



2011 **TOP INNOVATORS**
inventive programs. momentous impact.

URBAN LIBRARIES COUNCIL



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Public libraries continue to showcase their remarkable capacity for leadership, innovation, and transformation in the communities they serve. In the face of tough community challenges and growing needs, public libraries continue to respond with innovative strategies for delivering vital services every day.

One year after the Urban Libraries Council launched its first Annual Innovations Initiative, more than 200 libraries responded to another call for success stories in 2011. The ideas they shared demonstrate creativity and strategic thinking in anticipating and responding to community needs and improving day-to-day operations to ensure user-friendly, cost-effective services.

A panel of judges selected 11 outstanding programs in 11 categories based on their innovation, results achieved, and potential to be replicated in other

libraries. The categories are civic engagement; collections; economic and workforce development; education; health, wellness, and safety; literacy; organizational change; operations; positioning the library; sustainability; and user experience.

The top innovations emphasize the foundations of 21st century library success – serving diverse communities, maximizing technology access, supporting local economic stability and growth, building partnerships to respond to community needs, encouraging civic engagement, providing for the health and welfare of the community, serving as an education hub from early childhood through lifelong learning, and more. Most important, they demonstrate the library's transformational role as the most trusted public institution in local government – a safe, welcoming, and innovative resource for everyone in the community.

OPERATIONS

THE SAN FRANCISCO (CA) PUBLIC LIBRARY

sfpl.org/genpl

Gen PL: The Next Generation of Library Leaders



The San Francisco Public Library's **Gen PL** is a multi-year internal leadership training program designed to develop the next generation of library and city leaders. When a city study showed that 56 percent of staff in library leadership positions and 31 percent of all staff were eligible for retirement in five years, current leaders knew they needed to focus on building a culture that recognized talent and leadership at every level. The Gen PL curriculum includes four full-day leadership training sessions; unprecedented access to the city librarian, senior staff, and other city leaders through meetings, panels, and coffee hours; opportunities to lead and participate in cross-unit team projects; and workshops dedicated to building core management skills.

A total of 65 Gen PL fellows representing almost every staff classification from library pages to middle managers have completed the program. Of those fellows, 25 percent have been promoted, appointed to acting promotional assignments, or qualified for promotional exams. In the process of building a cadre of future leaders for both the library and the city, Gen PL has also strengthened collaboration across library units, improved internal communication, and enhanced library effectiveness through the work of fellow-led efficiency teams.

HEALTH, WELLNESS & SAFETY

PIMA COUNTY (AZ) PUBLIC LIBRARY

library.pima.gov

Refugee Health Fair



More than 1,500 refugees living in the midtown area of Tucson, Arizona, participated in health fairs in 2009 and 2010 provided by the Martha Cooper Branch of the Pima County Public Library. The fairs were created to meet the immediate medical needs of refugees and connect them with primary medical care to serve longer-term health needs. The library joined with the International Rescue Committee, the Pima County Health Department, and the University of Arizona Eller School of Business Management to plan, organize, and carry out the fairs, which offered free health screening tests and information on health and wellness topics in 13 languages.

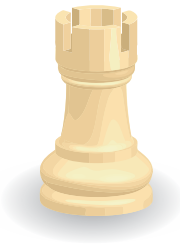
Many community resources supported the library's effort including 35 wellness organizations and volunteers from the University of Arizona, who helped with advertising, transportation, language interpretation, and supplies. With an estimated 5,000 refugees living in Tucson, the growing turnout for the two fairs – 500 in the first year and 1,000 the next year – confirms the need for this valuable service.

POSITIONING THE LIBRARY

SPRINGFIELD (MA) CITY LIBRARY

springfieldlibrary.org/board/strategicplan.html

A Brighter Future for Springfield Today



A Brighter Future for Springfield Today is a library-led effort that has positioned the Springfield City Library as a key resource for building optimism in a city that has been hard hit by economic challenges. After a long history as a private non-profit corporation, the Springfield Library became a city department in 2003 but remained separate in the eyes of the public. Early in 2010, the library made a conscious and strategic decision to focus a new long-range planning process not on the library but on how it could help reverse the city's downward economic spiral and contribute to a more optimistic future. Using community focus groups and regular connections with city officials, the library helped create new goals built on positive themes of success, community leadership, and celebrating Springfield.

The results have been increased awareness of the library's position in the community and the value of the services it provides, a strong partnership with city government, and a role as a major player in building Springfield's "brighter future." The library's effort drew praise from city leaders and led to a new city hall focus on long-range planning with library staff serving on every committee. When the Mayor was asked about priorities in the face of state budget cuts, he said he would protect "core services such as public safety and libraries," adding that in tough economic times "people want their libraries open."

