Programming Testimony

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Programming is a backbone of the Ilsley Public Library. Our ongoing assessment of library programs (through statistics, surveys, and anecdotal feedback) demonstrates that Vermont communities are hungry for programs and, if programs are offered, they will be well attended and will enrich community members' lives. Ilsley's experience with programming also demonstrates that thoughtful, engaging programs require substantial funding and staff time. Public libraries are often asked to do more but are not supported with adequate resources. Programming is an essential service, and in order to provide programs libraries need dedicated funding.

There is great demand for programs in Middlebury, so we devote significant resources to programs. Three years ago we added a full-time position specifically to allow us to meet growing demand for programs; in 2019, pre-pandemic, the library planned or sponsored 900 programs which were attended by over 18,000 participants. The library has a five-person programming team that meets three times a year to make sure our programs are in alignment with the library's mission, are meeting the needs of our community, and are reaching underserved populations (reaching underserved populations often means meeting those populations where they are, and library programming regularly takes place outside of the library building). I am attaching a document we use to guide and evaluate our library programming. Ilsley is able to provide rich and engaging programs because we have 1) a dedicated programming budget (about $13,000 annually), 2) adequate staff hours dedicated to programming, which includes time for planning and evaluating programs, and 3) an understanding at the admin/trustee level that many of these staff hours need to take place outside of the library building.

During the pandemic, we promptly canceled all in-person programming, along with the rest of Vermont libraries. Over the following year and a half, we continued to provide programs in three distinct ways, which changed the way we think about 'library programs' at Ilsley.

1. Digital Programs. The library immediately pivoted to holding as many planned programs as possible remotely, primarily using Zoom. Benefits of remote, digital programs are that they allow patrons to connect in real time, providing a sense of community. It also increased accessibility for patrons that have a difficult time making it into the library building for programs. For our youngest patrons, digital Storytimes provides a sense of continuity and security. Drawbacks are that patrons started to experience Zoom fatigue as the pandemic wore on. Going forward, we plan to utilize remote meeting technology occasionally, as a tool to extend access to programming.

2. Outdoor Passive Programs. The library worked with the town, local businesses, and homeowners to install Books on Sticks in several areas around town. These storybook walks were immensely popular with young children and their caretakers. After evaluating the program and discussing its value with local daycares and schools, the library has decided to continue to

operating Books on Sticks in perpetuity. Benefits include giving caregivers something fun to do with their children at *a time that works best for them*; promoting outdoor excursions; and placemaking benefits for downtown Middlebury. A drawback is that it is a time intensive program to maintain, requiring ongoing maintenance and updated stories.

3. Take-and-Make Passive Programs. The pandemic caused the library to redirect much of our programming budget to developing Take-and-Make projects for both youth and adults. These are bags that can be picked up at the library and completed at home; bags include an age-appropriate craft and instructions. Youth bags tend to focus on a STEAM theme. Again, after evaluating the program and noting overwhelmingly positive community feedback, the library has decided to continue to offer Take-and-Make bags as part of our regular programming going forward. Benefits include reaching new library users (many caregivers would ask if they could take extra take-and-makes for their neighbors, who didn't regularly visit the library and wouldn't have otherwise seen the bags), and, again, allowing patrons to participate on their own time. A drawback is that these craft bags can be costly to create.

Our patrons have let us know how much they value in-person programming, and we are slowly returning to in-person programming as it allows. The library is the heart of the Middlebury community, and in person programs provide many important benefits which cannot be replicated by digital or passive programs. But we learned during the pandemic that library programs can adapt to meet patrons where they are and can provide cultural enrichment even during periods of great upheaval. We learned that passive programs (site specific programs and take-and-make crafts) play an important role in allowing us to reach patrons that prefer to complete activities on their own, or cannot make it into the library for regularly scheduled programs for any number of reasons. We also learned that we can extend the reach of certain programs by hosting them on a digital platform, allowing patrons to Zoom in remotely. As we move out of the pandemic, Ilsley will rebalance our programming budget to accommodate more passive programs and will utilize remote digital access for programs more frequently.

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Programming at Ilsley Public Library

Ilsley Public Library provides free public programming as one means of fulfilling the library's mission. These programs are one of the library's essential services and significant staff time is devoted to planning and implementation. As such, the following definitions and pillars of programming have been developed to clarify the desired outcomes of library programming and provide librarians with guidelines as they develop programming for the community:

Strong programming is responsive to the needs of our diverse community, supports all of the library's pillars of programming, and furthers the library's mission.

A strong program is one that incorporates at least one pillar of programming, has an intended audience demographic, does not unnecessarily duplicate other programs currently offered in Middlebury, is promoted prior to the program, and is evaluated post-program.

Pillars of Programming

- Increasing knowledge or awareness of a subject

- Teaching a new skill

- Building social or community connections

- Fostering literacy and a joy of reading

- Providing cultural enrichment, recreation, or inspiration

Other definitions:

- A **program** is an intentional service or event in a group setting developed proactively to meet the needs or interests of an anticipated target audience.

- A **library program** is one that is planned and implemented by library staff.

- A **library program with a partner** is one that is planned and implemented by library staff in collaboration with another organization (collaboration can come in the form of staff time, funding, use of non-library spaces, etc).

- A **library sponsored program** is one that is not planned or implemented by library staff, but qualifies as a strong program and receives support from the library in any of the following forms: library spaces beyond what is provided for in the Meeting Room Use Policy; staff support in planning and/or promoting the program; financial support.

- A **non-library program** is one that is not planned or implemented by library staff and does not receive support from the library, but is held in library facilities as per the Meeting Room Use Policy.

- A **passive library program** is a service designed such that patrons may participate individually and without the physical presence of library staff. Passive programs are an important part of Ilsley's overall programming and are tracked internally.

- **Reference** and **technology help** are not developed proactively and are usually conducted in a one-on-one setting. They are important library service but are not considered programs and are such are not included in program statistics.

- **An off-site program** is a library or library-sponsored program held in a location other than Ilsley Public Library or Sarah Partridge Library. Programs might be held off-site for many reasons, including: if the goal of the program is to reach populations who might not otherwise have access to the library; if the program requires equipment or amenities not available in library facilities; if the program attendance is expected to exceed library space.

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