



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: County of Henrico

Program Title: Closing the Distance Between Us

Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Anthony McDowell

Title: Deputy County Manager for Public Safety

Signature: 

Program Overview

Henrico is a rapidly growing and diversifying County, and Henrico County Public Library has responded to the changing community by hosting programs to welcome new immigrant residents. These efforts have resulted in greater engagement between the Library and immigrants in Henrico, which in turn informed the Library's decision to host author Reyna Grande to discuss her immigration memoir *The Distance Between Us* at the Library's signature event, All Henrico Reads, in 2018. After the event with Ms. Grande, the Library hosted a moderated discussion panel featuring local residents and staff who immigrated to Henrico, called "Closing The Distance Between Us." In order to create a community event that could bring people together, the Library planned carefully, and focused on highlighting storytelling and shared experiences. Without taking a political position, the Library showed that it values the immigrant experience by providing an opportunity for community members to know more about immigrant lives, challenges, and successes in Henrico. The panel opened up dialogue and understanding between long-time Henrico residents and new, at a time when immigration is at the forefront of our national discussion.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Since 2000, the population of Henrico County has grown by upwards of 30%, and many new Henrico residents are immigrants or refugees. Once a predominately suburban and rural County, Henrico now has areas ranging from urban to rural in density. New Henrico residents immigrate to the County from all over the world, with the largest numbers of immigrant residents hailing from Central and South America, as well as Korea, India, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Henrico County Public Library saw a need for a welcoming approach to serving the County's newer residents. The Library system selected Reyna Grande's immigration memoir *The Distance Between Us* for its 2018 All Henrico Reads event, an all-community read in which residents read

a selected title, then discuss it at book discussions across the County leading up to the evening author event. With immigration issues playing an increasingly divisive role on the national stage, the Library wanted to bring a local focus to experiences and stories of immigrants and those who work with immigrants to give an opportunity for dialogue and understanding. In order to do this, Library staff decided to plan a moderated discussion panel on the immigrant experience in Henrico County to continue the conversation sparked at All Henrico Reads.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Closing The Distance Between Us could provide a model for other County library systems who are seeking to host programs that highlight the role of Libraries as both centers for community learning, and civic institutions. The program provides a roadmap for engaging immigrant residents and fostering important community conversations while avoiding the divisiveness of the national immigration debate. In order to create a community event that could bring people together, the Library planned carefully, and focused on highlighting storytelling and shared experiences. Without taking a political position, the Library showed that it values the immigrant experience by providing an opportunity for community members to know more about immigrant lives, challenges, and successes in Henrico. The program did not incur any expense for the library to plan or host, and could be replicated in a library system of any size or funding level. Library systems across the state could easily host this program for the cost of refreshments, as it was our experience that passionate community members will donate their time to participate in such an important community conversation. Library systems with fewer staff could share more of the planning workload by partnering with a local organization serving immigrants or refugees. For very little cost, the program facilitated a valuable community conversation and learning experience for Henrico County residents that was centered not on difference and division, but inclusion and connection.

How Program Was Carried Out

In Spring of 2017, the Library system had selected Reyna Grande's immigration memoir *The Distance Between Us* as the featured title for its April 2018 All Henrico Reads event. From 2017 to 2018, the national conversation around immigration became increasingly heated. The All Henrico Reads planning committee worked with the Library's Multicultural Committee to create tie-in programming inspired by the author event that could unite, not divide, local residents through a shared discussion of the immigrant experience. The Programming Librarian worked with the Multicultural Committee and its chairperson to create an inclusive moderated panel discussion where local immigrants could share their stories with the wider community.

Planning for the moderated panel discussion began in October 2017, with the objective to host an event in May 2018 that would increase awareness of the variety of nationalities represented in Henrico's immigrant population and call attention to the services provided by local organizations which work to help immigrants and refugees. Most importantly, the program planners wanted to discuss local immigrants' journeys from their home country to Henrico County, and answer the questions: What was it like to leave home? What do they like about Henrico? What do they wish was different?

In order to plan the program, the Programming Librarian and Multicultural Committee chairperson had to find and confirm panelists and a moderator, as well as draft discussion questions. They worked with the All Henrico Reads Planning Committee and the Friends of the Library to provide refreshments, contact local organizations, and coordinate publicity for the event. They determined that for an hour-long discussion, the number of panelists should be between five and six. They decided panelists should be representative of the County's diverse population, with a range of experiences, backgrounds, education levels, and professions represented. The Multicultural Committee agreed by consensus who should be invited to the panel; the panelists included Kate Ayers, Executive Director of ReEstablish Richmond, a local nonprofit dedicated to

servicing immigrants and refugees; Lydia English, an immigrant from Colombia who specializes in Early Childhood Education and ESL learning, and is a proponent of Hispanic women in the arts; Marcia Garcia, owner of Mexico Restaurants and philanthropist, whose family originated in Guadalajara, Mexico; Val Gooss, Education Specialist for World Languages and ESL Education in Henrico County Public Schools; Waheed Sabawoon, HCPL Public Services Specialist and immigrant from Afghanistan; and Ernesto Moreno Salazar, a Venezuelan immigrant who attained citizenship in 2013. The Multicultural Committee chairperson agreed to be the moderator, tasked with facilitating conversation and keeping track of time.

