

PROGRAM TITLE: Laser Tag in the Library

BRIEF PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: Play a game of laser tag inside the library after hours with the lights off. The bookcases provide natural obstacles to hide behind and sneak around.

MATERIALS NEEDED: Laser Tag Guns, Poster Paper, Screwdriver, Other Amusement (Wii, board games, snacks, a craft like LED throwies, etc.)

COST: \$240. Could be more or less depending on what kind and how many laser tag guns you rent. I rented 16 of the simple Nerf Phoenix LTX guns at a cost of \$12.50/gun, plus the cost of shipping (about \$40). We had 41 teens at the program and each teen was able to play 3 games (9 games total on the night). That's \$5.81 per teen, \$26.67 per game (up to 16 people), and \$1.95 per teen per game.

PROGRAM PROCEDURE:

We required registration for this program, and our trustees asked us to also require a Liability Release signed by the teen and the parent. Every time we registered someone in person we got a signed release from the parent right away. If the teen was in without a parent we sent them home with the form. We received 15 forms in advance. The rest signed the form with their parents when they were dropped off or brought the signed form with them to the event. We had several volunteer chaperones in attendance to help police the rules:

Rule 1: No Running. We were concerned about collisions around corners. We did not have any collisions, and we were able to keep their speed down by penalizing them. If caught running by a chaperone, their gun was forfeited and they were out for that round. They were able to play again in the next round for their team. Constant friendly reminders from the chaperones, "Keep your speed down," helped a lot. After the first couple teens were caught, we had few issues.

Rule 2: No contact. Any pushing, tripping, or other forms of destructive or poor behavior were blanketed under this zero tolerance policy. We made it very clear that after the first offense you would have to call for a ride and leave the program. There were no incidents.

Rule 3: Staff areas are off limits. There was no penalty for this, but we asked them to stay out from behind the reference and circulation desks and asked the chaperones to shoo them as necessary.

Rule 4: Don't move the books. We didn't announce this rule to the teens because we didn't want to give them the idea. The chaperones were instructed to stop teens they observed doing this. The teens didn't even think of it, but it was a concern.

Rule 5: I instituted a HOLD call for safety. When HOLD is called everyone immediately is to stop doing what they're doing, freeze in place, and also call HOLD. Anyone can call HOLD. HOLD represents a potentially dangerous situation such as: someone tripped, someone lost their glasses, etc. After the situation is resolved, we would call GAME ON to resume play. Both the chaperones and the teens were instructed in HOLD calls. We only had to make 1 HOLD call all night for an excessive runner/jumper to be taken out of the game. In the next game he was much better behaved.

We set up a registration table at the front entrance of the library at 8:40. During this time we also set up our community room as a game space with board games and a Wii (Super Smash Bros. and

Mario Kart). We flipped our public computer monitors down, since they're in the main library and there was a concern they might accidentally get bumped. At 9PM we closed the library like normal and kicked everyone out, including Laser Tag attendees.

At this time I instructed the chaperones in the use of the laser tag guns, and in the rules they were to enforce. We had 3 staff members and 6 chaperones, plus our Director, who left early. We then brought the teens in, checking them off the registration list as they entered—no registration or no waiver, no entry. This went smoothly.

At this time I gathered them in the lobby and went over the rules with the teens. We had a poster on hand with the rules written on it, and after I explained the rules verbally, we had them sign the poster to acknowledge that they understood them. We funneled them into the community room as they signed the poster and asked them to stand with the friends they wanted to play with. I took a moment to explain how the laser tag guns worked, and then we started sending them back into the lobby in small groups where staff divided them into teams. This gave us 6 small groups in the lobby of 6-8 people each (before each match we would shuffle 1-2 teens as necessary to even the teams).

Once they formed their teams I gave them a couple minutes to discuss what they would call their teams. The names they came up with were: The Avengers, Team Awesome, Ravens, Delta Squad, White Sharks, & Warriors. I wrote these down. Then I called two of the teams to stay in the lobby and sent the rest back into the community room to wait. I put 2 staff members in the community room to start, since I needed as many chaperones as possible to patrol the whole library, but after the first game we realized the space was too big and closed the children's room. I sent 2 of my chaperones into the community room to help support the staff in there. That's the set-up we went with for the rest of the night: 5 chaperones (including me calling the games) on the main floor for laser tag and 4 in the community room. I rotated chaperones every couple games so that those inside would get a chance to watch the laser tag games as well and those outside could sit down for a bit, making sure that there was always at least 1 staff member in the community room for summer reading sign ups.

With 16 laser tag guns the game was played with two teams of 6-8 members. The guns had solo, team 1, and team 2 settings, so members of the same team couldn't shoot one another. I kept track of which team won solely so I could match winning teams against each other for a more fair game. The last game played by every team was a solo match rather than a team match—it was a total free-for-all and they loved it. They really liked having teams, but they also liked being able to switch it up at the end, form alliances, and sometimes backstab one another by shooting their friends.

