

Out On The Shelf Evaluation Report Summary

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Background

This project was prepared for, and in partnership with, Out On The Shelf (OOTS), a queer library and resource centre in Guelph, Ontario. As a volunteer-driven, registered non-profit organization, OOTS was keen to assess its programming and processes to inform improvements and to secure future funding. Therefore, the goals for this evaluation project, established in partnership with OOTS, were to evaluate:

1. Current OOTS programming including:
 - Program attendance
 - Program accessibility and impact
 - Current user demographics (i.e. program reach), experiences, and satisfaction
2. Current OOTS Board and volunteer process including:
 - Accessibility of getting and remaining involved
 - Structure and functioning
 - Training needs and skill development
 - Role and task clarity
 - Burn-out

Methods

Project evaluation activities were carried out from October 2019 to February 2020 and were comprised of:

- OOTS Program Participant Attendance Tracking, completed by program facilitators to highlight program usage.
- An OOTS Program Participant Survey and eSurvey to understand OOTS program participants and their perceptions and usage of programming.
 - This survey was offered in hard copy paper format as well as electronically through the online Qualtrics survey platform.
 - A total of 29 survey responses were collected.
- A “Graffiti Wall” in the form of a whiteboard affixed in the OOTS space in 10C to provide a place for program users to record testimonials.
- An OOTS Board Member and an OOTS Volunteer focus group to explore the current experience of being involved with OOTS.
 - A total of seven people participated in the Board Member focus group and a total of six people participated in the Volunteer focus group.

Key Considerations

Welcoming and Inclusive Atmosphere

- Continue to cultivate a welcoming and inclusive environment, as this is something OOTS members greatly value.
- Take concerns regarding inclusivity of older members into consideration in order to further foster OOTS’ welcoming atmosphere.

Role and Task Clarity

- Create a document that clearly describes and defines each Board member’s role and the tasks that accompany it.
- Restructure and update library volunteer instructions so that they are clear and outline what volunteer tasks entail, especially for new volunteers.
- Delegate more Board member tasks to library volunteers who feel like they do not have enough tasks. Such delegation would also help to reduce the high task-load that the Board members are currently experiencing.



Transition Periods

- Implement shadow periods during which new and old Board members overlap to allow for orientation to a position and to support this knowledge transition.
- Assign each Board member as a back-up for one other Board member as a mechanism for providing coverage if, for instance, another member falls sick or leaves abruptly requiring coverage for a longer period of time.

Volunteer Engagement

- Prioritize coverage of the Volunteer Chair position in order to ensure ongoing attraction and retention of volunteers
- Organize more frequent volunteer events to foster a feeling of cohesion.
- Pair up volunteers during their shifts to further support volunteer connections and belonging.
- Provide written training materials to help build capacity among volunteers.
- Create opportunities for volunteers to be more involved (e.g., supporting OOTS's social media presence or helping with Board members' tasks) to help cultivate a sense of purpose and thereby engagement. This may help to prevent high volunteer turnover in the future.

Training and Development

- Provide OOTS Board members and volunteers with first aid and mental health training in order to create a safer environment, which may also support participants in attending OOTS programs.

Financial Barriers

- Organize low- and no-cost events (e.g., the previous queer movie night cost less than one dollar for the movie rental).
- Create a Community Liaison Chair that could build lasting connections within the community for the purposes of collaboration, cost-sharing, and funding opportunities.

Communication

- Create and distribute documents that list each Board member's role and responsibilities to help volunteers identify and contact the appropriate Board member when needed. This might also improve the transparency of decision making and create a more inclusive dialogue.
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Timing of Programs

- Consult participants about the timing of programs in order to better suit their needs and to ensure the time of program leads and volunteers is being maximized.

Accessibility

- Consider accessibility for all unique abilities when thinking about the OOTS space and planning events and programs. Taking such disabilities into account will also help maintaining the inclusive and welcoming atmosphere for which OOTS is known.

Library

- Add audio books and/or streaming services to the library.
- Ensure regular library volunteer staffing to support engagement with library visitors.

Conclusion

In order to continue to support its mission and the community it serves, it is important that OOTS prioritize the improvement of volunteer processes and engagement as well as Board member task management and succession planning. Further, consideration should be given to cost, accessibility, and timing of programs and events in order to ensure feasibility and reach to all potential program participants. Overall, OOTS is much more than a queer library and resource centre in Guelph. OOTS is recognized as an inclusive space where folks feel welcome and comfortable expressing themselves and their ideas.

