

## Library Sponsored Events & Programming Promotion Ideas

In the fall of 2009, Donna Arment, Technical Services Librarian with the Durango Public Library, asked the Libnet listserv the following question:

We are in the process of evaluating how we notify patrons of our Library sponsored programs. Currently we place ads in the local paper (getting a little expensive), place small reminder slips by our self-checkouts and post flyers by the program rooms but still our attendance is low. We are considering creating an email list to send out regular reminders and promote our online event and program calendar. Has anyone tested any of these of these methods, if so how well do they work? Does anyone have any other ideas for promoting your programs?

The following is a compilation of the responses Donna received.

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Chris McGrath - South Central BOCES Instructional Media Center

- This might be stating the obvious, but your school aged programs could be promoted through the schools.
  - How about partnering with your Parks and Recreation Department? Senior Centers? Art Galleries? Anywhere that human life forms gather.
  - I know you have some connection to the college, right? Perhaps expanding upon that would make sense.
  - Here in Pueblo, our radio stations will make public service announcements for non-profits and their events for free. Is that an option for you?
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Marcia McElroy - Las Animas-Bent County Library

- The local bank marquee
  - The local cable station
  - We put up flyers in the local grocery store plus we print flyers to give to patrons as they check out books
  - Advertise on the Swap Shop programs of the radio stations in Lamar and La Junta.
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## Larry Grieco - Gilpin County Public Library

- It's not the easiest solution, but I write a weekly library column for the two local newspapers (they are both weeklies), and use the last paragraph or two to promote anything we're doing. Both of these papers offer free "community events" postings, and that helps.
  - On a really big five-part reading and discussion series, I partnered with one of the newspapers, and they were proud to have such an active (and public) role for the program, and gave us big ads for free, with the schedule of books and dates listed.
  - I've also enjoyed writing and submitting press releases, within which I was subtly really advertising an upcoming program. (Like an interview with a notable, featured poet in the next poetry reading.)
  - Sometimes in the case of a poet or author coming to the library, the paper would want to have a reporter conduct the interview prior to the program, and write a feature story. Press releases, community announcements, regular library columns--are all free. Sometimes if a reporter doesn't cover an event, I write a press release describing how successful and fun it all was, and include pictures. This helps for the next program down the line.
  - I've had a flip chart on an easel right inside the main entrance, with an event announced in bold, large magic marker strokes. They can't miss it, so it's more effective than a flyer on a bulletin board, or even at the circ desk.
  - And if there are groups using the meeting room, I make sure an event flyer is distributed by whoever in the group is willing to do it, or I do it myself if I'm around.
  - I've had limited success with email lists--probably because of our rural, mountain location. The internet at home isn't very dependable or fast. And some people are afraid to provide their work email addresses.
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## Bonnie McCune - Library People President

- All the ways you currently promote programs are still valid, but as you point out, purchasing ads is expensive. And more and more people are using alternatives to get their news.
- Douglas County has an e-list newsletter for which people sign up. Several libraries are using Twitter to pique initial interest in their offerings. Texting to an established list is also a way to reach people, especially younger ones.

- Yes, this all takes time, and you have to know how to use the various methods (which I don't).
  - The best thing you can do is have a program--content, title, etc--that will catch on to word of mouth so people will pass the message along to their friends. Most people don't come to a program by themselves; they come with someone.
  - Libraries are already positioned for word of mouth as staff interacts with patrons daily. If you can get your staff excited about the programs, they'll talk about it more.
  - Another excellent way to spread the news: reach out through networks of other organizations. If your program is cosponsored by another group (say a school, a mothers' group, book club, whatever), they'll be sure to let their members know. Even if another group doesn't officially cosponsor, brainstorm with library staff to see who has connections to groups whose interests coincide with the content of your program.
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Karen Alfino - High Plains Library District

- I've had some luck with programming attendance and in every case I promoted the program as limited seating, pre-registration required. For the past two months, my program has filled it's 30 available slots and the 10 waiting list slots. I then call and reminder the pre-registered participants the day before the event. My attrition rate has been quite low. The name of my program is Young Scientists and it consists of S.T.E.M. workshops for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. Feel free to call/email if you have any questions. 720-685-5112 is my direct line. Good luck!
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Kathleen Kelly - Louisville Public Library

- I started creating an email list a couple years ago. What I did was ask attendees of programs and participants in our summer reading program for adults if they were interested in receiving a monthly email about upcoming adult/family programs. (I don't do anything about the children's programs - just the ones that I am responsible for.) I added anyone who gave me their email for that purpose after each program and currently have about 175 on the list. We also have low attendance problems, in general, at these programs, but this has helped to some degree. It doesn't take long to create the email and send it out so I think it's

useful. I put the email addresses in the BCC column so that I am not giving out personal emails.

