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Connecting Communities and Celebrating Diversity through Living Library Events

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PURPOSE

Facilitate conversations between “living books” (individuals who volunteer to share their personal experiences) and “readers” (individuals who “check out” living books) in a safe and supportive environment. (*Editor’s note: Chapter 94 features a similar, yet different, approach that you may wish to explore depending on your needs.*)

TARGET AUDIENCE

Students and library staff involved in outreach services and programming

INGREDIENTS

- Personnel:
 - ◊ Library staff and others to serve on the planning committee and as event volunteers
 - ◊ Campus/community partners
 - ◊ Members of campus and/or local community to serve as living books
- Supplies:
 - ◊ Paper for posters, flyers, event schedules, table/room reservation signs, circulation statistics sheets, surveys, etc.
 - ◊ Easels and/or large display board for posters, event schedules, etc.

- ◊ Customized t-shirts or other giveaways for living books
- ◊ Name tags for volunteers
- ◊ Refreshments for volunteers and living books
- ◊ Camera/smartphone for photos
- Spaces (physical and virtual):
 - ◊ Comfortable seating areas and private meeting rooms (if needed)
 - ◊ Room for living books to relax when not checked out (optional)
 - ◊ Website and social media channels for event promotion, living book volunteer form, online schedule, and advanced reservation form

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Recruit planning committee members and event volunteers.
2. Select an event date and time (may require administrative approval).
3. Identify and reach out to potential campus/community partners who can help promote the event and recruit living books.
4. Identify and invite individuals with a diverse set of experiences to share, including those who have encountered marginalization or prejudice, to participate as living books.

5. Create statements outlining event details and goals, including tips sheet, campus/community partnership statement of expectations, press releases, and social media announcements.
6. Distribute a save-the-date announcement, including living book suggestion form.
7. Establish a vetting process for living book submissions, including editing submitted titles and descriptions and confirming final details (e.g., t-shirt sizes, other recommended readings, etc.).
8. Develop a circulation process, including coordinating advanced registrations and check out procedures, both to track availability of living books and to gather circulation statistics.
9. Update website with living book descriptions and event information as they are finalized.
10. Assign event volunteers to specific tasks (e.g., circulation, “runners,” room monitors, etc.).
11. Advertise event (e.g., flyers, email announcements, social media, etc.) and provide marketing materials for campus/community partners to distribute.
12. Offer orientation sessions and tips for living books to outline event details, expectations, and to answer questions.

13. Select and reserve rooms and open library tables.
14. Purchase supplies and giveaways.
15. Document event (e.g., photos, social media posts, etc.), being respectful not to disrupt conversations.
16. Send thank you to living books, event volunteers, and partners after the event, including any relevant positive feedback gathered, photos collected, etc.

CAUTIONS/ADVICE

Clearly communicate the goals and format of the event to living books.

Assign some event volunteers as on-call readers in case of slower periods.

Reserve private rooms, especially for those discussing more sensitive topics.

Gather contact information and materials for referral services (counseling center, advocacy centers, etc.) in case they are requested or needed.

Create “other books like this” bibliographies or related book displays.

Establish policies for handling requests from researchers or journalists interested in covering or observing the event.

Confirm with living books if they have any accessibility needs in order to participate in the event, dietary restrictions, etc.

Request permission from living books of any intention to take photos during the event,

noting and honoring any requests from those who indicate they would not like to be photographed.

ASSESSMENT

Create separate evaluation forms for living books and readers to collect feedback and suggestions for future events and living book topics.

Gather feedback from event volunteers and partners.

Analyze survey responses, circulation statistics, and other feedback, to inform future event considerations.

REFLECTION

The Human Library was developed in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2000, and “designed to build a positive framework for conversations that can challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue” (The Human Library, 2019).

Human Library events can successfully bring together individuals from a community to engage with each other and promote diversity and understanding. For more information on hosting a Human Library event, visit the Human Library website.



Figure 93.1. The living library in action.

As of this writing, we have hosted six events based on this concept, and each year, most of our living books circulate actively throughout, with multiple checkouts and even some renewals! Our feedback from living books and readers has been very positive, with helpful suggestions for future events. We make adjustments every year to ensure that the event runs as smoothly and effectively as possible and provides a meaningful experience for all participants. A picture from our event is shown in figure 93.1

REFERENCES

The Human Library. (2019). *The Human Library organization*. Retrieved from <http://humanlibrary.org>