



APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2020.** 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: LGBTQIA Book Discussion Group

Program Category: Customer Service

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Victoria Davis

Title: Public Relations Specialist

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Brandon Hinton

Title: Deputy County Manager for Administration

Signature: 

Program Overview

Henrico County Public Library created the LGBTQIA+ Book Discussion Group to improve service to the LGBTQIA community. Through a combination of outreach, thoughtful planning, intentional materials selection, and flexible program design, the book discussion has established a healthy following. The book discussion group improves community engagement with the library through conversations about books with LGBTQIA authors, themes, and characters. The group's success indicates that the library is establishing itself as a welcoming community space for members of the LGBTQIA community.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

Henrico County Public Library's Libbie Mill location serves an increasingly diverse and urbanized community. The county's population as a whole is also diversifying, and the library system is actively seeking ways to engage with a broader spectrum of community members, including historically marginalized groups. In order to do so, the library needs to communicate that it is a welcoming space. One way the library worked to achieve these goals is to improve service to the LGBTQIA community. For years the library has worked to develop inclusive collections, and staff have honored Pride Month with commemorative displays. Still, staff knows from experience that it takes more than passive displays to engage the community and welcome people authentically. The LGBTQIA+ Book Discussion Group at Libbie Mill Library was created to tackle these challenges, connecting library collections with interested readers, and helping to establish HCPL as an affirming and welcoming community space.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

Henrico County Public Library, like many libraries across the state, is actively seeking ways to engage with a broader spectrum of community members, including traditionally marginalized

groups. One way HCPL has worked to achieve this is to improve service to the LGBTQIA community. The library went beyond passive offerings like displays or reading lists to offer the LGBTQIA+ Book Discussion Group in 2018. By creating an accessible and inclusive discussion group, and promoting the group through outreach and partnerships with regional organizations, the library has more actively welcomed the community. The group connects interested readers with books that resonate deeply with their identities and interests, while remaining firmly grounded in the library's mission. Attendance has been consistently strong and the book discussion leader has received positive feedback. An especially encouraging outcome of the group has been a diversity of age groups represented; sessions attract largely millennial and Gen Z readers in addition to older readers. The LGBTQIA+ book discussion group is broadening the library's community engagement, improving service to a historically marginalized group, and establishing HCPL as an affirming and welcoming community space.

How Program Was Carried Out

Henrico County Public Library's (HCPL) LGBTQIA+ Book Discussion Group was founded with the objective to enrich community life and engagement with the library through conversations about books with LGBTQIA authors, themes, and characters. HCPL's programming librarian first pitched the idea at a meeting of the library's Adult Services committee in early 2018. A librarian at Libbie Mill Library took the lead on the project shortly thereafter. The program received administrative approval in early summer 2018 and began marketing that summer. HCPL promoted the program through direct outreach, such as at Virginia Pridefest in September 2018, as well as flyer distribution at local bookstores and regional LGBTQIA community center Diversity Richmond. The Librarian at Libbie Mill led initial pilot discussions in October and November of that year, and due to high turnout, the program was approved for renewal after the first discussion.

The LGBTQIA+ Book Discussion Group selects titles with intention. The group reads across genres, moods, and experiences, and when scheduling, the book discussion leader tries to ensure a balance between issue-driven books and lighter material. Of the selection process, the discussion leader states, “I want the selection to be as expansive as the lives, interests, and priorities of people who fall under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella.”

At each session, the book discussion leader sets up the tables in a hexagon or octagon to facilitate discussion, depending on how many copies of the book were checked out, which is a reasonable way to predict attendance. She will set aside a few tables and chairs on standby in case attendance exceeds expectations, which has happened on occasion. Each regular attendee has a cardstock tent with their name and pronouns that is distributed upon arrival. Blank cards and markers are available for new attendees or anyone who'd like to change their information. The group starts off the discussion by going around the room, with each participant responding in turn to a low-stakes warm-up question about the book, often some variation on “What are your initial reactions?” When the turn falls back to the book discussion leader, the group switches to free-form responses for questions the discussion leader developed in advance. Typically, there comes a moment during the discussion when the group stops answering the discussion leader's questions and starts talking to each other, signaling that the discussion has taken on a life of its own. The book discussion leader takes care to arrange questions so that the conversation deepens throughout the meeting, but pays close attention to the discussion and may reorder the prepared questions or pose new ones if the discussion warrants it. When appropriate, the discussion leader synthesizes the points of speakers sharing related ideas or jumps in to redirect conversation. At the end, the discussion leader offers information about the coming month's book and distributes copies to the group.

