



2015

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# Top Innovators



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**LIBRARIES**  
COUNCIL

INSPIRING LIBRARIES.  
TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES.



# About the Innovations Initiative

*“Creativity is thinking up new things. Innovation is doing new things.”* —Theodore Levitt

Dear Library Leader:

Since 2010, the Urban Libraries Council has been collecting, sharing and promoting your institution’s creativity and innovation through the ULC Innovations Initiative. To date, the ULC website houses over 1,000 submissions that reflect your library’s mission, strategies and achievements. We thank you for contributing to a resource that libraries throughout North America will use for years to come.

The scope of this year’s Innovations Initiative is remarkable! ULC is proud to showcase the wide range of services and programs ULC members have developed to connect people to technology, address key community issues, and support participatory learning experiences across a lifetime. From a library that offers teens high school credits in exchange for tutoring local elementary school students to a program that matches the specific library services with community-based organizations to increase their effectiveness in meeting neighborhood needs, to a team of library staff members solely focused on analyzing a library initiatives’ value and impact on the community, creativity and innovation are thriving in today’s public libraries.

Inside, you will discover the 2015 Top Innovators and Honorable Mentions in 10 categories. They were selected as winners based on the strength of the innovation, results achieved, and capacity to be replicated in other libraries. The categories are: Leading Learning; Civic and Community Engagement; Collections; Customer Experience; Economic and Workforce Development; Health, Wellness, and Public Safety; Operations; Organizational Change and Strategic Management; Positioning the Library; and Sustainability.

ULC congratulates all of our member libraries and the 2015 honorees for their sustained commitment to thinking up new ideas and doing remarkable work for your communities. We are proud to support your work and showcase your innovations!

Susan Benton  
President and CEO

[urbanlibraries.org](http://urbanlibraries.org)

## Top Innovator

**Denver Public Library, CO**  
*DevCamp@Denver Public Library*  
[www.denverlibrary.org](http://www.denverlibrary.org)

DevCamp introduces teens from at-risk neighborhoods to the possibilities of STEM careers while igniting a passion for learning that extends beyond the camp experience.

In partnership with Denver Public Schools and tech industry professionals, the Denver Public Library offers free week-long camps in neighborhood libraries for young people aged 12 through 19 to learn the basics of web development through hands-on experience, tours of local tech companies, and guest speakers. Participants work in teams with professional mentors to create websites which each team presents to a panel of industry professionals who evaluate content and technical expertise. Denver Public Schools helps recruit potential campers from target neighborhoods and provides transportation to the camp, and technology industry partners identify mentors, provide speakers, and arrange tours.

A key audience for DevCamp is Hispanics which is the fastest growing population in Colorado but is significantly underrepresented in STEM fields.

In 2014, 72 percent of DevCamp participants said they could see themselves working in web development, and 86 percent wanted to continue their technical education after the camp. In addition to developing individual skills and motivation, DevCamp provides a starting point for building a pool of Colorado natives who have the skills needed to fill technology jobs.



*"DevCamp has quickly won the hearts and minds of our young customers because it is an excellent fit for our urban library. Kids get the skills they need to succeed in STEM in ways that are fun, engaging, and memorable. This isn't your typical summer camp - it's a summer experience that brings tech concepts alive in magical, tangible ways."*

—**Michelle Jeske**, City Librarian, Denver Public Library

## Honorable Mention

**Boston Public Library, MA**  
*Pathway to Reading Sensory Wall*  
[www.bpl.org](http://www.bpl.org)

Boston Public Library's Sensory Wall provides a multi-sensory experience for the youngest learners to foster brain development and an inclusive environment for children with sensory-processing disorders. Located in ToddleTown, the early literacy area in BPL's newly renovated Children's Library, the Sensory Wall offers new learning tools such as LED panels and bubble tubes to stimulate senses in a playful child-directed environment.





## Top Innovator

**Palm Beach County Library System, FL**  
***Embedded Librarians in County Government***  
[www.pbclibrary.org](http://www.pbclibrary.org)

Library staff working in eight county departments provided a valuable boost to research capacity while building stronger internal department connections, enhancing job satisfaction, raising awareness of library capacity, and building a commitment to civic engagement. The *Embedded Librarians in County Government* matched library staff research expertise with department needs to complete projects that supported community priorities.



More than 70 hours of research and related work were logged during the first month of operation including projects that supported information needs of assistant county administrators and provided resources for lawmakers regarding proposed legislation. Through a listserv and monthly meetings, participating librarians discussed challenges and research strategies to serve the county departments with which they were paired more effectively.

The library hopes to expand the program to include more county departments and eventually offer the library's research capacity to community organizations.

*"As an integral part of county government, the library system with all of its resources and talented staff is providing expert research services to assist county departments in improving the quality of life for all county residents. The Embedded Librarians project is an opportunity for the library to expand beyond our walls to where research is most needed."*

—**Doug Crane**, Director, Palm Beach County Library System

## Honorable Mention

**District of Columbia Public Library, DC**  
***Orwellian America: Government Transparency and Privacy***  
[www.dclibrary.org](http://www.dclibrary.org)



Using George Orwell's book *1984* as a framework, the District of Columbia Public Library organized and led an extended community dialogue to explore personal privacy, government transparency, and Internet security.

