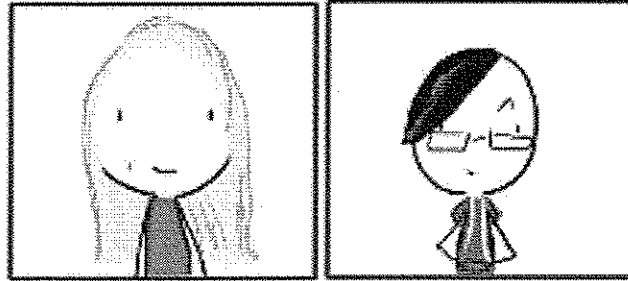


How to Organize an Anti-Prom



By Maria Bartlett and Elliott Gish

Program Objectives: This program aims to provide an inclusive space where all teens are welcome and supported. It offers graduating high school students a safe, free alternative to their school's prom activities and celebrates their collective achievements.

Description: Many teens feel unwelcome at conventional proms due to their sexual orientation, gender expression, or aesthetic. Many others cannot afford to attend, or are homeschooled and therefore ineligible. Some simply find proms to be boring. As an alternative to the traditional tuxes and taffeta, some libraries have begun to hold **anti-proms**—events that offer graduating students the celebratory atmosphere, without the restrictions of a formal prom. Teens are encouraged to wear whatever attire they want, from mohawks to ball gowns. (Combinations thereof are also welcome!) Proms are often places where teens fear to be themselves, but at anti-prom they are encouraged to be whoever they are without fear of

judgement or retribution. Since this is for students only, teens should remember to bring their student IDs!

Activity Ideas: Because an anti-prom is meant to provide teens with an alternative to a conventional prom, the usual dinner-and-dancing programme need not apply. Some anti-proms have included video games and board games, or a separate room for showing movies. Having a photo booth or designated photo space with a volunteer photographer is another popular feature of anti-proms. Dance-offs and prize raffles are also common. Some anti-proms have themes, such as “the eighties” or “anime.” The sky's the limit! The most important thing to keep in mind for activities is that an anti-prom should be planned by and for teens. Ask your patrons what activities they would like to see and act accordingly. (A suggestion box could be helpful for this.) Food and music should be provided.

Venue: The library could be a perfect venue for an anti-prom, depending on attendance.

The prom could be held after hours so regular patrons of the library will not interfere with or be disturbed by the celebration. If it is not possible to have the dance in the library, speak to facilities managers in your community (think community centres, schools, or even a public park) to find an alternative venue.

Music: One of the issues that many teens have with conventional proms is the music. An anti-prom provides an excellent opportunity to play music that may not be in the Top 40, such as heavy metal, punk, and indie. Put the word out to teens who use the library—many teens have experience DJing, and it could be possible to obtain a volunteer! There are also many applications that can be used to create a playlist for your anti-prom, such as Grooveshark, 8tracks, and Rdio. If you go this route in lieu of a DJ, remember to ask your patrons what they would like to hear. A good way to do this would be to post a sheet in the teen section of the library titled “Songs for Anti-Prom” and encourage teens to write in their suggestions!

Decorations: As with all other aspects of anti-prom, this should be teen-led. Ask your patrons what they would like their anti-prom to look like. It may be a traditional “prommy” look (streamers, balloons), something a little edgier, or even a theme!

Food: Instead of the formal dinner that usually occurs at conventional proms, anti-proms should have snacklike foods that are

easy to eat and do not require teens to sit for long periods of time. Cheese and crackers, chips and dip, candies, and soda are all suitable for this kind of low-key program. Depending on your budget, delivery pizzas could be a fun addition to your anti-prom.

Volunteers: Many libraries that host anti-proms are able to do so using their teen volunteer base. However, depending on how involved your program is, you may need to expand. Try posting recruiting messages on your community billboards, selecting adult volunteers, or asking the parents of anti-prom attendees to help set up and chaperone. An anti-prom can be a big venture, so don’t be afraid to ask for help!

Partnerships: In order to keep anti-prom free for patrons, it may be necessary to partner with outside organizations. Put together a squad of volunteers who can ask local businesses and institutions from the community to donate food, decorations, or other materials. Asking for donations from local business as prizes is an excellent way to build relationships with members of the community.

Proposed Publicity: Social media and the library website are two excellent ways to advertise anti-prom to teens. Tweeting and creating a Facebook event page, as well as posting on the library homepage, could draw in attendees. If the budget allows, purchasing advertisement space on the radio or elsewhere could be helpful.