

Bringing Authors To Your Library: A Step-By-Step Guide

by Aquila Cheaney

Libraries inspire, connecting readers with the men and women who create books through a long process. As authors draw upon extensive historical or scientific research, experiences from real life, and the evolution of their ideas and characters, they offer readers a deeper understanding and appreciation of a variety of topics. Inviting an author to an event at your library can add a whole new level of depth to the connection between reader and author, especially for younger readers. There are many steps and decisions to be made to get an author to visit your library, and it's important to know those steps to make the most out of the experience and hopefully to do so with minimal expense.

Basics

The first thing to consider is who to invite. There are many factors that go into this decision, including where the author lives, the cost of the visit, what books are highlighted by your programs, and the interest of the library's patrons. There is a helpful list of authors by state who are open to visits, available at <http://authorbystate.blogspot.com>, hosted by Virginia author Kim Norman.

Since cost will likely be a primary consideration, you will want to look at not only which author's rates fall within your budget, but also how much you will be expected to pay for travel expenses.

Once you have an author you want to invite, the next step is to contact them. In the not-so-distant past, you would normally contact an author through their publisher, and for some this is still the case. However, almost all authors now have websites, which will include contact information (either for them personally or for their book-

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ing agent), and this is usually an easier way to arrange a visit.

Once you've contacted the author or her booking agent, you'll need to work out a date, a schedule, and exactly what will be expected from the author. There are many options, and the best plan will be compatible with your patrons' interests, the format of your programs, and size of the space available at your library. Commonly, authors are invited to make a single presentation, hold a question and answer session, lead a book club discussion, autograph books, have a meal with a group, or some combination of these. It's important to schedule in time for breaks if your library guest's visit is a long one or if there are many events during her visit.

Preparation

Getting an author to come to the library can sometimes be challenging, but there's far more to be done to make sure patrons can get the most out of an author visit. The real key to a successful author visit is preparation. Depending on what sort of events will occur during the visit, preparation can require a lot of work. Here are some suggestions to help prepare you for your author's visit:

1. Read the author's books. This one may seem obvious, but it's worth mentioning because it's the most important one. It's very likely that the author will be speaking about their books in some way even if it's not the main point of their presentation, so everyone who can possibly read the book should do so. You may need to order (or borrow through Interlibrary loan) more books to meet the demand, so be sure to leave time for extra copies to arrive.

Aquila Cheaney is a woman of diverse experiences, having been an aircraft mechanic (she holds a B.S. in Aviation Technology), a college tutor, a professional dancer, an Aerospace Engineering student, and a mom. Her mother (award-winning children's author J. B. Cheaney) encouraged Aquila in her lifelong love of children's literature to start her own booking agency for children's book authors, Storyworks Presentations (<http://www.storyworkspresentations.com>).

2. Promote, promote, promote! Put up signs and banners, pass out fliers or brochures, talk to patrons about the event, put an ad in the local paper. However you can, generate some interest! A large turnout will help to get the most out of the visit.

3. Tailor activities relating to the author's books. This is especially helpful for school visits, as there's nothing like a hands-on activity to get students into the world of books. However, public libraries can do this too. For example, when a book club in Rhode Island decided to invite children's author J. B. Cheaney to talk about her latest book, they created their own versions of the chapter headings of her book, which were from a fictional self-help book. They wrote their own motivational sayings and even illustrated them.

4. Enjoy the day! Once the day of the event arrives, do your best to enjoy the fruits of your labor.

Funding

Now that we've covered the basics of how to orchestrate an author visit, we come to everybody's favorite topic: money. You may be thinking that an author visit sounds like a great way to enhance your patrons' reading experiences and broaden their horizons, but how can your library afford it?

Unless their name is J. K. Rowling, most authors are not wealthy and charge for visits in order to remain solvent and continue writing. While it is true that some authors will do visits for free, most of the time this means that the author is relatively new, unknown, or local. This doesn't mean that they're not worth inviting, but many authors will not fall into this category.

However, there's still the chance to get an established and admired author to come visit your library for free. But you might also consider finding outside funding for

the visit. Here are some options worth exploring to help fund an author visit:

1. Government and private grants. This is fairly obvious, but it is well worth exploring. If you can get a few hundred or even thousand dollars for your library just by writing about your need, this is a very worthwhile endeavor. A few websites to get you started include:

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/administrators_grants.mhtml
<http://www.vla.org/?tag=grants>
<http://www.schoolgrants.org>
<http://fdncenter.org>
<http://www.oklahomachildrensauthors.com/needgrantsorfunding.html>

**... your success rate
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An important point to keep in mind is that grants take a long time to process. You will need to start this process far in advance, as the funding from a grant might take up to a year to arrive after applying.

Another unique funding source is available at <http://www.donorschoose.org>. On this website, you can enter how much money you need and what you need it for, and donors can choose whom they want to support and how much to give. This can be a successful venture if you market your cause effectively to groups such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), local reading associations, local companies and businesses, and even your patrons or the parents of your students. As with so many

other things, your success rate will likely be proportional to the amount of work you put into it.

2. Internal fundraising. This is usually the most labor-intensive option, and may be the least attractive for that reason, but it can also be really fun. It's a great way to build relationships among your community. Your library is likely already involved in fundraising and would have a structured system for giving in place. Resources abound for the library looking to organize things from the ground up. Here are a few to get you started:

<http://www.fundraising-ideas.org/DIY>
<http://www.fasttrackfundraising.com>
<http://www.fundraiserinsight.org/ideas>
<http://www.easy-fundraising-ideas.com>

If you are only able to afford a portion of the author's visit expenses, internal fundraising is a good option for making up the difference.

3. Virtual visits. This option is still relatively new, and not all authors are prepared for or are comfortable with virtual visits via Skype or a similar service. If your library already has the equipment and if your budget will not allow for a live visit, ask the author if they do virtual visits. You can find a list of "Skyping" authors at <http://skypeanauthor.wetpaint.com>.

The biggest advantage to a virtual visit is cost: there are no expenses or travel time to be accounted for, and the visit only takes an hour or two of the author's time. There doesn't appear to be much of a set standard yet in what authors will charge for virtual visits, but you can probably

expect to pay between \$100–\$500. The whole point of an author visit is to get the author and the readers together in a synergistic, real-life learning experience. This can be accomplished via technology, even though the experience is much richer in real life.

Stretching Dollars

Finally, here are a few ideas for saving a little money here and there:

1. Hotel cost. If an author is traveling a significant distance, they will need to spend the night somewhere, and you might be able to eliminate the hotel expense in one of two ways. The first is that you could ask area hotels to donate a room for the author. The other

way is to bypass a hotel cost by having the author stay at the home of somebody local. This can be a sensitive matter; make sure the author is assured privacy and that all parties are clear on the arrangements in advance.

2. Invite in your area. If an author is going to be in your area anyway, that is the time to ask them to visit. If they're already close by, you'll likely get a huge break on travel expenses. If you hear that an author from out of state will be in Virginia because they're visiting a friend or relative, presenting at a conference, or speaking at another school, it's worth your while to ask them to come to your library.

3. Multiple visits. One more tip for an author coming from a

distance: if the author can visit several libraries in one trip, the libraries can split the author's traveling expenses between them, which means the cost per library will be reduced.

Now that you know how to do it, who would you like to invite to your library? The author of that brilliant book you couldn't put down, or that great children's author whose books are always checked out (or will be after they visit)? Don't be intimidated by the process or the money—if you're ready to provide an expanding, dynamic, literary experience for yourself and your patrons, you *can* make it happen! **VI**