Civic Lab

Skokie Public Library

Adults

|

Intergenerational

Civic Lab

Apr 30, 2018

Free

Byline

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Skokie Public Library's Civic Lab is a pop-up experience held within the library that offers information, activities and discussion on issues facing our community. Topics have included race, media literacy, endangered species, net neutrality and Standing Rock.

The goal of Civic Lab is not to change anyone’s mind, but to provide patrons with evidence-based, credible resources and information that have been vetted by our staff. These are things that one would probably receive if they were to ask a question at the reference desk; it’s just a different model of delivering information.

We emphasize that we are non-partisan — but we are not neutral. We take a lot of care in cultivating resource lists that correspond to those ethics.

Labs are generally held once a week, with two different topics a month. We try to establish establish various points of entry into a topic. Some people really want to engage with staff, so the pop-ups are staffed the entire time. Others may wish to write a note or take a handout. View Civic Lab handouts.

Advanced Planning

The idea for the Civic Labs started in late 2016 when we had a Civic Lab Boutique that was not facilitated, but established in a corner of our library. The Boutique offered a curated list of materials that would change week to week covering topics like income inequality, LGBTQ issues, reproductive justice and Black Lives Matter.

We knew the boutique couldn't stand forever, so we looked for other, more portable ways to arm our patrons with information. That's how the Civic Labs took off.

Resources, questions, definitions and activities are developed by members of the Civic Lab Curatorial Team, a team of eight staff members from different departments. The process can be time consuming, but not more so than if we took time out to research a topic in-depth at the reference desk.

Our communications department supports the Civic Labs with branding (logo, banner, etc.) so every time we "pop up" in the library, people recognize us. We have stackable crates that can be used makeshift tables or display modules, depending on our needs. We also use the crates to hold magnetized white boards that we can write a question on for patrons to answer.

Marketing

Each Civic Lab is promoted on our website. We also include them in our monthly in-house publication, called "Next," that lists all adult programs.

We often develop topics for the Civic Lab in conjunction with other library programs. For example, we screened the documentary film "Surviving Skokie" on a Sunday,

and then facilitated related pop-up Civic Labs on the following Monday and Friday.

Budgeting

We don't have a budget for our Civic Labs. Aside from the money that was invested in permanent pieces — such as the cubes we use for set-up, the banner, small whiteboards, markers, Post-it notes, pens and an iPad stand — we don't spend any money outside of staff time.

Day-of-event Activity

Set-up varies. We typically set up the crates, Post-its, pen and paper. We also use visually striking resources such as large laminated photos, maps (when relevant), a short video on an iPad or a laptop open with Internet browser tabs that demonstrate how we research a topic.

Program Execution

Between 10 and 30 people visit the Civic Lab over the course of two hours. Some patrons will make appointments to come to our Civic Labs because they’re very interested in a particular topic.

Sometimes patrons disagree with the particular perspective we have taken, but these labs are not established for agreement. They’re established so we can share information and knowledge, show how to verify sources, provide an alleyway to the information we receive and then enable patrons to think critically about how they've received information and what they may do with that information.

Advice

Think about what is most relevant to your patrons, and think about ways you have gone about recognizing and orienting information streams for your public. What are some of your best interactions? How might you be more creative in taking away that desk for the time being and exploring a topic more in-depth with the patrons?

I would also look at what resources or information your patrons tend to gravitate toward and whether there is something that's missing from their media diet. Is there a way you can redirect someone if that's necessary?

For more information about Skokie's Civic Labs, check out our presentation from the 2018 Public Library Association Conference.

Did you try this program at your library? Share your experience using this form.

Supporting Materials

Document
sample_questions.pdf
Document
free_speech.pdf
Document
news_sources.pdf
Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images



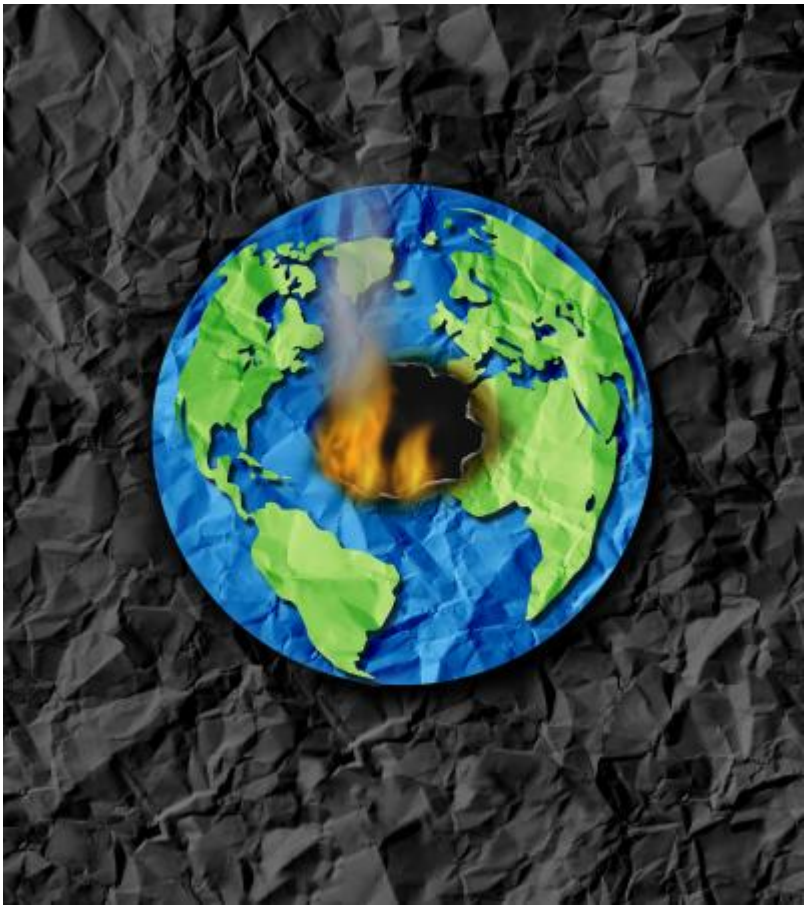






More Programs

Feb 23, 2017
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | $$$
Image



Talking Truth: Finding Your Voice Around the Climate Crisis

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Sep 21, 2017
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | □□
Image



Café LOUIE

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
Apr 16, 2018
Adults (21 and up)+ | $$$
Image



Fake News 101

Audiences:

Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational