

It's your library too

Inviting staff to a library event designed just for them

Academic staff can often be forgotten in marketing of library resources and services. Targeting this unique population creates a campus community of staff that are informed about the library, comfortable using library services and spaces, and powerful library advocates. Workshops and similar lecture-style events targeting staff do not often draw large numbers. We designed an engaging and creative event called Summer Fest as an alternative to the traditional workshop. This article focuses on the planning, preparation, marketing, and execution of an event targeted to this overlooked population.

Overview

Many academic libraries emphasize support of their campus community in their mission statements, yet outreach efforts often focus on specific populations, such as students or departmental faculty. At our institution, the liaison structure effectively reaches academic departments, but there is no specific librarian assigned to staff outreach. Identifying this imbalance in our own outreach strategies, we resolved to connect with staff (including administrators and faculty) at an event addressing their specific needs. We investigated staff library behaviors and discovered that most staff were unaware of library services available to them and hesitant to enter perceived student-only library spaces. We designed an in-person event to help staff more confidently use library resources and to build stronger relationships between campus and library staff.

Cara Bradley at the University of Regina identified campus staff as potential library advocates. Campus staff often work in information-intensive positions and are key influencers on campus, advise and direct students, and make important decisions that impact the library.¹ At Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Library, we expected our staff would be more likely to refer students to our services and advocate for the library when they were more familiar with the library. Summer Fest was designed to both meet the library's strategic plan goal of increasing awareness of all library resources and services to staff and transform staff into powerful library advocates.

The Hazy Library and Learning Center is part of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. Our goal was to target the institution's 202 part- and full-time faculty and 324 staff. Previously the library held workshops or brown bag lunch sessions with limited success and low attendance. We envisioned a more fun and interactive alternative to the staff workshop format that highlights the same resources, services, and information.

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During the event, attendees received a passport that directed them to explore seven stations placed throughout our two-floor library. Each station showcased different library resources tailored toward staff needs. Fortunately, the event coincided with the launch of our Act One Culture Pass program, which provides two free admissions at participating museums, zoos, and cultural institutions. Rather than having a generic library introduction session, this new program launch provided us with the perfect opportunity to draw in participants with a popular local program.

Planning

We began planning the event one month prior. In the early stages, we met with influential campus staff and asked them about their impressions of the library. These staff agreed that they were unaware of library services for staff. One staff member expressed their discomfort with entering library spaces. Their comments mirrored our own observations of staff library behaviors.

Unlike student orientations, we did not include research-based services or course materials but instead focused on services that benefit staff both personally and professionally. We also wanted the stations to be interactive. To encourage staff members to explore and feel comfortable in library spaces, we placed seven stations strategically through the first and second floors of the library:

- **Welcome Table:** The library director greeted guests, explained the event, handed out passports, and gave out library swag.
- **Station 1:** A book display with Yavapai Library Network (consortium of local libraries) books. Selected titles reflected a wide range of non-academic topics, such as knitting, traveling, and cooking. The librarian at this station helped attendees set up library accounts.
- **Station 2:** A tabletop display of a sampling of technology that can be checked out, such as projectors, podcast microphones, speakers, and more.
- **Station 3:** A display with library staff's favorite books and movies. Cards were available for attendees to write their own recommended book or movie to share.
- **Station 4:** The librarian gave a short tutorial on how to use the catalog. Attendees were also given a handout with steps on how to navigate the catalog.
- **Station 5:** The librarian gave a short tutorial on how to access Libby (with a handout) and a FitBike Desk demonstration.
- **Station 6:** A display of Act One Culture Passes. The librarian was there to answer any questions about how to use the Culture Passes. Attendees could also take an interactive quiz about local trivia.
- **Station 7:** A spot to sign up for a New York Times subscription.
- **Just for Fun:** Attendees were encouraged to try moving the library's new compact shelving.

The bulk of pre-event preparation involved creating the passport, event posters, invitations, handouts, station signs, and displays. We decided on a pineapple theme with bright colors, and all event materials reflected our goal to keep the event light and fun.

When planning, we originally wanted more interactivity, such as Kahoot games or website demonstrations at each station. We also considered a summer-long passport activity where staff would pick up their passport, do library tasks, and turn in the completed passport for

a prize. Ultimately, we decided to keep it simple with uncomplicated station activities at a one-time event.

We scheduled the event for a non-holiday week from noon to 2 p.m. The event was purposefully planned to overlap with lunchtime hours to accommodate staff who cannot leave their departments during work hours.

Planning and marketing your event

When planning your own staff-centered event, you may want to consider the following questions:

1. What do you currently do for staff outreach that's not working?
2. What are the library behaviors of your staff?
3. What underused services do you want to highlight?
4. How can your event attract and engage both new and seasoned staff?

We focused our marketing efforts on platforms that would reach staff. We sent several campus-wide emails announcing the event and highlighting the new Act One Culture Pass program. The email also mentioned additional resources we would be showcasing, such as the Libby App for audiobooks and e-books and tech items for checkout like movie projectors. Additionally, we created an announcement on our internal staff page detailing the event. Knowing that personal invitations can increase outreach success, we asked library staff to hand-deliver invitations to their campus connections. Our varied marketing methods generated buzz and questions, especially about the Act One Culture Pass program, but about other services as well. Even prior to the event, marketing efforts sparked staff engagement and enthusiasm for library resources.

Event

Twenty-four staff members attended the event with many departments attending in groups. Attendees were enthusiastic about both the resources and the event, lingering to chat and enjoy the social interactions with each other and library staff. Attendees' eagerness for the event can be partially attributed to a post-COVID-19 desire to leave office spaces and socialize. One attendee wanted to access audiobooks but didn't know how. The event provided him with a timely opportunity to master the Libby App for an upcoming summer road trip. Another attendee commented that they were excited to use the large-format printer for a photography project. Multiple attendees expressed interest in using the Yavapai network lending system. Summer Fest had a mix of seasoned staff, new staff, and non-library users. We were satisfied with the event turnout based on these conversations and observations.

Two weeks after Summer Fest we sent a follow-up email with links to resources that we highlighted during the event. We wanted to ensure that those who did not attend received information about library resources and services. We also included the newsletter of staff recommended reads from Station 3.



Poster for the Summer Fest event.

Reflections

We identified several elements that worked particularly well, including positive social interactions, station interactivity, and learning more about the library. Having staff at each station to facilitate conversations made the experience more friendly. Library staff were also able to introduce themselves to new campus staff or renew existing relationships. Interactivity at every station, like the local trivia quiz, gave attendees a purpose at each station. Demonstrating some unique items like the FitBike Desk was a great conversation starter. Attendees also enjoyed moving the new electronic compact shelving. Letting them hit the button and see the electronic shelves working provided a tactile way to increase their comfort in library spaces. Several staff were excited about the opportunity to use the library as an alternative workspace. Most importantly, campus staff were exposed to previously unfamiliar library resources and were able to experience firsthand the library's mission to serve the entire campus community. Similar to our experience, the University of Montana found that staff want to learn more about the library and are empowered when they are more aware of library services.² Empowered staff can become library supporters and advocates increasing the reputation and value of the library campus wide.

We recognized several areas for improvement, such as reconsidering station placement, as not everyone went to the stations upstairs. Additionally, some attendees were confused how Station 1 (Yavapai Network lending system, library account) and Station 4 (library catalog) were different. Combining these stations would make more sense for attendees. Also, refreshments are often a powerful draw for event attendance. While the budget did not allow for it, a snack and drink station, perhaps combined with a cookbook display, could help increase attendance.

We received feedback from many attendees that they enjoyed the event. Specifically, one of the attendees recognized the value of an interactive and relaxed library introduction and requested we put on a similar event for international students. An administrator also commented that the format was a unique way to showcase library resources, and they hoped that similar events could be done for first-year students.

While we measured success through positive interactions and attendance, a more structured assessment, such as pre- and post-event surveys or staff circulation data, could help track increases in staff engagement with the library. For example, at the University of Washington, librarians used post-event surveys to assess their orientation for campus support staff. They found that attendees received the event positively and felt more comfortable using library resources.³

Conclusion

In hosting Summer Fest, we wanted to reach an overlooked population in our campus community. Previous outreach attempts through workshops were ineffective, and too many campus staff were unaware of library resources. Believing that a more relaxed program would garner more interest, we focused on creating an event where staff could explore and interact with library staff, services, and resources in an engaging way. Through both the event and marketing efforts, we successfully strengthened relationships with staff, increased library visibility on campus, and helped staff better understand library services. We found this event to be invaluable in the library's mission to support the campus community, and we look forward to continuing staff-focused outreach.

Notes

1. Cara Bradley, “Campus Disconnect: Academic Libraries and the Information Needs, Skills, and Behaviors of Non-Teaching University Staff,” University of Regina Ourspace, March 13, 2009, <https://ourspace.uregina.ca/handle/10294/2595>.

3. Sue Samson and Kimberley Swanson, “Support Your Staff Employees: They Support the Academy,” *Reference Services Review* 42, no. 1 (2014): 165–80, <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/RSR-03-2013-0017/full/html>.

4. Leslie Hurst, “The Special Library on Campus: A Model for Library Orientations Aimed at Academic Administration, Faculty, and Support Staff,” *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 29, no. 4 (2003): 231–36, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0099-1333\(03\)00041-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0099-1333(03)00041-7).