico’s libraries often struggled to embrace them and meet their needs. Library staff had often been in the uncomfortable position of having to decline offers from passionate, local authors. Without a new effort directed at relationship-building between authors and public libraries, the opportunity to build library and county community is lost and prospective library customers and supporters are disappointed and left out.

3. How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The Henrico Community Author Showcase is a self-serve program that allows local authors to sign-up and share their books during a 90-minute evening time slot at area libraries. Authors can read, discuss their writing process, sell, sign, and promote their books.

This program uses existing library technologies in a new way to serve local authors. This cost-effective, repurposing of existing technology is an innovation that libraries across the state can likely replicate to engage their local author communities. Many library systems utilize room reservation systems of various kinds, as well as cataloging software, and most libraries offer public meeting space. Self-serve registration for the Author Showcase program simply requires internet connectivity and the use of our existing room booking and program scheduling software called “Evanced”. Library IT staff configured a way to allow authors to book their times for the

events on their own with no staff intervention, using a feature of Evanced that is intended for registering library customers for classes and programs. Authors use library technology, which may include laptops, projectors, and other AV capabilities, in the meeting and conference rooms for their events. In addition, books by local authors are added into the library’s cataloging software system and made searchable for the public on the online catalog.

4. How Program Was Carried Out

The concept of this program was envisioned by the Public Services Administrator who oversaw adult programming. The development and planning occurred in 2014, with a committee composed of one Adult Services librarian serving as the Author Showcase point person from each area library location and an IT/Web team member who handled software used for the program and web site publicity. The pilot program launched in May of 2014. With one year into the program, demand for bookings required available date posting lead times to be extended out several months. In 2016, a new Showcase was added at the new Varina Area Library, which opened on June 2, 2016, bringing the Showcase to a fifth location in the library system.

Authors who have a HCPL card and have written a book that is bound and published or self-published can participate. They visit the Author Showcase section of the Library’s website and check an online events calendar to find available Showcase dates and times. They can register on their own from anywhere with an internet connection. Authors can choose the library location and conference or meeting room. They are prompted to include information about their book, including the title, genre, audience age, and other relevant information. Once they have registered for a showcase program date, they are encouraged to promote their program, donate a book, and optionally sell their books at the program.

The library encourages authors to invite family, friends, and other writers and readers to their event using printed materials with a template provided, and through Facebook, Twitter, and other social media. Publicity is the primary responsibility of the author with this self-serve program; however, ongoing advertising about the Henrico Community Authors Showcase is also provided by the library via the library’s web site and social media. Library staff receives some information via data entry from the author and works to post and share Internet links about books and sales sites if they exist. Local newspapers review library-scheduled events and often pick up on the Showcase and promote specific books and authors.

Authors are invited to donate one free copy of their book to the area library where they host their program. If they choose to donate a copy, their book is catalogued and processed by Materials Management library staff, and it becomes searchable for all county library card holders in our library catalog. Library customers can search for books in this special collection in our catalog by browsing the “If You Like” section called, “Community Authors,” or use the Advanced Search for "Community Authors" under “Location.

The Community Author Showcase books can be checked-out and also reserved as holds by library customers. Books are shelved on our Henrico Community Author’s shelf and are kept for a minimum of a year, or longer if they continue to check out. All donated books have a sticker placed on the front cover clearly indicating that they are part of the Community Author Showcase program. The sticker’s wording serves as a disclaimer and was reviewed and approved by the County Attorney’s office.

Another option for Showcase authors is to sell books at their programs. The Friends of the Henrico County Public Library serve as a partner of the Community Author Showcase program and are able to sponsor books sales for those who make a \$20 tax-deductible donation. Authors are

encouraged to join the Friends and get involved with supporting the library. The program has created a new revenue stream for the Friends in this way, and the Friends’ support, in turn, comes back to the library.

At the conclusion of each program, authors are asked to count the number of attendees and return a brief form with the total to library staff. The Showcase program increases the use of library meeting rooms, which is another benefit.

