

2012 TOP INNOVATORS

# **BUILDING COMMUNITY. CHANGING LIVES.**



URBAN  
**LIBRARIES**  
COUNCIL

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INSPIRING LIBRARIES,  
TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES.



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## 2012 TOP INNOVATORS BUILDING COMMUNITY. CHANGING LIVES.

The 2012 Urban Libraries Council (ULC) Top Innovators showcase how public libraries are building community and changing lives every day. Using strategic partnerships, advanced technology and customer-focused ingenuity, these innovative libraries have helped people find jobs, introduced teens to healthier eating habits, encouraged reading in unexpected places, improved English language skills among low-skilled workers, harnessed community creativity to turn ideas into printed books, modeled environmental sustainability and more. At the same time, they are working constantly to improve service, respond to customer needs and even expand library hours despite budget and staff reductions.

A panel of expert judges selected 10 outstanding programs in 10 categories based on the strength of their innovation,

results achieved and capacity to be replicated. More than 190 success stories were submitted in this third year of the ULC Innovations Initiative. The categories are Civic & Community Engagement; Collections; Economic & Workforce Development; Education, Literacy & Lifelong Learning; Health, Wellness & Safety; Operations; Organizational Change & Strategic Management; Positioning the Library; Sustainability; and User Experience.

The Top Innovators showcase “best” and “next” practices that reinforce the value and impact of the 21st century public library— a trusted and tested resource with deep local roots and broad assets that build strong communities and change people’s lives.

## CIVIC & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

### SACRAMENTO PUBLIC LIBRARY (CA)

[saclibrary.org/istreet](http://saclibrary.org/istreet)

#### I STREET PRESS: A COMMUNITY & WRITING PUBLISHING CENTER

The Sacramento Public Library's **I Street Press** is a community hub for creativity which connects people, resources and the means to turn ideas into printed products. I-Street Press is much more than a self-publishing center. It is a dynamic resource where residents learn about writing and publishing, connect with writers of all levels to work together and critique each other's work and create a stronger community. Since its November 2011 launch, I Street Press has published more than 600 books and engaged many community residents in information sessions, a reception for local writers, outreach events and free writing and publishing classes that are filled to capacity

with the overflow being added to waiting lists. Using the Espresso Book Machine, I Street Press converts digital files into "bookstore quality" paperbacks in less than five minutes—making it possible for authors to touch their first book when it is still warm.

From printing a book of poetry by a local homeless poet to connecting established writers with novices, I Street Press celebrates community creativity and offers people a safe place to express themselves through writing, learning and publishing.

## COLLECTIONS

### PUBLIC LIBRARY OF CINCINNATI AND HAMILTON COUNTY (OH)

[cincinnati.library.org/downloadables](http://cincinnati.library.org/downloadables)

#### VIRTUAL INFORMATION CENTER

The Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County brought its growing audience of remote users closer to the library through its new **Virtual Information Center**. Recognizing that many customers do much of their work with the library remotely—particularly downloading e-books and e-audiobooks—the library established the special customer service center by reallocating staff in the main library, training all library staff to support remote users and enhancing technology to measure responsiveness. Staff in the Virtual Information Center: (1) ensure easy access to the library's electronic resources; (2) create content for the library's website to broaden awareness of library resources;

(3) answer phone calls, respond to emails and reply to text messages as well as queries posted on the "Comments" section of the library website; and (4) support customer training on how to access the downloadable collection.

Since creation of the Center, the library has seen a dramatic increase in use of downloadable resources—from an average of 15,000 downloads per month in January, February and March 2011 to 62,000 during the same timeframe in 2012. The Center handles more than 10,000 calls and 250 electronic questions and comments weekly and has significantly increased satisfaction on all inquiries.

## ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

### BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY AND QUEENS LIBRARY (NY)

[nyc.gov/html/sbs/wf1/html/contact/contact.shtml](http://nyc.gov/html/sbs/wf1/html/contact/contact.shtml)

#### WORKFORCE1 EXPANSION CENTERS

More than 740 unemployed New Yorkers found jobs this year thanks to a partnership between the city's three library systems and its job placement program. The partnership emerged when the Brooklyn Public Library, New York Public Library, and Queens Library were looking for better ways to connect job seekers who come to the library for guidance with employers, and the NYC Department of Small Business Services needed locations for 10 new **Workforce1 Career Centers**. The centers prepare and connect applicants to job opportunities.

In fall 2011, Workforce1 Expansion Centers opened in Brooklyn Public Library's Central Library and Sunset Park Library and Queens Library's Flushing Branch. As

of April 2012, the centers have referred 2,721 job seekers to interviews leading to 742 placements. Another center will open soon in New York Public Library's Francis Martin Branch. Each library system provided up to 2,000 square feet of space to make room for the workforce centers which required relocating existing library programs.

