



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2023.** Please include this submission form with the 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: Anime Clubs in School
Program Category: Customer Service

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Program Overview

Teen Services librarians at Henrico County Public Library's Fairfield Area Library sought to engage teens in their newly constructed library, and connected with a local high school to create and host an Anime Club on site at the school. Fairfield staff were tasked with the challenge of creating a Teen Services department from scratch in the new library building, which opened in 2019. At the same time, Librarians at nearby Highland Springs High School knew their students had a strong interest in anime, but didn't know enough about the genre to host a group on their own. The library offered to send library staff knowledgeable about anime to lead discussions and workshops, and to use library resources to stream anime video for interested students, on site at the high school. The new Anime Club at Highland Springs High School was an immediate success, and has averaged 85 attendees per session since it began.

The new Fairfield library offers lots of amenities for teen users, including dedicated areas for teen collections, computers, gaming, and reservable study space. Even in a well-equipped library like Fairfield, engaging teens is challenging for public libraries because teens are often not in charge of their own transportation and scheduling, and usually have full days of school, extracurricular activities or jobs, and homework. Librarians at Fairfield decided to bring the resources of the library to meet teens where they are, at school.

The club allows students to have an enriching experience at school, provides a valuable outreach opportunity for the library, supplements the knowledge base of school staff, and cements positive relationships between students, the school, and the library. The cost to do these programs is low, but the impact is high. The library has seen crossover attendance at its own programs since the club started, meaning their engagement strategy has been a success. This program could be replicated easily by localities seeking to strengthen ties between schools and teen librarians, and for public libraries trying to engage teens in their communities.

Problem/Challenge/Situation Faced by Locality

The new Fairfield Area Library opened in October 2019, just five months before the pandemic shutdown. The new library needed to build an expanded Teen department largely from scratch, which would have been a challenge, pandemic or not. The old Fairfield Library building did not have a separate room for teens and had one staff member for Teen Services. The new building has a large teen area complete with study rooms, a gaming area, lounge furniture, study and

computer tables, collection areas, and even a nook just for Tweens, plus five dedicated staff. After the pandemic, when students returned to in-person schooling, librarians understood they would need to be creative to engage teens with the library in our changed world. The new Fairfield Teen Services staff members knew partnering with nearby schools would be crucial to growing the new library's teen engagement. They thought something beyond keeping in touch with school librarians, like being a visible presence in the school, might help them reach new users. At the same time, two school librarians at Highland Springs High School in Henrico knew they had students passionate about anime, but the school librarians did not consider themselves experts on the subject. The teachers noticed that the Fairfield Library held regular Anime Club meetings and offered lots of related materials in its collection. The two parties decided to work together so the library could achieve its outreach and engagement goals while the school could offer an engaging learning experience for anime fans.

How Program Fulfilled Awards Criteria

The Anime Club at Highland Springs High School was an innovative solution to a common problem for public libraries, a fruitful collaboration between libraries and schools, and could easily be replicated by localities across Virginia. Public Librarians commonly visit schools to promote the library to teens by visiting classes, PTA meetings, or distributing promotional materials. Taking a popular library program and offering it inside a school during the school day is a less common, more innovative approach to engaging teens that offers clear benefits to teens, the library, and the school. Teens may be interested in a subject like anime but, because they can't drive or need to participate in other extracurricular or family activities, can't attend a library program offered after school or on a weekend. By providing the program in school during a free period, library staff can engage teens with high-interest reading materials, promote the library and its offerings, and support school staff by filling in gaps in specialized knowledge or school library collections. Library staff from Henrico County Public Library's Fairfield Area Library and school librarians from Henrico County Public Schools' Highland Springs High School collaborated to bring Fairfield's Anime Club to students during free periods twice per month starting in 2021. The school librarians recognized interest in anime in their students but didn't possess enough knowledge of the genre to hold a program by themselves. They worked with public librarians from Fairfield Library to schedule, plan, and purchase supplies for the twice-monthly programs, and saw an incredible turnout. Over 1100 teens have engaged with the programs over the course of 13 meetings.

Library staff members took their passion for anime, the library's streaming platforms and manga collections, and a small program support budget, to create a program series with activities ranging from watching anime to discussing books, from cosplay to crafting. The school librarians also contributed funds to respond to the program's immense popularity. Educators and librarians working with teens anywhere can attest that a turnout of over 100 teens is a major victory. This program exemplifies a successful, mutually beneficial model for partnership between public libraries and public schools to serve young people. The program promotes reading and connected learning, demonstrating to teens that schools and libraries are truly invested in them and their interests. The in-school program has even translated to increased in-library visits for Fairfield Library. Localities seeking to break down silos between agencies serving youth could look to this collaboration as a low-cost, high-impact way to promote learning and community connection for teens.