The discussion questions were also drafted and agreed upon by consensus in committee. Staff determined that questions would need to be broad enough to cover a variety of lived experiences, and address issues such as education, integration and community, work and businesses, children and family, language barriers, and other barriers to succeeding in Henrico. Members of the HCPL Multicultural Committee debated and fine-tuned discussion questions over the course of a few months and arrived at eight questions they believed would elicit rich and varied answers from the panelists to give the audience an appreciation of their experiences.

Staff also had to consider logistics, including finding a space that was equipped with microphones and was large enough for the panelists to sit together in a row with an audience facing them. The program was scheduled for May 3, three weeks after All Henrico Reads with Reyna Grande, from 7-8:30 pm. The large Meeting Room at the Tuckahoe Library was selected as the venue for the panel. They decided to begin the program with a welcome and brief introductions, followed by discussion questions. Staff planned to have light refreshments on tables in the back of the room behind the audience, and scheduled time after the discussion so that both the panelists and the audience could mingle and learn more from each other after the moderated discussion concluded. Local organizations working with immigrant communities in Henrico were invited to display materials on tables in the back of the room as well.

Financing and Staffing

The largest cost for Closing The Distance Between Us was staff time, however, Library staff plan events and serve on committees as part of their regular duties, so this was not an additional expense for the system. Staff involved in this program included the Programming Librarian, the Multicultural Committee, and the Community Relations Department. All panelists and the moderator were happy to talk and serve on the panel for free. Printed programs for the event were done in-house by the Programming Librarian and the Library's Graphic Designer. The only expense was furnished by the local Friends of the Library, who provided refreshments for \$50.

Program Results

Approximately 20 people attended the Closing The Distance Between Us panel discussion, not including the panelists, moderator, and other Library staff who were present. Panelists shared sincere and thought-provoking stories, information, and personal accounts of both difficulty and success. The audience displayed their engagement by asking poignant questions to which the panelists responded in rich detail. Panelists felt that they were able to connect with County residents and show not how their lives differed, but how they were the same, describing universal experiences and desires that were relatable and ultimately unifying for all present.

Audience members expressed great enthusiasm for the program, and several commented about how glad they were to have attended. One audience member said they wished the Library would have this program, or a similar program, again. One of the non-profits managed to recruit some new volunteers. Many audience members stayed to mingle and meet with the panelists and interact with them after the moderated discussion ended. They had many questions to ask and found a lot of common ground, relating to the struggles of starting a business, selecting the right school for their children, and finding their place in the wider community.

The impact of Closing The Distance Between Us has endured long after the event. Several audience members shared that they were ESL teachers and this program was helpful in understanding the families and students they work with in the County. After the program, ReEstablish Richmond invited the Library to participate at their World Refugee Day event, continuing the partnership formed in planning the program. Henrico County Public Library debuted an ESL Storytime, called Hello!, in January 2019. Library Administration decided to focus on diversity and inclusion for Staff Development Day in 2018, ensuring all staff had an opportunity to learn about what it means to be inclusive – to not only recognize the presence of difference, but to embrace difference and understand it with the goal of improving Library service to a diverse population.

Brief Summary

In Spring of 2017, Henrico County Public Library had selected Reyna Grande's powerful immigration memoir *The Distance Between Us* as the featured title for its April 2018 All Henrico Reads event. From 2017 to 2018, the national conversation around immigration became increasingly heated. Library staff worked to create tie-in programming inspired by the author event that could unite, not divide, local residents through a shared discussion of the immigrant experience. The result was "Closing The Distance Between Us," an inclusive moderated panel discussion where local immigrants could share their stories with the wider community.

Planning for the moderated panel discussion began in October 2017, with the objective to host an event in May 2018 that would increase awareness of the variety of nationalities represented in Henrico's immigrant population and call attention to the services provided by local organizations working to help immigrants and refugees. Most importantly, the program planners wanted to discuss local immigrants' journeys from their home country to Henrico County.

At the event, panelists shared sincere and thought-provoking stories, information, and personal accounts of both difficulty and success. The audience displayed their engagement by asking poignant questions to which the panelists responded in rich detail. Audience members expressed great enthusiasm for the program, and several commented about how glad they were to have attended.

Closing The Distance Between Us was a program that highlighted the Library's role both as a community space for literacy and learning, and as a civic institution. The program provided a valuable experience for all involved without incurring any expense for the Library, and could be replicated in libraries across the state, tailored to each community's unique needs. Closing The Distance Between Us allowed new and old Henrico residents to discover not how their lives differed, but how they were the same, through discussion of universal experiences and values that were relatable and ultimately unifying for all present.