The series included sessions on Internet safety for teens and accessing government information online and a screening of the Frontline documentary *United States of Secrets* with producer Mike Wiser. The program wrapped up with a day-long readathon of Orwell's, *1984*.

## Top Innovator

**Dayton Metro Library, OH**  
*Dayton: Cradle of Innovation*  
[www.daytonmetrolibrary.org](http://www.daytonmetrolibrary.org)

When a growing community of local authors and artists wanted to share their “masterpieces” through the public library, Dayton Metro Library embraced the opportunity by creating a special collection and hosting an annual event. The Local Author Collection has more than 250 items including mainstream fiction, bestsellers by local authors, self-published works, books that emerged from classroom assignments, poetry, children’s books, music CDs, and more. The annual Local Author and Artist Event showcases local talent, provides networking opportunities, and highlights the library’s commitment to the community it serves.



In 2014, items in the Local Author Collection circulated 355 times—a 48 percent increase over the first year these local resources were available. More than 70 authors, artists, musicians, and publishing companies participated in the first Local Author and Artist Event where they were able to display and sell their work and talk with community residents about their creative processes and publishing success.

*“Since the time of the Wright Brothers and Paul Laurence Dunbar, Dayton has been the home of innovation and creativity. In this technologically advanced age, libraries do more than check out materials- they support patrons’ endeavors to create text, sound, visual items, and nearly anything they can imagine.”*

—**Tim Kambitsch**, Executive Director, Dayton Metro Library



## Honorable Mention

**San Mateo County Library, CA**  
*FindIt! Word-Based Classification System*  
[www.smcl.org](http://www.smcl.org)

Move over Dewey Decimal System! The San Mateo County Library introduced a word-based classification system called *FindIt* to make its nonfiction collections more accessible to all patrons. The classification system has been translated into Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish; is regularly updated based on staff and patron feedback; and is supported by customized signage and ongoing communication tools to improve the browsing experience.



## Top Innovator

### Jacksonville Public Library, FL Immersive Cultural Experience Est Bien Meilleur <http://jpl.coj.net>

To better meet a long-time community interest in international languages, Jacksonville Public Library shifted its approach from marketing an online language learning tool to offering a full cultural immersion experience. The result was a significant increase in both customer participation in interactive classes and use of the Transparent Language Online database and a new understanding of the power of strategic marketing to meet individual needs.

Despite the known interest in international languages, the Transparent Language Online database – a highly-respected online language learning program that is free to library card holders – wasn't widely used. The library offered classes on how to use the database, which led to a slight increase in its use. The shift from technical training to cultural immersion made the difference. The concept included interactive classes on local cuisine, travel tips, currency conversion, and conversational use of the language followed by practice sessions using the database. With more emphasis on individual interests, classes filled quickly and new languages were added to the curriculum based on user requests. Use of the language database grew from an average of 250 per month to more than 600 in the first month after the new program was introduced.



*"Answering our customers' needs by connecting them with library resources is central to the mission of the Jacksonville Public Library. By taking an innovative approach to teaching and marketing a database, we were able to enhance the customer experience in a new way while demonstrating the value of the library."*

—**Barbara Gubbin**, Director, Jacksonville Public Library

## Honorable Mention

### San Antonio Public Library, TX Digital Library Community Project [www.mysapl.org](http://www.mysapl.org)

The Digital Library Community Project brings the San Antonio Public Library's digital resources to current and potential users in convenient public places. Using digital bookshelves in community centers and kiosks at the San Antonio International Airport, patrons can check out digital resources or download them to their mobile devices. In the first four months of operation, the airport kiosks received nearly 30,000 page views and 1,000 checkouts. Digital bookshelves in community centers led to a 53 percent increase in use of the library's digital resources.





## Top Innovator

**New York Public Library, NY**  
**NYPL Out-of-School Time Program:**  
**Literacy Leaders**  
[www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org)

The New York Public Library's Literacy Leaders program helps elementary school children improve reading skills while giving teen tutors school credit and the opportunity to apply for paid tutoring internships at a library afterschool program. Teens build their resumes and confidence by tutoring elementary school children, earn credits that increase the likelihood of graduating from high school, and develop strong relationships with the public library.

Library educators developed a literacy curriculum that is aligned with English Language Arts Common Core standards and approved by public school principals. Library staff also work with school guidance counselors to identify teens that are in danger of not graduating but are motivated to improve.

Since Literacy Leaders was launched in 2013, more than 200 teens have earned high school credit for participating in the program and 250 first and second graders have improved their reading skills through tutoring. Feedback from teens' tutors has been very positive. "I really enjoyed trying to make a difference in the lives of youth today," said one participant. "It was great to walk in everyday to each bright young face eager to read with me."

