The 411 on 420

Estes Valley Library

Young Adult

|

Adults

|

Intergenerational

The 411 on 420

Jan 31, 2020

$51-100

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Byline

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The 411 on 420 was a daylong symposium about marijuana designed to educate the community in advance of a ballot measure allowing the operation of marijuana facilities within city limits.

The symposium consisted of three sessions with guest speakers, including the medical director of an addiction treatment center and a dispensary owner, as well as

a screening of the PBS documentary “The Botany of Desire.”

Advanced Planning

Our goal was to educate the community and provide unbiased information so voters could make an informed decision. One of the key steps in planning was finding relevant guest speakers; this involved reading papers and reviewing past presentations from potential speakers. An unexpected challenge was discovering that some potential speakers were not able to participate because there would be too much risk of impartiality in an election (for example, town clerks, police officers and state officials).

After researching speakers, we invited several to provide a range of expertise and perspectives.

- A session entitled Marijuana and Your Health was led by the medical director of a detox and addiction treatment center.
- Marijuana Defined was led by a dispensary owner.
- Marijuana and Public Health in Our Community was led by a public information officer from the county health department and an emergency room director.

The documentary screening, held during the lunch hour, provided a passive programming opportunity for patrons who were not interested in attending a discussion.

We also researched how other institutions structured similar events in the past to see what was successful and what could be improved. These models included community conversations sponsored by other local agencies, as well as programs from other libraries (the library in Saskatoon, Canada, had hosted a similar daylong symposium).

We invited both proponents and opponents of the measure to set up tables on the sidewalk outside the library; however, no groups chose to do so.

Finally, we wrote a script for the day of the event, including introductory remarks and clear ground rules for participation.

Marketing

The event was promoted through local newspapers and other marketing channels. Additionally, all library staff were notified of the event and its goals several weeks in advance so that frontline staff felt confident providing information to patrons.

Budgeting

We typically budget $150 for a program like this. We used $60 to buy the DVD with the licensing rights to show it in a public setting. Every speaker donated their time, so there were no other costs.

Day-of-event Activity

The event required a microphone as well as index cards for submitting questions. We decided to take questions by index card only, so we could keep the conversation focused on the speaker’s area of expertise. However, we also wanted a space for attendees to share their opinions or other questions, so we set up butcher paper and Post-it notes at the back of the room.

We also displayed the ballot measure electronically and had it posted on the walls in the meeting room.

Program Execution

We started the sessions by welcoming the participants, stating the goal of the session and its connection to the library’s mission, and setting the ground rules (see attached 411 on 420 Intro Script).

While the speaker was presenting, we moderated the room and collected question index cards from attendees. Volunteers from the League of Women Voters helped

review the question submissions and select which were relevant and should be asked. We did not think it would be fair if only library staff decided, and the League has experience moderating questions from their forums on election issues.

After the session, we sent an evaluation form to participants. We received positive feedback, although some attendees said they would have preferred to ask questions in real time rather than using index cards. The volunteers from the League of Women Voters also noted that, because the event was so close to the election, many people had already decided how to vote.

Advice

It's important to set clear ground rules. In other programs, we have had everyone start their questions with "My questions is…" to keep them focused on asking a question instead of providing opinions or anecdotes. If taking questions by index card, it may be helpful to pre-print "My question is…" at the top of the card.

We found that, by offering separate sessions led by experts with different perspectives, participants could self-select events that would align to their existing viewpoint. In order to provide all attendees with a variety of perspectives and information, it may be better to host this type of event as a panel with multiple speakers at one session.

We also realized, by hosting the event during the day, working families were not able to attend. Consider having sessions at various times of day to reach a wider audience.

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Supporting Materials

Document
411on420_flyer.pdf
Document
411_on_420_intro_script.pdf
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