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

CALGARY (AB) PUBLIC LIBRARY
calgarypubliclibrary.com

21st Century Literacies: Civic Literacy



Historically low voter turnout in municipal elections prompted the Calgary Public Library to launch its **Civic Literacy** program during the 2010 campaign to educate voters and encourage active and purposeful civic engagement. A series of library-hosted events were designed to inform residents about the importance of municipal elections, connect them to candidates for office, and help them assess candidate positions on key municipal issues. Using candidate forums, a series of blogs, a training session for candidates and campaign managers, and a meet-the-candidates session which encouraged individual interaction, the Calgary Public Library became election central for both candidates and voters.

The result was a remarkable 53 percent voter turnout for the 2010 municipal election, compared with an average of 28 percent during the previous three municipal elections. Even more important, the high-visibility campaign events raised the library's profile as a vital community asset among key municipal leaders. All of the candidates mentioned the value the library brings to the community and the importance of maintaining adequate funding during their campaigns.

EDUCATION

CHICAGO (IL) PUBLIC LIBRARY
youmediachicago.org

YOUmedia



The Chicago Public Library's **YOUmedia** is a 21st century learning space for teens tailored to their needs, interests, and learning styles. Launched in 2009 at the Harold Washington Library Center in partnership with Digital Youth Network, YOUmedia has become a new library entry point for teens, providing a place to gather, learn in exciting ways, participate in projects that support critical thinking and skill building, and connect with friends, mentors, digital resources, books, and workshops.

Chicago teens have enthusiastically embraced YOUmedia. More than 5,000 teens from 70 high schools have visited YOUmedia since 2009, and circulation of books among young people has increased 600 percent. Teens are leveling-up their media production skills as they engage with mentors, attend workshops, and tinker with new types of media. Perhaps most important, YOUmedia has become the hub of a new Chicago ecosystem where learning happens anyplace, anytime. In 2010, President Obama cited YOUmedia as a national model for informal learning environments for youth that will be replicated in libraries and museums nationally and internationally.

ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

HOUSTON (TX) PUBLIC LIBRARY

houstonlibrary.org/wecan

WeCAN Works



Record unemployment and a growing population of at-risk public school students led to the establishment of the Houston Public Library's **WeCAN Works** program. The program addresses drop-out prevention, GED success, digital literacy, and workforce skills training – all designed to provide brighter economic futures for the city's underserved, unskilled, and unemployed populations. Three separate tracks address different needs. Track I focuses on keeping at-risk high school students moving toward graduation; Track II helps out-of-school youth and adults obtain their GEDs; and Track III provides digital literacy and workforce skills training to increase opportunities for job success.

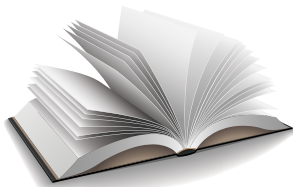
Since its 2009 launch, WeCAN Works has served more than 320,000 city residents. A \$4.5 million grant from Microsoft and strong partnerships with Houston Community College, Houston Independent School District, Workforce Solutions, and the Greater Houston Partnership have helped the library offer free, comprehensive, and sustained services that have started to change Houston's workforce and economic landscape.

LITERACY

PIERCE COUNTY (WA) LIBRARY SYSTEM

piercecountylibrary.org

Our Children are Ready for Reading



The Pierce County Library System's **Our Children are Ready for Reading** program focuses on ensuring that in-home care providers have the tools and skills needed to support early childhood literacy. Recognizing that many toddlers spend considerable time with in-home care providers, the library developed a program of training, literacy tools, and coaching to support this important audience. With funding from a Boeing Corporation grant and in partnership with the University of Washington, the program included pre-testing of participating toddlers and creation of two control groups of child care providers – one that received literacy tools, resources, and support, and one that didn't.

Fifteen child care providers completed the program, and 94 four- and five-year-olds were assessed. Preliminary data shows that the children whose in-home caregivers received training and resources showed significant gains in critical pre-literacy skills including concepts about print, alphabetical principles, and phonological awareness. Early alphabet and phonics skills have been cited as the most predictive of reading success by the National Early Literacy Panel report. These results offer great promise for the library's overall strategy.

