

Cityread London



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Background

Cityread London is an annual month-long celebration of reading in the capital during the month of April. It promotes reading for pleasure and develops community cohesion through shared literary and performance events based on one London-focused book which Cityread London encourages as many people across the city to read as possible.

Cityread is the only programme in which all 33 London library services participate

Objectives

- To raise the profile of libraries in the media
- To promote library events and services
- To 'bring reading to life', fostering a love of literature and reading for pleasure
- To develop partnerships between libraries and other cultural, commercial, academic and heritage organisations
- To act as a 'gateway' for library audiences to other cultural and heritage organisations
- To build community cohesion
- To explore and celebrate London's heritage and history

Target audience

Cityread London represents culture for all, with all 33 of London's library services delivering a programme of reading, children's and local history events. Cityread programmes include events aimed at emergent readers, readers for whom English is not a first language, and children and young people. We aim to make great literature accessible for all Londoners, including – and especially – those who think it's not for them. Within our strategy for mass engagement, Cityread's library partners have targeted audiences such as prisoners, ESOL groups and teenage parents. We have also worked with the Asian Libraries and Advisors Group (ALAG) to deliver reading groups in a number of community languages.

In 2014, for the first time, we will be working with primary school groups in fourteen boroughs, connecting them to their libraries and local history archives through a letter exchange programme. We're looking forward to building a partnership with Quickreads in 2014 which will enable us to work with even more Londoners who do not currently read for pleasure.

Process

Each Cityread programme takes approximately 18 months to plan, from signing-up all 33 London library services individually, to finalising the evaluation. A rough timeline looks something like this:

Year 1

- Jan: On-board library services; invite publishers to nominate Cityread book
- Mar: select book
- Apr/May/Jun: write funding applications
- Jun/Jul/Aug: Project director identifies and approaches partners, and drafts programme
- Sep: Work with libraries to set their local programmes; book and print orders
- Dec: Marketing training day for Cityread library partners; announce title

Year 2

- Jan: Cityread website relaunch
- Feb: Library partners meeting
- Mar: Cityread 3 month Young Writer's residency begins; marketing and PR activity begins
- April: Cityread launches, programme runs for duration of the month
- May/Jun: Collection and collation of evaluation data, and report writing.

Outcomes

Cityread 2014 will:

- Work in partnership with all 33 London Library services
- Deliver a programme of more than 700 events during April 2014
- Involve over 300 library book groups in reading and discussion
- Engage audiences and participants of at least 25,000 throughout the campaign
- Create Cityread exhibition display panels for each service's central library, the combined footfall of which is approximately 3.75 million in the duration of the campaign (CIPFA)
- Generate approximately £500,000 in cash and in-kind support from funders, sponsors and project partners
- Engage over 500 Year 6 pupils in local history through the Cityread letter exchange project
- Create opportunities for 150 children aged 8-12 to participate in comic book workshops
- Work with ALAG to programme approximately ten Cityread book groups for Asian language speakers
- Be extensively marketed through print, social media, and comms channels across over 300 London libraries, Waterstone's across Greater London region, selected Foyles Bookshops, and via other Cityread partners' networks.

Key point for effective practice

The overall project budget for 2014 is approximately £500,000, consisting of a combination of cash and in-kind support from funders, partners and sponsors. Each library service contributes £400 to £550 to participate.

The risks are almost entirely concerned with financing the campaign. The project director undertakes a vast amount of unpaid research work for each programme, to get the planning to the necessary stage needed for funding applications. We are constantly juggling resources.

As a relatively new festival, against a backdrop of thousands of other literary goings-on in the capital, we have to work really hard to secure our media coverage. We are incredibly fortunate to work with award-winning Riot Communications to deliver our PR strategy – they rock!

We are also fortunate to work with amazing evaluators, Melita Armitage and Michele Taylor. They have really helped us to understand what's worked over the last two years, to demonstrate the value of Cityread, and have been invaluable in shaping the campaign going forward.

Sharing and participation are obviously central to Cityread programmes, and we like to think that these sentiments guide the project management too. We play nicely with our partners and stakeholders, share our audiences, contacts and resources, and acknowledge that we couldn't do half of what we do without the masses of in-kind support and good will generated by the people we work with.

The steering group, freelancers, seconded staff, volunteers and paid interns who work on Cityread are passionate and engaged advocates for reading and literature. They are encouraged to use their initiative and creativity, to take risks, and generally get stuck in. Which they amaze me by doing every time!

Conclusions and recommendations

Going into Cityread London's third year, we seem to be finally finding our stride. Timeframe and planning have always been tricky, but this year we've pulled loads of programming and marketing deadlines forward so – touch wood – February won't be 'the dark month' (as my husband calls it) that it has been in the past.

Looking ahead, we're starting to shape the parameters of the 2015 programme at the moment. We'll be revisiting our audience development strategy, and potentially looking to engage a completely new audience through new partnerships with organisations such as Transport for London. We plan to invest more in project evaluation, and devote more time to generating income to cover core costs to support staff to deliver the campaign more effectively year-round.

My main recommendation I guess would be to keep following up all the leads with all the potential partners, meet for coffee, meet for wine, keep having the 'what if?' conversations, even if most of them never become realised, be creative, stay focused, have fun.

Additional information

www.cityreadlondon.org.uk

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