OUTSIDE PRESENTER CONTACT & INFORMATION:

There was no presenter. We rented the laser guns through Laser Tag Source (<http://lasertagsource.com/>). Their website is not the best, especially as it doesn't make the per gun cost clear, but they were responsive to phone calls. They do prefer that bookings are made through their website and they accept credit cards or mailed checks. They're based in Virginia and charge a flat rate for shipping to different regions. The shipping cost is around \$40 and includes shipping from them to you and then back to them. The box they send comes with the laser guns you ordered in gel pack cases, a packing list, a bag of replacement batteries, and a return shipping label. They ship the guns so that they arrive the day before or the day of the event, then you slap on the return label and send them back the next day. Easy and painless—they even shipped early for my event to account for the extra shipping time due to the 4th of July holiday.

USEFUL PLANNING RESOURCES

See above.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MARKETING THIS PROGRAM:

This program almost markets itself. I put a poster up at the front of the library, had an announcement put up during the last week of school at the middle school, and informed all my regular high school program attendees. I wasn't able to get an announcement at the high school due to finals. Even though this program was a late addition to my schedule, I hit my maximum number of registrants (48) the day of the program after only a week and a half of it being announced.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

(Include duration of program, suggested number of participants)

Program duration: 2 hours. We ran it from 9PM-11PM after the library closed at 9PM. Next time I would give a 30 minute buffer between library closing and program start. We had a band event prior to Laser Tag, so between the breakdown for that and the early arrivals for laser tag it was a little bit of a mess to start. I also should have accounted better for the time it took to go over the rules and split them up into teams. We didn't actually start playing Laser Tag until 9:20PM. Between 9:20PM and 11:00PM every teen was able to play in 3 games. I eyeballed a 10 minute timer, but in reality the games were 7-12 minutes long so that I could make sure everyone got to play in the same number of games. Most of them were ended by the timer rather than the total defeat of one team or the other.

Participants: I set the registration cap at 48. I chose this number because it was a multiple of 8 and because I intended to have 16 teens in the main library playing laser tag while the rest were in the community room waiting. To amuse the waiting teams we set up a Wii and board games, and I set up a table for a staff member to register them for summer reading. This netted me 13 new registrants the night of the program, and several more besides. After registration errors and no shows, we had 41 in attendance at the program and all but 7 were signed up for summer reading by the end of the night. Many signed up for summer reading when they came to the library to register for laser tag in advance.

Your maximum number of participants will depend a lot on the space you have in your library. We found that the main room in our library was appropriately sized for the 16 players we had going at any one time. We originally tried to use the children's room and the main room, but the space was just too large. The teams took a long time to come into contact. We were able to adjust quickly by closing the children's room doors. We also used our community meeting room for the teams that were waiting. The room has a capacity of 60, so with a maximum cap of 48 we figured we'd only ever have 32 in the room at a time—plenty of space for tables with board games and teens playing the Wii. With a larger meeting room, or multiple meeting rooms to amuse waiting teams the maximum number of participants could be higher. One of the libraries I spoke to had 50 in attendance, and another library I spoke to had 75. Whatever limits you set, you can probably expect the maximum to be reached.

Other Concerns: We did have a couple of the laser guns lose battery. The company we rented from does send a bag of batteries, and each gun is already loaded with batteries. Each Nerf LTX gun takes 6 AA to work and you can only open the battery case with a screwdriver. Keep one on hand just in case. Even better, order a couple more guns than you need for a quick swap out. That's what we did since few of our teams were at the maximum of 8 members. We also had a couple small faults with the equipment. We had one gun that malfunctioned but then started working again

randomly. A second gun had a sticky reload button. There wasn't much we could do about this, but for the most part they worked just fine. They shot best in about a 10 foot range indoors, but could hit at up to 25-30 feet. Our building is particularly good at blocking signals, so it's a pretty good worst case scenario as far as the range is concerned. The IR beams did bounce a lot off the walls due to how many shots were being fired, so we had some early complaints from teens that they were getting hit around corners. We made sure the guns were set to indoor, which helped, and suggested to teens that they use the shield button on the gun. When holding the shield button you can't shoot, but you also can't get shot. This improved the games dramatically.

Other comments: We were worried with the popularity of games like Call of Duty that language would be a problem, but in fact the opposite was the case. The worst language we had was before one of the early rounds when one of the tweens held up his laser gun and said, "This shiz is going down," in just about the most serious voice you've ever heard. The teens had a blast, the volunteers and staff had a blast, and I can't count the number of times I was asked when we were going to do laser tag again. If you can afford it and manage it properly, this program is an instant success.

CONTACT INFORMATION OF LIBRARIAN SUBMITTING PROGRAM:

(library, e-mail address, library phone number)

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A lot went into this program, and I tried to record as much of it as I could. I have a rather lengthy proposal I wrote for our trustees, including my correspondence with other libraries that have run laser tag, as well as copies of all the forms we used if anyone is interested. Feel free to contact me any time!