Camp WannaRead: A Summer Camp for Grown Ups

Polk County Public Libraries

Adults

Camp WannaRead: A Summer Camp for Grown Ups

Aug 11, 2026

$1,001-2,500

$$$
Byline

Allie Snyder, Program Coordinator, Polk County Public Libraries, Columbus, N.C.

Camp WannaRead transformed our adult summer programming into an immersive "summer camp for grown-ups." Instead of promoting standalone programs, we created a cohesive summer experience complete with camp branding, collectible merit badge-style pins, participant tote bags, themed prizes, and eight nostalgic programs that encouraged adults to rediscover the fun of summer camp while

building community through the library.

Advanced Planning

Planning for Camp WannaRead began several months prior to facilitating the program series. Our goal was to create an adult summer program series that felt like an immersive, nostalgic, adults-only space that participants would want to return to each week.

The first step was developing the overall concept: a nostalgic summer camp designed specifically for adults. Once the theme was established, every planning decision—from partnerships and branding to prizes and marketing—supported that concept. We created the Camp WannaRead visual identity, designed promotional materials, developed a collectible pin incentive program, coordinated presenters, selected programs that reflected classic summer camp experiences, ordered supplies, and planned logistics for the eight-week series.

One unexpected challenge was clearly communicating that Camp WannaRead was exclusively for adults. As many patrons associate summer camp with children, we found it helpful to consistently include "Adults Only" on promotional materials and signage.

Marketing

Rather than advertising each event as a separate program, we marketed Camp WannaRead as one complete summer experience. Every promotional piece—from brochures and social media graphics to in-library displays—used the same camp branding, colors, and visual style to create a recognizable identity.

The kickoff event emphasized the experience by providing every participant with a camp tote bag and explaining the collectible pin challenge. Each subsequent program built on that excitement, encouraging repeat attendance as participants worked toward earning pins and prizes.

The consistent branding generated enthusiasm before the series even began and helped patrons recognize Camp WannaRead as one of the library's signature

summer offerings.

Budgeting

Summer programming funds, generously provided by our Friends of the Library group, were used throughout the program to provide participant tote bags, collectible pins, prizes, and promotional materials. Four of the eight programs involved community partnerships, three of which entailed a presenter honorarium, and the remaining four programs required a small budget for supplies.

Libraries with more limited budgets could easily adapt the concept by scaling down or utilizing donated prizes, or creating a passport-style incentive program with branded or unbranded notebooks in which they can collect stamps or stickers. They may also seek out pro-bono community partnerships, or forgo community partners for lower-budget in-house programming.

The Camp WannaRead concept is highly scalable—patrons' experiences are created more through branding consistency and creativity than through cost.

Day-of-event Activity

Although each program's setup varied depending on the activity, many components remained consistent throughout the series. Camp signage, prize displays, and branding elements were reused each week, making setup progressively easier.

Most programs required one or two staff members to prepare supplies, welcome participants, facilitate activities, distribute collectible pins, and clean up afterward. Because the series followed the same format each week, staff quickly developed an efficient routine.

Program Execution

Program events were as follows, every Tuesday at 5:30 PM (with the exception of the outdoor movie night):

- Camp Kickoff: Welcome to Camp WannaRead! Kick off the summer with a free camp tote bag and let loose your inner child to tie-dye or bedazzle it.
- Slime Science: Let’s get messy! Join Zaniac Learning on a whirlwind tour through the science of slime. Space is limited and registration is required.
- Spooks & S'Mores: Are You Afraid of the Dark? Drop in for some Goosebumps and good eats! Whip up a sweet treat at our gourmet s’mores bar and gather round for spooky shows from the 80s and 90s.
- Canvases & Canteens: Grab a Capri-Sun or some Kool-Aid and cozy up to a canvas! Local artist Samantha Bell will guide us in painting a waterfall scene. Space is limited and registration is required.
- Outdoor Movie: Ring in America’s 250th with this outdoor showing of National Treasure. Grab a picnic blanket or chair and head to the library deck for this patriotic cult classic. Popcorn will be served and there will be a costume contest - dress as a historical American figure for the chance to win a prize! This program will take place at 8:30 PM.
- Backwoods Basics: Blaze your own trail! Get trail ready as we hear from Chimney Rock State Park ranger David Schafer on outdoor preparedness, hiking essentials, and how to thrive in the great outdoors.
- Throwback Crafts: Craft your way through the 80s and 90s! Try your hand at shrinky dinks, sand art, friendship bracelets, and bedazzling.
- Animal Encounters: Ever wanted to chill with a capybara or lounge with a lemur? Now’s your chance! We’ll wrap up summer in style with the Wildlife Geeks and their exotic rescue animals.

Camp WannaRead successfully created a sense of anticipation that extended beyond individual programs. Participants returned week after week to collect pins, reconnect with fellow attendees, and experience the next "camp activity."

Programs blended creativity, nostalgia, entertainment, and lifelong learning, and the varied activities allowed participants with different interests to find something that appealed to them while maintaining a consistent camp theme throughout the summer.

Many participants commented that they would miss their summer at "camp," and that Camp WannaRead reminded them of childhood summers while providing opportunities to meet other adults and experience the library in a new way. Programs garnered an average of 20-25 attendees, with the final program reaching nearly 50 attendees. Overall, Camp WannaRead achieved its primary goal of encouraging repeat participation and reaching new patrons.

Advice

Don't think of your summer programming as a list of events—think of it as telling a story.

The strongest aspect of Camp WannaRead wasn't any single program; it was the feeling that participants were joining something larger than themselves. Consistent branding, recurring traditions, incentives, and small thematic details created excitement and encouraged patrons to return week after week.

The concept is also highly adaptable. Regardless of the theme, building a cohesive identity around your adult programs can dramatically increase engagement without dramatically increasing your budget. Start with one strong concept, commit to it across every aspect of the series, and let every event reinforce the overall experience.

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

Supporting Materials

Document
Camp WannaRead - June-July 2026 - Brochure.pdf
Document
Camp WannaRead - June-July 2026 - V. Flyer.pdf
Download this Program as a PDF

- Programming Librarian Facebook Group

Slideshow Images

More Programs

Mar 20, 2026

\+ |

Image

What It Takes to Run a 17,000-Player Library Game

Audiences:

Feb 7, 2024
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | $$
Image

The Book Crawl

Audiences:

Young Adult (17 - 20)
Adults (21 and up)
May 14, 2026
Young Adult (17 - 20)+ | $$
Image

Lit Cookbook Club

Audiences:

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