How Program Was Carried Out

The Fairfield Area Library's partnership with Highland Springs High School started during the transition from the old Fairfield Library, which operated from 1976-2019, to the new Fairfield Area Library, which opened in October 2019. The new library is a state of the art, modern facility, more than twice the size of the old building, and located a half mile away on the same road in Henrico's Fairfield District. At the new library, Teen Services has its own wing of the second floor, staffed by a dedicated team of five, featuring distinct collection areas (fiction, graphic novels, nonfiction, books for Tweens, and more), a gaming station, reservable study rooms, lounge furniture, and computer and study tables. It can be challenging to engage teens, even for libraries that offer amenities like this, because teens are not always in charge of their own schedules and transportation. To promote library services and connect with local teens, meeting them where they are, Fairfield Library's Teen Services staff hoped to do direct outreach work in local high schools.

The Teen Services Supervisor at Fairfield opened lines of communication with two school librarians at nearby Highland Springs High School in 2019 before the new library opened, and mentioned that with the increased staff and resources of the new library, library staff would be available to visit with them or with students. She further mentioned that librarians would love to find a way to be a visible presence in the school, in whatever form that could take, to help raise the visibility of the library and connect with teens. At the beginning of the 21-22 school year, school

librarians from Highland Springs High School reached out to Fairfield Library's Teen Services staff to see if they would be interested in leading an Anime Club at their school. While the school librarians knew they had a lot of student interest in anime, they didn't consider themselves experts on the subject. Fairfield Library staff, however, had been leading Anime Club meetings for years. The resident Anime Club leader at Fairfield Library agreed to lead sessions with students twice monthly during a free period.

The club at Highland Springs High School was an immediate success. The first meetings were scheduled for a Tuesday and a Wednesday, November 16 and 17, 2021. Seventy teens attended. High attendance has continued since the meetings began. Now in its second year, the Fairfield Library's Anime Club at Highland Springs High School adapted to changing school schedules, and is now offered twice per month on Tuesday mornings. In the meetings, students watch anime streamed on a platform called Crunchyroll, and discuss their favorite anime series, Manga books, do simple anime-themed crafts, and more. The Fairfield librarians adapted their existing Anime Club meetings to a wider audience and school setting, and organized meetings around themes with input from participants. In addition to streaming anime, meetings have included cosplay, creating anime-illustrated pop sockets for phones, origami, shibori tie-dye masks, and an end-of-year celebration with contests and prizes.

Library staff overcame technical hurdles to adapt the Anime Club experience from the public library to a school setting. HCPL has an outreach license to use the streaming platform Crunchyroll, but that site could not be accessed through the school's networks. The library staff was able to borrow a Wi-Fi hotspot from the HCPL Outreach Division, allowing them to have an unfiltered internet connection and stream anime at the school. Staffing and backup were other concerns for managing the club, since knowledge of anime is specialized. The single staff member who is exceptionally knowledgeable about anime typically leads the groups, so if that staff member misses a meeting, a backup plan is needed. The popularity of and participation in the club has been another hurdle for staff to maneuver over because certain types of activities like arts and crafts can quickly become expensive. Thankfully, due to the popularity of the program, the school librarians now have a small budget for the program, which in addition to the funds Fairfield Library expends on materials, helps to support the large group.

Financing and Staffing

HCPL staff use an app called Crunchyroll to stream anime videos at Anime Clubs in library locations across the county. Crunchyroll has a free outreach license, so HCPL librarians do not need to pay for streaming rights even when working in schools. Libraries seeking to replicate this program could also use Crunchyroll for free. The library already owned a Wi-Fi hotspot to use for streaming to avoid the school's internet filter. This may not be an issue encountered by every locality. Highland Springs High School staff purchase snacks and some prizes for the program from their club budget. Everything else comes from the library's budget. Library staff looks for low-cost crafts that are easy to scale up, such as origami, coloring bookmarks, or washer necklaces. For meetings with craft activities, library staff tries to spend less than \$20 for all of the supplies. Overall, at all meetings, HCPL has spent approximately \$250. One Library staff member from Fairfield is the main host for the Highland Springs High School Anime Club, as she is particularly knowledgeable about anime. Her planning time and time leading the programs are part of her normal programming and outreach duties as a library staff member. She has worked with her supervisor to ensure other staff members can serve as backup in the event she is unable to lead a session.