- We don't purchase ads due to budgetary issues. We do send out press releases which occasionally are placed in our local papers. There's also an online listing of programs at the websites of a couple local papers and we can put our information there ourselves. We also highlight upcoming programs on our website.

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- Our library has been promoting our programs through a Facebook account.
  - I don't have a target email list, but I do try to send out a message to individuals that might have a specific interest in the program.
  - I use my LinkedIn profile to update the Business Incubator and other groups about programs and classes I am working on.
  - I have also been communicating more with the Chambers of Commerce in our area, so they have done more to pass along the word. Overall, as far as low cost ways to promote adult programming, I think the outreach and networking has helped greatly.
  - We started emailing patrons about upcoming programs fairly recently and it seems to have made a difference in attendance for some programs. We did a drive asking patrons for their email addresses to help with holds notifications, etc., and used the results to create an email list.

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- We use Constant Contact ([constantcontact.com](http://constantcontact.com)) to send mass e-mails about our events. The cost is reasonable and it seems to be effective. People can sign up for our e-mail list on our website, at the Circ. Desk, and at our programs. All of the e-mails have an "unsubscribe button," so it is easy for patrons to take their name off the list if they so desire. There are also colorful templates in Constant Contact that make it easy to send attractive e-mails that open right to your flyer or newsletter.

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- A monthly "What's Next" handout (I do this every month; it is 11x17, printed both sides and folded into a booklet, with all the programs for the next 2 months on it)
  - Our website, other groups' websites (I try to collaborate with other groups on many of our programs)

- Community calendars (newspaper, Chamber of Commerce, Merchants Association)
- Weathercrawl (the cable company lets us run a free "crawl" on the weather channel sometimes; this is not generally available so I use it only for our Volunteer Fair which benefits many organizations)
- Press release blurb to papers, radio stations & TV stations, press release hoping to get a real article rather than just a blurb in the list of community events; follow up with a phone call (I hardly ever do this, but I want to do it more)
- Picture in the paper after the event
- Library Column (we have a column in the paper every two weeks that the staff shares; the ones I write are almost always about upcoming programs)
- Radio interviews (we have a standing appointment on Wednesday mornings; we share this as well, but it's usually me talking about programs)
- Cover article for our paper's weekend supplement (I asked for and got this 3 times this year; it seems to be the best vehicle for us; it involves writing an article & doing a cover page layout)
- Flyer, usually 8.5x11, we put 50 - 100 of them all around town
- Small pick-up flyers 5.5x8.5 available in the library
- Big poster on a signboard (I just bought this 2'x3' signboard at Office Depot and I love it; I put it out at the Farmer's Market & plan to use it next summer at festivals)
- A sign in our lobby on an easel, sometimes with pockets with postcards to take home
- A display in our display cases in our lobby
- A bookcart display with related books on it and signs
- We put up a big banner on the outside of the building for the Volunteer Fair & we walked it in a parade this year
- email lists (I have forms people can fill out that lets them choose what kinds of programs they want to get e-mails about -- all, arts, civic engagement, health & lifestyle, history, poetry, reading, science, writing; I have this idea that I might send out 2 emails, a "save this date" email and a "this week" email but I really only get one sent; this works but it's been a pain to maintain; a friend tells me if we had a facebook site people could join and update and unjoin for themselves)
- Postcard lists for people who don't do email (I have this option on the above form but have rarely gotten it together to actually send out a postcard)
- Announcements at relevant organizations' meetings and

- Blurbs in their newsletters (I always ask presenters who in town will be interested in what they are talking about, I sometimes get suggestions I would never think of)
  - Our newsletter (it comes out 3 times a year so is only useful for some of the programs)
  - Direct mail notice or invitation
  - Table tents (this has been on my list for a long time and I have never actually done it. I think some of the restaurants in town would let us put them on their tables occasionally but I don't know for sure)
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- Do you post on your website? We started doing that with our website.
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- Would your newspaper allow you to write an article about an upcoming program? Most papers don't charge for articles
  - Is there a community calendar in the newspaper or maybe on local cable?
  - Have you tried radio stations? Radio stations are required by law to broadcast a certain number of (free) public service announcements and they will usually jump at the chance when a nonprofit has something to air.
  - Do you have a Friends group? Maybe they could make fliers and distribute them around town?
  - Do your public schools and the college have newsletters that you might be able to put a notice in?
  - I think your ideas for an online presence are good. Does the library have a presence on Facebook?
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