Many participants return every month, and a sizeable number rotate in and out as their availability allows or based on their specific reading interests. When formally or informally polled, most attendees report they learned about the group through flyers in the community or word-of-mouth. Most attendees are in their 20s and 30s, with several regulars who are older, some significantly. This produces an organic intergenerational exchange that enriches the discussion. Most attendees align themselves with one or more identities under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella, and several straight, cisgender attendees have been drawn in by the group's reading list and energetic discussions.

The library provides staff time in preparation and facilitation, meeting space for the conversation, and funding for book club sets to supplement the copies of each month's title found in our permanent collection. Support for book club sets can also be provided by the Friends of Henrico County Public Library. Local and regional organizations have assisted with promotion, including regional LGBTQIA community center Diversity Richmond, regional LGBTQIA news source GayRVA, and local independent bookstore Chop Suey Books. Other community spaces with public posting boards have been essential to getting the word out. The book discussion leader has tabled at Virginia Pridefest since the program's inception to improve overall outreach to LGBTQIA+ communities. The combination of outreach, thoughtful materials selection, and intentional program design have contributed to the success of the book discussion group. Importantly, the success indicates that the library is establishing itself as a welcoming community space for members of the LGBTQIA community.

Financing and Staffing

The cost of the program includes the purchase of book discussion sets, approximately ten copies of a title. However, this cost is part of the library's regular collection development cost and is not an additional expense for the library. The program requires one staff member to select titles and request their order, as well as read the selected title and develop discussion questions. These are routine duties for any librarian running a book group.

Program Results

The LGBTQIA+ Book Discussion Group has had 16 sessions and meets monthly. The average attendance is 12, with a highest-ever attendance of 20. This is considered a very strong turnout for a book discussion group at HCPL. 18 attendees completed a survey to indicate their reading preferences for the book discussion leader to use in planning 2020 selections. Several people have made very moving statements about the role the group plays in their lives and the lengths they will go to ensure their availability to attend. At one session, a teen waited outside the room for the discussion to end. She had come out to her family earlier in the day, and wanted to meet the book discussion leader and see "a room full of people like her."

Frequently, participants stick around to chat in the meeting space and the lobby after the meetings. In addition, authors with local ties whose work engages with LGBTQIA themes have been excited to appear and supplement the usual discussion, either by skype or in person. Another encouraging outcome of this discussion has been engagement with younger adult participants. Many book discussions engage with older age groups, but the LGBTQIA+ Book Discussion Group at HCPL draws curious readers in their 20s and 30s, with some older participants as well. This leads to a meaningful intergenerational exchange and hopefully life-long library use among the younger attendees.

Brief Summary

Book discussion groups are a cornerstone of public library services, and libraries across the state are working hard to ensure their groups are inclusive, accessible, and appealing across age groups. The LGBTQIA+ Book Group at Libbie Mill Library, part of the Henrico County Public Library system, has had success engaging new book discussion group attendees from Gen Z to Baby Boomers, by embracing LGBTQIA+ literature and through sustained outreach efforts to the LGBTQIA+ community. Thoughtful title selection has also attracted membership who do not fall under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella. It is important for public libraries to establish themselves as welcoming community spaces in order to meaningfully engage their communities. The LGBTQIA+ Book Group, by welcoming and appealing to diverse patron identities, has achieved strong attendance, participation, and engagement.

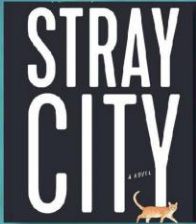
LGBTQIA+ Book Group
Supplemental Materials

LGBTQIA+

BOOK DISCUSSION

@ LIBBIE MILL LIBRARY

Extra copies available at the Libbie Mill adult desk.