Program Results

Through January 2023, Fairfield library staff have hosted 13 meetings at Highland Springs High School. At these meetings, they have served a total of 1,112 teens. There has been incredible growth in just one year. In November 2021, 70 teens attended the first meeting. One year later, 118 teens participated in the November 2022 meeting. There has been crossover between the school attendance and the library's own Anime Club, with in-library Anime Club meetings also experiencing a growth in attendance, with some students even attending both meetings. Students share positive feedback about the in-school program with library staff, friends, and school librarians on a regular basis. Every month, there are new requests to join Anime Club, and students ask questions about the club to their teachers, talk about it online, and want to discuss anime before and after the program with the Fairfield Librarian who leads the meetings. When the High School shares about the club on its Instagram page, librarians from as far away as Australia comment and message asking for tips on how to run their own club. During meetings, teachers at the school stop by to do crafts, watch anime, and see what the group is up to. At the end of the 2021-22 school year, the club ended year with a cosplay competition that engaged many participants. The theater teacher ran sound in the auditorium, one teacher came in cosplay

and joined our judge's panel, and members of the local cosplay community came out to act as judges and talk to the teens about cosplay. They are planning an even bigger end-of-year celebration for 2023.

When asked, people involved in the program, had plenty to say about the program's success. Parents, teachers, and teens provided testimonials as to the program's impact:

- [T]he Anime Club at HSHS...has given my son and many other children a chance to talk about their passion with like-minded individuals. When you go to high school you are trying to find your people, your clique, and Anime Club gave my son a safe place to be himself. –*Crystal Wood, HSHS Science teacher and parent*
- When I think about Anime Club at Highland Springs HS... I think about the sense of belonging that it provides for so many of our students...I have been able to witness how much joy and excitement Anime Club brings to our students through a common interest of the club's members...Anime Club has been one way to connect our students school-wide regardless of their social or academic affiliation...with a safe space to enjoy a special interest. –*Janeé Downs, HSHS Innovative Learning Coach*
- Now more than ever, students need an outlet for stress-free activities and fellowship surrounding a topic that interests them. And HSHS students are interested in all things anime and manga! We have been incredibly lucky to partner with the HCPL teen librarians in this endeavor to utilize their expertise in this area. The Anime Club has over 150 members! The most notable aspect of Anime Club, however, is the diverse representation among members. There are students from the Engineering program, Advance College Academy, and comprehensive students from a variety of backgrounds, including students from the exceptional education integrated services program who are not generally as likely to take part in extracurricular activities. –*Adrienne Coffey, HSHS Librarian*
- The Anime Club is a wonderful club that is loved by our students...[M]y students ...have told me about the anime they love, the anime they would want to write, and [I] have even seen them draw their own characters to share at their club meetings. Students who might not typically find a club or sport family at HSHS have found a place to fit in and share ideas. I have also seen students who would not call themselves “readers” come out of their bubble and try new things...[T]hey are so excited to show me the new anime they read and the friends they have made in the club ...This club is truly a treasure at Highland Springs High School. –*Danielle Clark, HSHS Social Studies Teacher*
- I enjoy the club for its inclusiveness and desire to open students' minds to various cultures through fun shows and games. This is an interactive and joyous club that allows students with the likes of other culture-based shows and games to have some time together. I learned through joining the Highland Springs Anime Club that there is much more diversity than people think and that there are plenty of people with interests outside of the stereotypes. –*HSHS 12th grade student*
- Anime Club is very helpful for relieving stress and making new friends that have something in common with you. –*Malachi, HSHS student*

- It's nice that I get to interact with friends. I get to know more anime shows that I didn't know about. *–HSHS 10th grade student*

Brief Summary

The Fairfield Area Library, part of Henrico County Public Library in Henrico, VA, opened in 2019 with an expanded Teen Services Department that sought to connect with local schools to engage students with the library's new resources and amenities for teens. After Fairfield Library staff connected with nearby Highland Springs High School, school librarians at Highland Springs approached Fairfield staff about the possibility of bringing the library's Anime Club program directly to students, by hosting meetings in the school. Fairfield Library's resident anime expert worked with her team and the school librarians to plan two meetings per month with a variety of activities related to anime, including streaming video, book discussions, arts and crafts activities, and cosplay. The program was an immediate success, with 70 attendees at the first meeting, a number that has grown to over 90 attendees per meeting. This model for public library-school library collaboration allows public librarians to meet teens where they are, in their community, while providing direct outreach and access to library resources to young people who might not otherwise visit the library. The program benefits the teens, library, and school in equal measure through the provision of a high-interest and high-impact learning experience.