

Once Upon a Formal

[Gilbert Public Library](#)

Young Adult

|

Adults

Once Upon a Formal

Jul 30, 2015

\$51-100

\$

Your name

Nicole Miller, Library Director, Gilbert (Minn.) Public Library

Once Upon a Formal is an ongoing formal and semiformal dress loaning program geared toward teens. We collect gently used and clean dress donations and store them in our cloak closet until someone needs to borrow a dress. They have the loan for up to one month. We reserve the right to turn away dirty and torn dresses, and we ask that anyone who borrows a dress have it cleaned before returning it.

Advanced Planning

There was no advanced planning for this program. I read an article about another library in Texas doing a dress swap, shared the article among my friends on Facebook, and people immediately offered to donate dresses if I started the program. After that, all I had to do was find a storage area (our cloak closet), make some fliers about accepting donations, and write up a quick article for the local newspaper.

Marketing

Once I collected enough dresses to be viable (about 50), I contacted principals of the local high schools and sent them fliers. They advertised for me with the fliers and in morning announcements. I also contacted local papers with press releases. [Watch a Fox 21 news story about the program.](#)

Budgeting

The only cost was buying clothing racks on which to hang dresses. I also recommend sturdy coat hangers with notches for straps. Everything should cost less than \$100.

Day-of-event Activity

We have a few days when girls can come to try on dresses. It only requires one staff member to help them. If girls need to make an appointment, we ensure there are enough people on schedule at that time so we can unlock the cloak room, pull out the dresses, and help her out.

Program Execution

We had a lot of donations! People still ask if we're accepting dresses and express approval over the program. We had fewer than 10 girls show up to try dresses this spring, but we got started well into prom dress shopping season. I anticipate there

will be more interest next school year.

Advice

Start collecting dresses in the summer and get the information to the schools in the fall. That will give girls time to think about it and see what you have to offer without waiting until the last minute. I also recommend asking for plus-size dresses. We have a number of tiny dresses, but not enough for larger girls. Some people will try to pawn off old dresses from decades ago. If there's a local theater company that takes clothing donations, you can recommend that those dresses go there instead.

Supporting Materials

[Download this Program as a PDF](#)

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

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