**The Future of Patron Engagement: A Next Gen Discussion Forum
Wednesday, May 8, 2019
10:30 AM
Session P01
Forum Recorder: Shawn P. Farrell**

Continuing a series of more interactive sessions, the session on patron engagement, led by two III staff members, was in part a preview of what’s to come with Innovative’s new Inspire discovery platform & subsequent products, & an opportunity for attendees to share feedback on another new product with some real world examples from our libraries.

Prior to the start of the session, we were told that we would be seeing samples from Inspire that hadn’t yet been shared with conference attendees, so perhaps this session was as close as IUG2019 got to *Endgame* level spoilers. Toni Minnick, Senior Director of Product Management for the Inspire platform & Bette Ha, a Product Owner for their new showcases framework & staff interface for Inspire’s platform to manage programs & events.

The session began with Toni Minnick offering an introduction on engagement & the key pieces of engaging our communities. That was followed by an example of an event, meant to inspire us with what we can do with managing an event & what III referred to as more brainstorms than concepts, as they’re still very early in the development process to solicit our opinion on the next generation of tools they’re building.

Obviously, for anyone who attended this year’s IUG, the promotion of Inspire seemed very much on the mind of III staff & there was no small amount of overlap between sessions. The library can be the start of a transformational movement in communities, igniting change, economic development, & bring people together, to communicate & collaborate with each other, community leaders, businesses, & organizations.

4 areas of engagement were cited:

Lifelong Learning

Economic Development

Health

The Environment

Further, 5 tenants of engagement were discussed:

The community needs to know about you – they need to be aware of your programs, so how do you promote them & where people can find you? You want to make it engaging & fun, so there’s interest there for the people attending. You want the experience to be a win/win – for the attendees & for the library itself. And you want to follow up, so people remain engaged in what’s happening at the library. Lastly, you want to repeat & grow, to increase participation in events moving forward.

To support awareness, there are a number of ways – through your discovery layer, social media, community advertising, & partnerships within the community. You want to create engaging events that are hands on, so there’s movement. You want to offer something topical, something that deals with current events. Make them educational or surprising – something that attendees wouldn’t have expected, so they get a little something extra out of it. Engage local experts – your staff doesn’t have to do everything. Use volunteers, who might bring their families, offering even more exposure. To make it a win/win, consider something that allows you to expose a part of your collection guests didn’t know you have, or to promote new resources, services or partnerships. Advocate for funding/fundraising & invite community leaders. And follow-up – don’t let the event itself be the last word. Showcase what you talked about, whether it’s a resource or export. Socialize through Facebook & Instagram & highlight additional related resources you have. Ask for feedback & promote the event to other organizations. Hold a part two (or three) to your event, to repeat & grow.

Next, Bette Ha led us through the concept of planning an event. She noted that the staff framework for planning programs & events is being approached by III as an holistic experience. They understand the frustration of having to use 5 different tools to successfully manage an event.

Planning the event, we first needed a theme. The example offered was spring & a spring gardening event. We then needed a title & means to promote it. A common element of a Customer Relationship Management tool (CRM) is that they provide e-mail templates, so we can automatically populate various fields with data stored in the system. Again, Bette is one of the product owners currently working on showcases, so she suggested creating a showcase specific to your event (titles, items, materials & equipment, etc. – such as a gardening kit). We walked through the process of reserving equipment, a room, speaker, volunteers & other logistical considerations.

This was followed by the sneak peek at what III is currently working on – the framework of the staff UI for event management, which should be available in the slideshow shared by III on the Supportal. Then came the interactive portion of the session, where we broke into groups of 3 or 4 people & offered feedback on their current framework using both what we saw previewed & real-world examples from our own libraries. This may not have worked as well as III had hoped, because the majority of us in the room worked behind the scenes & were not as involved with program planning. Still, there were a number of suggestions made that should prove helpful as their product continues to evolve. Some of what was suggested was a need for room amenities, reporting & analytics & booking not just rooms, but staff to set them up/break them down.