5. Financing and Staffing

There were virtually no costs for this program except for the stickers placed on the donated books. The self-serve design of the program used an existing room-booking system to facilitate the online scheduling for the showcase. Staff time is very minimal and falls within regular adult programming duties. This low-cost repurposing of existing library software could be replicated by most library systems in the state who offer room reservations and use cataloging software.

The library receives the showcase books at no cost, and The Friends of the Henrico Library earn money with donations made to support the associated book sales as a new revenue stream. These cost-effective features of the Community Authors Showcase could greatly benefit other library systems as well.

6. Program Results

Results of the Henrico Community Author Showcase have been positive. From its pilot launch in May of 2014, authors quickly began signing up and expressing their gratitude for the program via enthusiastic phone calls and emails to the program coordinator. By 2015, demand for bookings made it necessary to increase the lead time for authors to sign up for their sessions. In 2016, demand warranted the addition of another location at our new Varina Area Library, bringing the

number of library locations with Author Showcase programs to five. The genres of books have varied widely from board books for babies to more esoteric, non-fiction for adults. There have been inspirational books, how-to books, mysteries, and many more. Authors can schedule up to five events per year, and some have embraced that opportunity.

Since the program started, the number of bookings has been tracked, as well as, the dates, titles, genres, and other related information about the showcase. The library has been pleased that, to date, 82 author showcases have taken place. The number of free books that have been added to the library’s collection is also 82. Circulation figures for the books is 733. For supporting these authors in their endeavors and as indicated by their grateful feedback, we believe this to be the most important data element for gauging the overall success of the program. Building and supporting this author community was our primary goal.

There have been several other benefits. While tracking audience attendance has proved to be more difficult as we rely on the author returning a slip to report back their audiences, staff reports that attendance is usually small to moderate with an occasional larger audience for a better-known local author. Any and all showcase attendance does contribute to increased use of meeting and conference rooms. The Friends of the Henrico County Public library are pleased with the program and the related interest and donations they have received. In 2016, the library began teasing out the book sale revenue unique to the program and is now also tracking that figure.

Another indication of the success of the program in the goal of building community, is the interest and attention of the local press and other groups. The Henrico Citizen, a local news source, frequently highlights the Community Author Showcase with titles of interest. A local non-profit Richmond area authors’ group, the James River Writers, approached the library and requested and shared information about the program at their annual October Conferences. The State Library

of Virginia has approached the library with a request to partner and receive a second copy of our local authors’ books. Future plans for the Showcase are to facilitate a gathering or reception for all authors and to add a feature for authors to be able to submit copies of their works in ebook format. Interest has remained steady, and it is expected that this author community will continue to grow.

The Henrico Community Authors Showcase program offers a new and responsive service to county residents, both local authors and showcase attendees. The program fills a gap of opportunity where the library was previously unable to meet the needs and requests of local authors. The Author Showcase enhances the level of citizen participation in the public library and its programs. The program has measurable results including author participation and books donated and circulated. The Author Showcase program is innovative in being a systematic and “self-serve” local author hosting program that incurs almost no cost and requires very little additional library staff time. It further builds a community of readers at the library and in the County. The program is cost-effective, repurposing existing library technologies, requiring only stickers as materials, and using minimal staff time. In addition, a new revenue source was generated for the library’s primary auxiliary group, the Friends of the Henrico County Public Library, as part of this program. Library systems across the state could replicate this program to further engage their local reading and writing communities, enrich their collections of local history, and increase use of their public meeting spaces, at little to no cost.

7. Brief Summary

Henrico County Public Library created the self-service Community Authors Showcase program to build relationships between local authors and their public library. The library had struggled to meet the needs of local authors, many of whom would like to see their works available in their

local libraries. Authors often wanted to have book signings or events at the library, which was difficult for library staff to accommodate. By creating the self-service Community Authors Showcase program, local authors can now book and host their own author events in library meeting rooms with limited promotion provided by the library, as well as donate copies of their works to the Authors Showcase collection in their local Henrico library. The program benefits authors and libraries equally. This program could be easily replicated by libraries across the state to develop, strengthen, and sustain relationships with their local writing community, without altering collection development policies or increasing staff programming workloads.