June 12, 7:00 PM

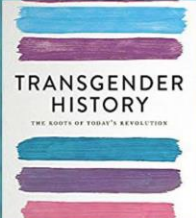
***Stray City*, by Chelsey Johnson**

When Andrea Morales does the unthinkable in Portland's late-90's lesbian scene and has an affair with a man, she is not entirely prepared for the emotional or biological consequences. *Followed by a video Q&A with the author.*

July 10, 7:00 PM

***Mean*, by Miriam Gurba**

A mixed-race Chicana's nonfiction novel examines widespread social ills with an unflinching eye.



August 14, 7:00 PM

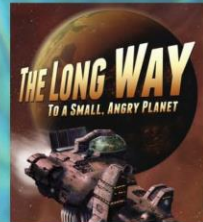
***Transgender History*, by Susan Stryker**

Explore a chronological account of trans* movements, writings, and watershed events from the mid-20th century through the book's revision and re-release in 2017.

September 11, 7:00 PM

***The Long Way to a Small Angry Planet*, by Becky Chambers**

Rosemary joins the crew of the Wayfarer spacecraft looking for a soft bed and a ride across the galaxy, but when a dangerous mission tests the group's bonds, companions of circumstance become chosen family.



Libbie Mill Library
2100 Libbie Lake East St.
Henrico, VA 23230

LibbieMillEvents@henricolibrary.org
(804) 501-1940 x 5
henricolibrary.org/calendar



LGBTQIA+

Book Discussion @ Libbie Mill Library



March 13, 7:00 PM

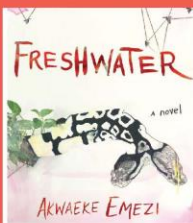
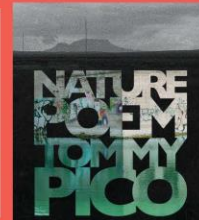
***Little Fish*, by Casey Plett**

Wendy Reimer is a trans woman navigating love and loss in Winnipeg, Manitoba who learns her staid Mennonite grandfather may have had more in common with her than she thought.

April 10, 7:00 PM

***Nature Poem*, by Tommy Pico**

In a book-length poem intent on defying expectations about native writing, Pico reaches from Brooklyn to the Viejas Reservation of the Kumeyaay nation -- from Beyoncé to the traditional basket designs tattooed on his arms.



May 8, 7:00 PM

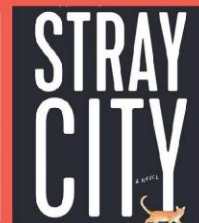
***Freshwater*, by Akwaeke Emezi**

Ada, a Nigerian child haunted by spirits since birth, constantly moves between realities. After leaving for college in the U.S., Ada must try to make peace with these selves amid the din.

June 12, 7:00 PM

***Stray City*, by Chelsey Johnson**

When Andrea Morales does the unthinkable in Portland's late-90's lesbian scene and has an affair with a man, she is not entirely prepared for the emotional or biological consequences. *Followed by a video Q&A with the author.*



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Discussion Questions from 8/14/19 Book Discussion of *Transgender History* by Susan Stryker

1. What was your existing level of familiarity with the historical content contained in this? What's something you learned on this reading?
2. Let's take a look at the book's structure – what do you notice? What worked for you, and what didn't?
3. What is the project of this book? What is its scope, and what are the self-imposed limitations that allow it to pursue this goal?
4. Do you see other limitations in this book, not necessarily self-imposed?
5. What are some of the divisions and points of unity across transgender communities that Stryker points to here?
6. What decisions do you see Stryker making about what information to include and how to arrange it?
7. How are these decisions visible (and/or invisible) in the text?
8. What do you consider the most important development in the past fifty years for transgender rights? Why? What do you think Stryker *presents* as the most important development?
9. Stryker pays a great deal of attention to the relationships between groups within the transgender movement and other groups – the gay liberation movement, waves of feminism, intersex activism, and, crucially, specific individuals and local manifestations of these terms. What did you learn from – or notice about – her care in describing these relationships?
10. Was there anything you found confusing, or particularly surprising in this?
11. Did this book change your perspective on trans history? If so, how?