

ARRT Book Club Study
April 27, 2021
Virtual Meeting
Leadership Topic
Led by Margita Lidaka
Notes taken by Elizabeth Hopkins
12 participants

Everything I Learned about Book Clubs during a Pandemic: A Reflection After the One Year Anniversary. We'll share strategies we developed during Covid, to draw people in and keep them engaged, and discuss what we will keep moving forward and what didn't work for us.

How do you feel after being in this for one year (virtual programming)?

- Crappy! It still sucks. I'm only talking about book clubs. It's still so much harder to facilitate when you can't read visual cues. You miss that two folks can have a quiet side conversation. You lose a lot of dynamics. But I can live with this.
- Zoom fatigue is a real thing. In a public setting, the numbers have dropped off. But in my social groups, we're so busy chatting that we don't always get to the book.
- The worst part is we don't have really good snacks anymore.
- I let my group go off topic way more than they normally would.
- I started in January, I've only ever done virtual book clubs.
- Every single time my group asks when we can be in person again.
- I used to facilitate at a senior facility...and most of our seniors can't access Zoom comfortably. So I drop off books and discussion questions at the facility now. So I don't get that feedback.

The selection of books...

- The content itself has evolved as well. Folks don't want to delve into the emotional weight of some titles right now, more escapism. The focus has shifted to something where people can just get together and chat.

When do you get a big turnout?

- Author events.
- Marijuana themed programming had HUGE attendance

People have been looking for ANYTHING to watch during the pandemic. It's a trend where if it's in front of them they'll watch, rather than needing to be present at a certain time.

- We have one patron who signs up for every single program and never shows up. So I guess her thing to do is just to sign up for programming.

-Earlier into the lockdown people were showing up to anything we had. Now that they're more hopeful, they are not showing up as much.

On virtual book club attendance...

-Register with us and we will mail you a copy of the paperback book (summer 2020). When we stopped sending out the books, all the new people disappeared! But they did show up for the discussion.

-When it's put in front of them, they participate. But if they have to actually make an effort to get the book, it feels like too much.

What would you keep?

-To have the Zoom option if the weather is bad.

-I think I'm going to have a hybrid of in person and Zoom at the same time.

Awkward moments-

-A higher up staff member was managing the program. They let everyone in the waiting room before we were ready so they heard us doing our "mic check"

-I've just pretended my screen froze during an awkward pause.

Book club in a bar concept (virtual)

-One participant shows off his craft beer before we begin. On one hand, it's great. Let's all share what we're drinking. But what if someone is 18...you just have to tell them to hang out for a minute.

-You can put in a disclaimer saying if you attend you're 21, etc.

Anyone have a Zoom troll?

-I got Zoom bombed during book discussion. I somehow missed enabling a waiting room. My senior center group. I didn't yet know you could lock the meeting so no one else can join.

-3 years ago I hosted an author during a discussion via Skype. There were so many terrible tech issues she just had to go. But now in the future Zoom is a nice option to have authors visit.

Is it harder to introduce new people to your group virtually?

-In this pandemic world...no one knows what to do so they're willing to try it and see what happens.

Success stories?

-Our online adult programs get 50-100 people. It's a set schedule. Monday nights are programs, Tuesdays nights are crafts. We get speakers who already have a following. Think- Leslie Goddard.

-Writing workshops with author speakers. Pretty popular in person. SO successful virtually, I just want to keep it that way. Plus the authors charge less because there's no commute.

-Take and make kits with adults. Super popular, registration always fills.

Any talks of doing and in person event?

-We just started talking about the fall.

-Limited outside programs.

What tip you would have given your past self this time last year?

-Make sure YOU'RE unmuted

-Just get used to it

-Settle in for the long haul.