

How Kilgore Memorial Library Fostered County-Wide Collaboration through One Shared Calendar

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ABSTRACT

This essay recounts the development of the “One County, One Calendar” initiative at Kilgore Memorial Library in York, Nebraska. What began as a simple solution for managing the library’s meeting room bookings evolved into a county-wide collaboration aimed at improving communication about local events. By working with the York Chamber of Commerce, the York County Development Corporation, and other county leaders, the library created a shared calendar system that now serves all of York County. This project exemplifies how libraries can play a pivotal role in fostering collaboration and solving community challenges, positioning public libraries as essential facilitators of information and engagement.

INTRODUCTION

As Library Director at Kilgore Memorial Library in York, Nebraska, I’ve had the privilege of being part of a library that serves as a true hub for our community. York, the county seat of York County, is home to 8,000 residents, while the county’s total population stands at 14,356. Situated at the crossroads of Interstate 80 and U.S. Highway 81, our location provides a vital connection for residents and travelers alike. Kilgore Memorial Library serves the entire county, offering public library services that reach well beyond the city limits. Libraries are more than just places to check out books—they are gathering spaces, information centers, and often the heart of local activity. But with that role comes challenges, and one issue we faced consistently was managing our meeting rooms and making sure our patrons knew about the events happening at the library. What began as a simple solution to manage room bookings has evolved into something much bigger: the creation of “One County, One Calendar,” a shared event calendar for all of York County. This project has connected organizations across the county and provided a much-needed tool for the community, and I’m proud to have played a part in its development.

THE FIRST STEP: MANAGING OUR MEETING ROOMS

Like many libraries, we’ve seen an increase in the demand for our meeting spaces. Whether it’s library hosted events, organizations holding meetings or community members needing a space for gathering with peers, our rooms are booked constantly. As much as we love being a place for the community to gather, coordinating all these requests started to become a headache. We needed a system to track room availability, avoid double bookings and be accessible online.

It was time for us to move forward, so I asked our information systems staff to locate a low- or no-cost online scheduling tool we could access at every workstation in real time. TeamUp.com, a free online calendar tool was their recommendation and we have never looked back. It was simple to set up and easy to use. We started using TeamUp.com to manage our meeting rooms, and right away, it made things run more smoothly. Staff could see room availability at a glance, and patrons

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had a more organized experience. An unexpected bonus I quickly found was with the app on my phone, I could check room availability at the library while I am attending meetings anywhere, anytime. Encouraged by this success, I wondered if we could take this solution further.

EXPANDING TO STAFF SCHEDULES

After we saw how well the calendar worked for room bookings, I realized it could help with other aspects of library management, too. We decided to add a second TeamUp calendar, this one dedicated to tracking staff schedules. We regularly have programming staff working off-site or staff attending meetings and it is helpful to know who is where from my desk or phone. In a busy library, it's important for everyone to know who is working when and this tool allowed us to stay better coordinated. It might seem like a small thing, but having a clear picture of both room bookings and staff availability made our operations run much more smoothly.

THE BIGGER PROBLEM: PATRONS MISSING EVENTS

Even with these improvements, we still had a recurring issue: patrons often told us they didn't know about library events until it was too late. We were promoting our programs in all the usual ways—social media, the Chamber of Commerce newsletter, flyers, and word of mouth—but it just wasn't enough. It wasn't just our library, after conversations with leaders from several local organizations, I learned they were experiencing the same issue. Everyone was trying their best to get the word out about events, but our efforts were scattered, and the public wasn't always receiving timely information.

A SHARED VISION: ONE COUNTY, ONE CALENDAR

During a conversation with the Executive Director of the York Chamber of Commerce, the York County Development Corporation, and other county leaders, I floated an idea: What if we all used a shared calendar? Rather than each organization promoting events separately (see figures 1a and 1b), we could create one unified calendar where anyone could find information about what was happening across York County.

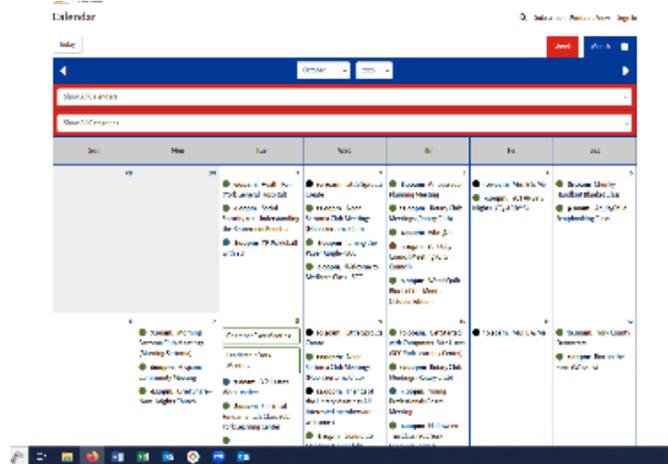
The idea struck a chord with everyone in the room. It was a simple solution to a problem we were all facing, and it had the potential to foster greater collaboration across organizations. By sharing a calendar, we could eliminate confusion about overlapping events and make it easier for residents to stay informed.

BRINGING THE IDEA TO LIFE

We decided to stick with TeamUp, but this time we upgraded to a paid version to access additional features. We wanted to ensure the calendar would meet the needs of multiple organizations while being easy for the public to use. Thus, "One County, One Calendar" was born—a centralized event calendar that could serve all of York County.

The Chamber of Commerce staff helped us design a logo, giving the project a professional look that would be instantly recognizable (see Figure 1). I took the lead on creating step-by-step instructions for the public, making it easy for people to access and navigate the calendar. We printed flyers and distributed them across the county, including hotels, our convention center, businesses, and community centers. The goal was to make sure everyone knew about the new calendar and how to use it.

Figure 3. Expanded view of calendar on city website (<https://www.cityofyork.net/vcalendar/>)



Each organization can customize how the calendar looks on their website, but all the events are still part of the shared “One County, One Calendar” system. This means no matter where someone is looking, they’ll see the same comprehensive list of events happening across York County.

MAKING IT EASY FOR EVERYONE TO PARTICIPATE

A key part of making this project successful was ensuring it was easy for organizations to use. We created clear instructions for new users, helping them input their events into the shared calendar. By lowering the barriers to entry, we’ve seen broad participation from local organizations, making the calendar a true reflection of the county’s diverse events and activities.

The calendar is now administered by three main entities: The Chamber of Commerce, the York County Development Corporation, and Kilgore Memorial Library. By sharing the responsibility, we’ve ensured that no single organization is overwhelmed, and we can keep the system running smoothly on fourteen individual calendars.

A MODEL FOR COLLABORATION

Looking back, I’m incredibly proud of what we’ve achieved with “One County, One Calendar.” What started as a simple solution to manage our meeting rooms has grown into something much bigger. We’ve created a tool that connects organizations, businesses, and residents, fostering collaboration across the county. Looking forward, I intend to offer to work with our newly hired York County Visitor’s Bureau director to suggest we look at creating a hand-out for distribution at hospitality centers across the county. Utilizing the export feature of the TeamUp application we could offer visitors a page-at-a-glance list of events planned while they are in our community. For now, this is a project that I believe other communities could easily replicate, and it’s a great example of how libraries can take the lead in solving community-wide challenges.

At the heart of this initiative is the library’s commitment to serving the public. As a trusted and neutral institution, Kilgore Memorial Library was in a unique position to bring people together and provide a solution that benefits everyone. “One County, One Calendar” has shown us that libraries aren’t just about books—they’re about building connections, solving problems, and leading the way.