



The Library is Always Open: OC Public Libraries Providing Creative Community Outreach & Engagement During COVID-19

OVERVIEW: Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, OC Public Libraries launched several creative community outreach and engagement efforts as part of modified services due to statewide stay-at-home orders.

CHALLENGE: Stay-at-home orders resulted in immediate closures and a halt to many vital library services that were offered in person. OC Public Libraries (OCPL) had to map out a plan for providing library services with limited resources in the most expeditious way.

SOLUTION: OCPL staff used their creativity and innovation to pivot modifying services to harness outreach and community engagement community. Several committees were formed to immediately address community needs. Staff created digital content and virtual programming including Storytimes, crafting, how-to videos, book discussion groups, cooking & food literacy, health & wellness, teen gaming and other fun activities. Through social media networks, thousands of users were able to engage with staff they would normally see in the branches. eLearning resources were developed to assist with at-home learning. Most of the resources listed do not require a library card and help to facilitate distance learning for any age and in multiple languages. In addition, website content was updated multiple times a day to ensure the most recent information and program offerings are available to the public. OCPL also launched one of the first-ever chat platforms connecting staff to the community during these challenging times.

INNOVATION: OC Public Libraries responded to the immediate need residents have for reading and to raise their personal and academic enrichment efforts for the community. During the COVID-19 pandemic many sought ways to stay connected and active and OC Public Libraries has facilitated this for its library users through creative community outreach and engagement. This enabled the library system to respond to quickly changing stay-at-home orders and modify service and outreach as needed. OCPL staff used their initiative, talents and commitment to provide quality digital content and virtual programming that can be

shared not only with Orange County residents, but people from around the world. The creation of digital content elevated access to programming by enabling library users to have continued access to library services, as well as repeated interaction aiding in child development and literacy skill-building. The compilation of eLearning resources and consistent communication efforts offers a long-term response to families and individuals who will be working from home and seeking access to information on a daily basis. OCPL's COVID-19 response has served as the blueprint for innovation and improvisation in the library field. Using what we have learned during this time, we will continue to expand our offerings.

RESULTS: Since March 20, OC Public Libraries has seen numbers rise exponentially due to high engagement with the community. Facebook engagement surpassed 17,000, Instagram over 18,000 and Twitter has seen over 485 engagements. Staff has completed over 200 virtual program offerings, which have been enjoyed over 4,100 times. OCPL's virtual Summer Reading Program had 2,392 participants registered which is more virtual participation than during our usual summer program. Finally, OCPL has welcomed over 4,572 visitors to our eLearning site and checked out over 268,000 library materials through curbside visits across all 32 public branches.

REPLICABILITY: By identifying the needs of the community and using the talents of staff, organizations can engage their users in enhanced ways even through a pandemic. A set of best practices should be provided to all staff responsible for creating digital content and branding, so system-wide messaging is consistent. Something else to consider is the development of enhanced communication and outreach in areas such as eLearning or resources pages and leading charges such as a library chat platform. For OC Public Libraries, though the library doors may be closed, our "Library is always open".

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OPTIONAL SUBMISSION: [OCPL Virtual Programming](#); [OCPL eLearning](#); [Enhanced communication and Library Chat](#)