

Expunge Your Criminal Record

[Charles County Public Library](#)

Adults

Expunge Your Criminal Record

Jun 10, 2015

Free



Byline

Sarah Guy, Program Coordinator, Charles County Public Library, La Plata, Md.

We invited 10 volunteer attorneys to provide pro bono assistance to our community to help expunge criminal records. Customers were provided with a basic overview of the expungement process, who can apply, how long the process takes and what they can expect after filing the paperwork.

Advanced Planning

The entire event was planned and executed in about six weeks. The Maryland Young Attorney's Pro Bono Committee coordinated and organized volunteers for the event.

The attorney in charge of coordinating the program collected the expungement brochure, court paperwork, fee waivers and disclosure of the attorney's non-representation of customers. On the day of the program, the volunteer attorneys arrived an hour early to debrief and decide which questions they did not feel comfortable answering.

Marketing

The most important thing for a program like this is to advertise in advance, preferably in the local newspaper. We also had the newspaper show up for the event and report on it after the program was complete. Afterwards, I had dozens of phone calls/ drop-in customers who wanted to know when the next event would be. At the time, we didn't have another session scheduled. Also, definitely notify your state People's Law Library about the event, as they will help advertise!

Budgeting

There was no budget for the event. All the attorneys were volunteers and the paperwork was provided by the courts.

Day-of-event Activity

Each attorney sat at a table and had the expungement brochure from Maryland Courts, as well as the expungement paperwork and fee waiver (for waiving the court cost to file the expungement). They also had their laptops with them so they they could research cases in judicial search and look up applicable laws. Each session with an attorney was first-come, first-served. On average, each session lasted about 20 minutes, although there were several people who spent more than an hour with the attorney. Each customer was provided a basic overview of the expungement process and what to expect after filing the paperwork.

The program was held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., with attorneys arriving at 9 a.m. for a strategy meeting and briefing. We had customers lining up outside the library

starting at about 8:15 a.m. (We don't open until 9 a.m.) Luckily, the line moved surprisingly quickly. Many of the charges I heard about were marijuana possession and traffic problems; I heard and saw nothing about violent or sexual crimes. To manage the session, we handed out numbers to call as the attorneys became available. This also allowed us to track the number of attendees for the event.

Program Execution

My projected attendance for the program was 25 people. We ended up surpassing this, with a total of 78 people attending. I consider this an extremely successful event. I had amazing feedback from the community and from local elected officials acknowledging how crucial this service was to customers. Some people told me personal stories about how it has affected their life and how they have the chance to finally move on. What was shocking was how many people contacted me after the event to say thank you.

Advice

I would suggest reminding staff that a lot of the customers will not be your regular library users. This is an excellent opportunity to encourage future library use and get them familiar with your services. You should not assume that these customers are criminals; do not treat them differently than you would treat anyone else. This was the one thing I wish I'd made abundantly clear before the program started. I was very disappointed in several staff members who were less than pleasant to customers.

Even if you advertise the event as a program that can handle charges for your state only, expect people to come in with cases they want expunged from other states. Despite advertising the program as expungement only for Maryland cases, we still had several people show up with charges in D.C., Virginia, etc.

This is one of the most helpful services public libraries can offer their community to help with workforce development, plus it's incredibly rewarding!

Supporting Materials

[Download this Program as a PDF](#)

- Feedback (Coming Soon!)
- [Programming Librarian Facebook Group](#)

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