

Cookbook Challenge

[Stephenson Memorial Library](#)

Adults

Cookbook Challenge

Nov 19, 2015

\$1-50

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Byline

Julie Steenson, Library Director, Stephenson Memorial Library, Greenfield, N.H.

Stephenson Memorial Library recently relocated and refreshed our nonfiction collection, so we wanted to highlight the new additions to our collection. With the holiday season approaching, cookbooks seemed like a good place to start. During October, we displayed all of our cookbooks, and patrons were challenged to check them out and try a new recipe or two (or ten). We then hosted a potluck in November, and everyone shared their new favorite prepared dishes, recipes and cookbooks. Our first potluck's theme was "finger foods," and participants were a wonderful mix of men and women, of varied ages and occupations.

Advanced Planning

During our adult summer reading program, patrons had expressed an interest in a program we held for children in which the kids took pictures of themselves doing something they learned in a library book; one little girl chose a cookbook, which sparked the idea. We began with a big cookbook display and a sign promoting the Cookbook Challenge. This was a low-impact program for staff, but patrons became immediately engaged and cookbooks definitely had an increase in circulation. Our biggest challenge was not knowing how many people would attend. We had sign-ups, but that isn't always a good predictor in our community.

Marketing

I had an in-house display, posters in the library and around town, and a write-up in our email newsletter, town newspaper and on Facebook. I did not publish a press release in the regional papers because I wanted to keep the event small. I was pleased that we had 18 attendees, both men and women, with ages ranging from the mid-20s to mid-80s! It felt like a family meal and included a couple of patrons I hadn't even met before.

Budgeting

I did this program using \$20 I received from the Friends of the Library for programming refreshments. I purchased paper plates, bottled water, napkins and plastic silverware. This was a gloriously low-cost event!

Day-of-event Activity

I set up the program by myself. The set-up included tables for the food and the guests, book stands for the related cookbooks, tablecloths, chairs and general dinner

set-up. Our only snag was the need to photocopy recipes that were going to be shared. Next time, I will also have little place cards indicating the name of the dish and the book title, but this time, I just had the recipes and books on display with the food. Staff members rotated through the event, since the library was still open, so everyone could have an opportunity to interact with the patrons and enjoy a social event with our community.

Program Execution

The guests arrived on time with their dishes, and there were no problems at all. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, and the program lasted for an hour and a half. Cookbook circulation increased after the event, and our 18 attendees were so enthusiastic that they started planning our next Cookbook Challenge event — "soups and breads."

Event evaluation was informal and anecdotal. I normally do a formal program evaluation, but I wanted this event to have a community feel and for attendees to feel the charm of small-town living. I was pleased to see some folks needing to introduce themselves to others. As a librarian, it was exciting to know that I had brought together different segments of the community.

Advice

I would advise to start small with this program. I am not sure I would want this program to get too big as it would lose the charm. It strikes me that we could do a similar program with any kind of creative library resources, such as books on jewelry-making or crocheting. The Cookbook Challenge could be a template for bringing together makers and creators through their connection with library books.

Supporting Materials

[Download this Program as a PDF](#)

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

Slideshow Images



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Audiences:

Audience

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Gratitude Cornucopia (Display)

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