The library-based Workforce Centers make it possible for job seekers to go to one familiar place both to become workforce-ready and to get referrals to companies that are hiring. In announcing the partnership, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said the libraries' track record as "gateways to opportunity" made them "great locations" for the city's career counseling and job placement services.

## EDUCATION, LITERACY & LIFELONG LEARNING

### SAN JOSÉ PUBLIC LIBRARY (CA)

[sjpl.org/read](http://sjpl.org/read)

#### WORK WISE: IMPROVING JOB PERFORMANCE AND PROFICIENCY

In San José, over 38 percent of the population was born in another country and speaks a first language other than English. Recognizing the strong connection between English language skills and job success, the Partners in Reading program of the San José Public Library invested in improving communication and reading proficiency among low-skilled workers. **Work Wise** is an English as a Second Language (ESL) and literacy program that combines classroom education with 24 weeks of job-related training. The program focuses on currently employed workers in three vocations: janitors, preschool teaching assistants and environmental service workers in health care. Training was also provided to volunteer tutors who work with participants

to enhance their learning and confidence.

Based on surveys and interviews, all Work Wise participants reported being better able to successfully understand and speak English on the job and in their lives. Formal assessments showed that 84 percent of the participants had measureable improvement in their English language skills, and 97 percent improved their competence on the job. The participating employers also reported improvements in employee performance from better understanding of job tasks to being more motivated and more willing to engage in conversations with colleagues.

HEALTH, WELLNESS & SAFETY

SAN ANTONIO PUBLIC LIBRARY (TX)

mysapl.org

BUILDING A TEEN NUTRITION PROGRAM

The San Antonio Public Library leveraged its strong connections with teens and a seven-year partnership with the San Antonio Food Bank to **Build a Teen Nutrition Program** that supports community-wide efforts to combat teenage obesity. What made the library’s approach unique is that it began by asking teens about the challenges they face in eating healthy and the nutrition issues they wanted to discuss.

Using teens’ ideas and recommendations as a starting point, the library brought in a licensed nutritionist from the San Antonio Food Bank to help design and implement the

program. It includes hands-on cooking demonstrations to help teens learn how to create their own healthy meals and discussion sessions on topics such as reading labels, identifying vitamins in foods and washing vegetables. Sessions are held year round to provide a sustained resource for teens, particularly in the summer when many find it harder to maintain healthy eating habits. Six branch libraries have incorporated nutrition programs into their teen services following the lead of the Central Library. In addition, the San Antonio Public Library was named the 2012 Nutrition Partner of the Year for its efforts by the San Antonio Food Bank.

OPERATIONS

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY (NY)

brooklynpubliclibrary.org

OPEN LIBRARIES INITIATIVE

A comprehensive analysis helped the Brooklyn Public Library increase system-wide service hours by 21 percent despite reduced funding and fewer employees. The **Open Libraries Initiative** was designed to leverage operational innovations (such as online fine payments and centralization of collection development) over the past few years into expanded hours across the system. The initiative included staff surveys, workload studies, site observations and statistical analysis of the library’s 60 locations. The research showed that operational changes over the years had significantly reduced the administrative hours needed for operating a branch. As a result, a new staffing model was

created to maximize available staff hours including a pairing system that minimizes the impact of scheduled days off on branch operations.

The library was able to add 441 weekly system-wide service hours or roughly one extra day of service per branch. Half of the branches are now open six days per week, and more than two-thirds offer Saturday service. The effort has drawn widespread praise from patrons who enjoy the expanded access to their libraries and local elected officials who point to the library as a great example of learning to do more with less.



## ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE & STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

### CHARLOTTE MECKLENBURG LIBRARY (NC)

[cmlibrary.org/about\\_us](http://cmlibrary.org/about_us)

#### STRATEGIC APPROACH TO PROGRAMMING

Responding to budget cuts, reduced staff and hours, closure of four libraries and the key recommendations from a Future of the Library Task Force, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library launched a **Strategic Approach to Programming** plan that emphasizes core services, full costing for all programs, scalable activities that other branches can adapt as well measurable changes in behavior, skill or attitude that can all be linked to library programs. Much of the plan was developed using data from the program portal, a cloud-based database that is accessible to all programming and management staff and facilitates planning, costing and evaluation.

Key components of the strategic plan include: (1) consistent programming focus around literacy, educational

success and workforce development; (2) sharing templates and kits so that programs can be developed once and replicated in 20 locations; (3) addressing emerging community needs; (4) opportunities to pilot and then further develop new programs such as sensory story times for children with autism and other special needs and Teens Reading to Tots.