COLLECTIONS

JOHNSON COUNTY (KS) LIBRARY

jocolibrary.org

Streamlining Materials Handling



Tight budgets, outdated workflow systems, rapid growth in library use, and overburdened staff led the Johnson County Library to launch a comprehensive process to speed the movement of materials to better serve patrons. Using broad guiding principles, carefully selected technology solutions, training, and staff ingenuity, the library overhauled daily operations. Changes include simplifying cataloguing, stripping down materials labeling, reallocating funds to best sellers, increasing use of automatic ordering profile systems, and using a collection agency small balance program to notify patrons of fines before balances reach \$25.

In its first full year of operation, the project produced \$130,390 in annual savings, reallocation of \$18,000 per year for best sellers, a net annual labor savings of 8.25 full-time equivalents, and annual recovery of nearly \$84,000 in fines, fees, and lost materials. In addition, the library staff has embraced a new business-like culture for managing and assessing staff-intensive library functions to ensure cost-effective service.

USER EXPERIENCE

ORANGE COUNTY (FL) LIBRARY SYSTEM

rightservicefl.org

Right Service at the Right Time



The Orange County Library System took user friendliness to a new level to help patrons navigate e-government services through library computers and kiosks. **The Right Service at the Right Time** (RS/RT) program organizes individual assistance needs into major categories – daily needs, family assistance, healthcare, housing, immigration, jobs, and transportation – and guides users through available resources and required background information. First-time users can create a personal profile to save required data, making the next visit even easier. To ensure ease of understanding for all users, RS/RT was designed at a fourth grade reading level and is offered in three languages – English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole. The system is also available on kiosks in 14 library branches using touch screens.

Since its October 2010 launch, RS/RT has averaged 4,500 visits per month with an average stay of 15 minutes, and 333 users have saved profiles for future access. In addition, 175 service providers are now available through RS/RT. Early survey results show a high level of customer satisfaction – 74 percent said the system helped them find what they needed, and 76 percent planned to tell others about this valuable library resource.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

EDMONTON (AB) PUBLIC LIBRARY

epl.ca

Building Our Brand from the Inside Out Who We Are and What We Value



An ambitious rebranding campaign by the Edmonton Public Library led to new values, mission, and promise statements – and renewed passion among the library staff who carry out the mission and model the values. The project's objectives were to build an appealing brand based on the library's values and to inspire staff to own the brand. With help from a consultant, a staff steering committee consolidated five separate organizational frameworks into a single values wheel with "sharing" at the center. The library's new mission statement became "We Share," and the library's promise is "Spread the Words."

Staff embraced the values and brand enthusiastically. "I am totally blown away," said one staff member. "I can't tell you how excited I am to be part of this." To ensure sustained ownership, the library developed a video in which staff describe the values, a shared statement and booklet to add depth to the new values, and a revised employee orientation process built around the values. Demonstrating their renewed passion, staff purchased 400 branded tee shirts in four days, depleting the stock.

SUSTAINABILITY

GREENSBORO (NC) PUBLIC LIBRARY

greensboro-nc.gov

Environmental Education Center



After a 2001 study pointed to the potential value of an environmental hub to coordinate local environmental education, the Greensboro Public Library opened the Kathleen Clay Edwards Library in 2004 as a dedicated environmental education branch. Located in a 98-acre park, the branch built its environmental education credentials by (1) modeling green practices; (2) providing environmentally focused programs that attract more than 5,000 people annually; (3) leading an Earth Day celebration that draws another 2,000 people annually; (4) serving as a hub for environmental education efforts of dozens of nonprofits and government departments; and (5) supporting outreach programs that extend environmental education to diverse populations.

The Kathleen Clay Edwards branch is the only library among 194 centers listed in the directory of North Carolina Environmental Educational Centers and earned the Environmental Educators of North Carolina outstanding environmental organization award. Most recently, the library expanded its offerings to include programs for low-income residents on available home weatherization and energy savings programs, a solar program for after-school groups, and a regular green luncheon for area businesses.

Learn More About These Innovations

Visit the Urban Libraries Council website at **urbanlibraries.org** to learn more about the exciting innovations underway in leading urban and metropolitan libraries. On the website, you can review all of the 2011 leading library innovations that are transforming communities across North America.

About the Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC) is a membership organization made up of America's premier public library systems and the corporations that support them. While ULC's members primarily represent urban and suburban libraries, its work is widely used by all libraries. ULC strategically addresses issues important to all communities including education, workforce and economic development, public safety, environmental sustainability, health, and wellness. ULC's members are thought leaders dedicated to the continuous evolution and strengthening of libraries to meet changing community needs. As ULC celebrates its 40-year anniversary, its work focuses on helping library leaders develop and use skills and strategies that match the challenges of the 21st century.



visit urbanlibraries.org for more on these innovations