Speed Repping

Berkshire Athenaeum

Young Adult

|

Adults

Speed Repping

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Free

Byline

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On April 13, the Berkshire Athenaeum hosted a Speed Repping program. What is Speed Repping? Much like speed dating, Speed Repping provides community members a few minutes to sit down with their representatives in a one-on-one setting and ask them questions about who they are, what they do, or just voice concerns.

The Memphis Public Library ran a similar program in 2017. Through this program, city representatives engaged thoughtfully with the people they serve in a relaxed atmosphere.

Our city's mayor, director of administration, city council president, school board committee member, state senator and state representative participated. We worked with the Junior League of Berkshire County to help with day-of logistics and had our local community television station interview the participants live on Facebook, using crowd-sourced questions, for those unable to attend.

Advanced Planning

I read about Speed Repping, developed by the Memphis Public Library, in the Urban Libraries Committee's 2017 Innovations Initiative publication. I thought this was a great program to showcase the library as a center for civic discourse.

I contacted the manager of the Memphis Public Library Whitehaven branch, where the initial event took place, to discuss execution, marketing and outcomes. With his guidance, I was able to bring the idea to the Athenaeum's director for approval and reach out to our local representatives.

I contacted the mayor's office, city council, school committee, and both our state representative's and senator's offices to invite them to participate. We managed to secure commitments from all those we contacted. We were able to find a time that worked best for all our participants using an online form.

Marketing

We created fliers, sent out a press release and developed a social media campaign.

Budgeting

It didn't cost our library anything to host this program.

Day-of-event Activity

Unlike traditional speed dating, where individuals move from one date to the next at the sound of a bell, we had members of our community sign up for one five-minute slot for each rep with whom they wished to speak. Each rep had a sign-in sheet. When a community member signed up for a time, they received a ticket with the rep's name and the time selected.

The Junior League of Berkshire County volunteered to staff the event for us. We had a host who sat at the front of the auditorium to answer questions. Each rep had a corresponding volunteer in charge of signing people up. We had a liaison to move people from sign-in to waiting area to respective representative. And we had a timekeeper to inform everyone when the sessions began and ended.

Unfortunately, three of our participants had an event the same day that ran late, forcing them to arrive at the library after our event's start time. We were able to find times for those who signed up for the early slots, so they still had the opportunity to meet with their reps. The event still began at our designated start time for the three reps who were present.

Program Execution

Since we were holding the event during 9-to-5 business hours (the event started at 2 p.m.), we were aware that not everyone who wished to participate would have the opportunity. I contacted our local community television organization to see if they could film interviews with our reps prior to the event for those unable to attend. We crowd-sourced questions and aired the interviews live on Facebook.

We had the volunteers arrive two hours before the event to go over logistics and assign roles. We opened sign-ups an hour before the start of the event. We requested that our reps arrive 30 minutes before the event to get situated and be interviewed by community television.

Even with the delayed start for some of our participants, the event was a success. Around 40 people came to speak with their representatives, and everybody was able to meet with their rep of choice. We had one 10-minute break halfway through the event and finished exactly at 4 p.m.

After the event, our city council president and mayor acknowledged that they were a bit nervous when they agreed to participate, but found the conversations to be generally positive rather than a litany of complaints. Among the topics they heard about were parking issues, mosquito spraying, deteriorating infrastructure and jobs. These topics gave us ideas on what the library might do to address these issues.

Many people have suggestions on how to better their community or complaints about how government functions. This event gave people the opportunity to speak with the person or people who could directly meet their needs or answer their questions. It is a great opportunity for transparency in government.

Advice

I would recommend holding this event on a weekend or at night so that more people may have an opportunity to participate. However, make sure that you find a time that works best for your representatives.

People will attempt to stay longer than his or her designated five minutes. Make sure that your timekeeper can politely, but effectively, move the event along.

Your representatives will love this opportunity.

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

Supporting Materials

Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

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Sep 10, 2013
Children (9 and under)+ |
Image



Supporting Community Civic Engagement

Audiences:

Audience
Children (9 and under)
Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational
Apr 24, 2015
Adults (21 and up)+ | $
Image



Coffee & Conversation

Audiences:

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



Café LOUIE

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
Intergenerational