LGBTQ+ Programming in Libraries

Many library systems want to provide programs that create a welcome place for the LGBTQ+ community. However, it's not always clear what those programs could be. What does LGBTQ+ programming even look like, and how should a library go about providing it? To answer that question, we did a survey of North American libraries to find out what kinds of programs are currently being offered, and what considerations go into making them impactful.

Commonly Offered Programs

These were the most common programs that fit neatly into other library offerings. Many of these were offered a few times a year, usually around Pride month (June). Often, these kinds of programs serve a multipurpose role, where participants can use the time to meet other people in the LGBTQ+ community, make friends, and get connected to relevant resources.

Drag queen story hour

Rainbow Storytime

LGBTQ+ Youth Social Groups

LGBTQ+ 101 Educational Sessions

Book Clubs

Movie Viewings

LGBTQ+ History Sessions

LGBTQ+ Author Panels

Unique Offerings

These were programs that stood out as particularly unique and exciting, most of which are currently only being offered by a few library systems across the United States and Canada. These represent creative opportunities that other libraries could emulate or take inspiration from.

Wikipedia Editing Parties

Smashing Stereotype Piñatas

Pronoun Button Making

Drag Makeup Tutorials

LGBTQ+ Cartooning

LGBTQ+ Crafting Sessions

LGBTQ+ Board Game Nights

LGBTQ+ Comedy Workshops

Zine Making Workshops

Blackout Poetry

LGBTQ+ Healthcare

LGBTQ+ Human Library

Name Change Information and Assistance Sessions

How to be a Better Ally or Parent Information Sessions

Pop-up Libraries at LGBTQ+ Events and Organizations

LGBTQ+ Open Mic Nights and Sing-Along Parties

LGBTQ+ Prom Night

Involving Partners

By far the biggest factor that went into making an impactful program was partnering with schools and local organizations that serve the LGBTQ+ community. These organizations were able to advertise library programs to those who would need them the most, deliver relevant necessary knowledge and expertise, and provide facilitators and speakers.

Conclusions

There's no program that worked universally everywhere. Even across libraries that served similar sized communities with similar demographics, the same program might take off in one location and flounder in another. The most successful programs emerged out of being willing to try different things at different times, and not being scared off from trying if the first attempts fail. Reaching out to local LGBTQ+ organizations and centering their involvement often led to programs that were more dynamic and responsive to local wants and needs. Many offerings like book clubs and board game nights can be repurposed as LGBTQ+ events, creating space for the community while giving them a structured activity to socialize around. What's most important is trying anything at all, even if it's not perfect, and even if it doesn't take off at first.