Planning a full year of programming with this new model allowed the library to create system program catalogues for children, teens and adults as well as outreach that articulates the intended impact of programs to customers. The result is a more strategic, focused, responsive, cost-effective and measureable program framework.

## POSITIONING THE LIBRARY

### KING COUNTY LIBRARY SYSTEM (WA)

[kcls.org/taketimetoread](http://kcls.org/taketimetoread)

#### TAKE TIME TO READ

**Take Time to READ** is a King County Library System initiative designed to promote voluntary, recreational reading and make reading a community priority. The library created the program to encourage reading as a valued activity for adults and families and to position the 46-branch library system as a respected source of information, inspiration and learning. It pushes opportunities out to the community to take advantage of limited free time for reading in unexpected places.

The strategy includes “quick read” shelves stocked with books and magazines along with rocking chairs in places where adults have waiting time such as auto centers,

doctors’ and dentists’ offices, recreation and community centers and licensing facilities. The library also provides “I got caught reading in public” stickers, a book review competition and a book cover walking tour that features outdoor-framed book cover art signs in eight cities with mobile-access book talks and a printed walking guide.

More than 125 new partners have joined the effort leading to more quick read shelves and more rocking chairs in high-traffic waiting areas such as a major hospital and the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport so that anxious visitors and harried travelers can TAKE TIME TO READ.

## SUSTAINABILITY

### ARLINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY (VA)

library.arlington.us

## BIKES, BUILDINGS AND BROCCOLI: INTEGRATING ARLINGTON COUNTY'S SMART GROWTH AND FRESH AIRE PRINCIPLES INTO WHO WE ARE AND ALL WE DO

**Bikes, Buildings and Broccoli** reflects the Arlington Public Library's commitment to promote, inform and model the county government's focus on environmental sustainability. With its deep community connections and its role as an education hub, the library demystifies sustainability mandates, raises civic awareness about sustainable development and demonstrates, inspires and celebrates sustainable actions.

The library promotes and supports Arlington's status as a bike-friendly community by encouraging staff to bike to work; leading an annual bike tour of seven library branches; and hosting sessions on bike safety, equipment and routes. To support the county's commitment to

energy conservation, the library cut electricity use by 43 percent and total energy use by 27 percent in the Central Library over 10 years; circulates electricity monitors to help residents cut energy use; installed solar panels on the Central Library's roof; recycles paper, bottles, cans, eyeglasses, cellphones and CFL light bulbs; and holds an annual recycled art show. Broccoli represents the library's reputation as a gardening leader including the Central Library's organic vegetable garden. The library provides classes in the garden, donates harvests to the Arlington Food Assistance Center, offers master gardener demonstrations and tree steward clinics, and won an award for its innovative "Arlington Reads" program on food sustainability.

## USER EXPERIENCE

### COLUMBUS METROPOLITAN LIBRARY (OH)

columbuslibrary.org

## "MY LIBRARY" STRATEGY

The Columbus Metropolitan Library (CML) is pursuing its vision of a customer-focused, technology-savvy system through a new website that allows each customer to create a personal homepage featuring favorite electronic resources, reading genres, local news feeds and more. It's all part of CML's **"My Library" Strategy** designed to redefine the customer experience.

The website—conceived as a resource-rich web "app"—facilitates creation of customized dashboards and enhances the online connection between customer and librarian. A

new customer relationship management (CRM) system provides the foundation for the My Library web app. Structured like today's web app stores, the library created widget tiles for every electronic feature, events by location, and other popular content.

In its first month of operation, 1,400 customers created web accounts, and the number of accounts has continued to grow. Overall web usage has more than doubled with users staying longer, viewing more pages and discovering new ways to personalize their library experience.



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## LEARN MORE ABOUT LIBRARY INNOVATORS

Visit the Urban Libraries Council website at [urbanlibraries.org](http://urbanlibraries.org) to learn more about these and other exciting innovations underway in leading urban and suburban libraries. On the website, you can review all of the 2012 submitted library innovations that are transforming communities across North America. All submissions from 2010 and 2011 are also available online at [urbanlibraries.org](http://urbanlibraries.org).

## ABOUT THE URBAN LIBRARIES COUNCIL

As a membership organization made up of America's premier public library systems and the organizations that serve them, the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) has spent more than 40 years enriching urban communities by strengthening their public libraries. While ULC members primarily represent urban and suburban libraries, lessons from their work are widely used by all libraries. ULC serves as a forum for thought leaders sharing best and next practices resulting from targeted research, education and emerging trends. Its programs are recognized for creating new frameworks that invigorate public libraries and their communities.