*"The New York Public Library is developing engaging and impactful educational programs that build the love of reading and learning in youth of all ages. We are proud of Literacy Leaders because it allows teens to serve as valuable role models and tutors for beginning readers while reinforcing their own literacy skills."*

—**Mary Lee Kennedy**, Chief Library Officer, New York Public Library



## Honorable Mention

**San Diego County Library, CA**  
**Professional Group Study**  
[www.sdcl.org](http://www.sdcl.org)

San Diego County Public Library's Professional Group Study program gives refugees a jumpstart on careers in their adopted country by providing Welfare-to-Work credit for studying for professional recertification exams rather than taking typical classes such as English as a second language. The library established a system with agencies that oversee the Welfare-to-Work program for new refugees to track study time, prepare verification forms, and deliver required documents on behalf of students. More than 140 skilled professionals have exchanged class time for study time to prepare for U.S. licensing exams; several participants have earned engineering licenses and four have been admitted to medical residency programs.





## Top Innovator

### St. Louis County Library, MO Summer Lunch Program [www.slcl.org](http://www.slcl.org)

A partnership between the St. Louis County Library and Operation Food Search ensures that children and teens aged 2 to 18 who get free lunches during the school year can get the same resources at the neighborhood library during the summer. In 2014, the library served more than



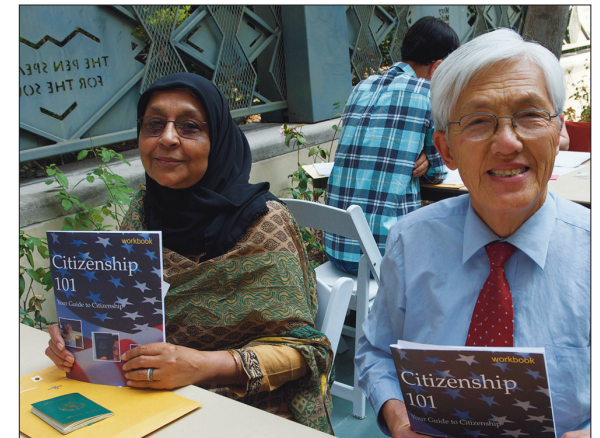
8,500 free lunches at three branches to kids who might otherwise have gone without lunch all summer. The addition of a fourth branch in 2015 is expected to provide an additional 2,500 free lunches.

The state provides funding for the library summer lunch program which runs from June through mid-August as part of the Operation Food Search (OFS) “No Kid Hungry” initiative. OFS delivers lunches to the participating library branches which also provide mid-day activities such as board games, crafts, and story times.

*“St. Louis County Library’s free summer lunch program is vital to kids and families who rely on free lunch service during the school year, but are often left empty handed once school is out. Every summer hundreds of kids come through our doors. This partnership with Operation Food Search allows us to reach those who are hungry, while also introducing them to library resources. Studies show that hunger is a barrier to learning. Together we’re fighting hunger and promoting literacy.”*

—**Kristen L. Sorth, Library Director**, St. Louis County Library

## Honorable Mention



### Los Angeles Public Library, CA Partnering to Succeed [www.lapl.org](http://www.lapl.org)

Partnering to Succeed matches specific Los Angeles Public Library programs with complementary community-based organizations to increase the effectiveness of both in meeting neighborhood needs. Using this strategy, the library created a nationally recognized citizenship program, reduced health disparities in L.A.’s disadvantaged community, increased health programs in Asian communities, and provided support in getting health insurance through the Affordable Care Act marketplace.

## Top Innovator

### Milwaukee Public Library, WI *Rebuilding Libraries for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* [www.mpl.org](http://www.mpl.org)

Drawing on its 2010 long-term facilities plan, *Rethinking Libraries for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, the Milwaukee Public Library transformed how it plans for and replaces branch libraries to provide quality service while saving money and stimulating economic development. Two branches have been replaced as mixed-use developments in which MPL and developers share ownership through a condominium association and a reliable financing structure.

The Villard Square Branch includes a 12,770 square foot library on the first floor with 47 apartment homes on three stories above for families in which grandparents are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. The Standard @ East Library is a five-story building housing a 16,000 square foot library, 99 apartments with underground parking, surface parking for library patrons, and a retail space adjacent to the library on the first floor. Financing for construction of the buildings included tax credits, bank loans, and housing grants from the Wisconsin Department of Commerce and the City of Milwaukee.

Community involvement throughout the development process has led to overwhelming support for the new facilities and increased use of the branch libraries. Planning for four additional mixed-use developments is underway to replace branches that are in the greatest need for capital investment with a goal of renovating the entire MPL branch system by 2020.

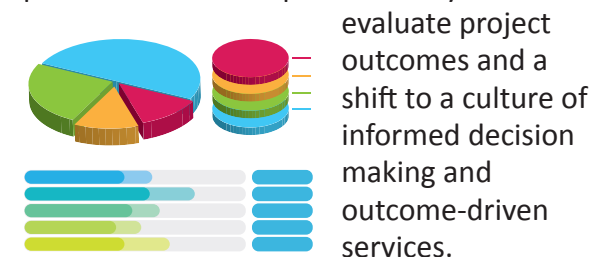


(Photo©Darris Lee Harris)

## Honorable Mention

### Sno-Isle Libraries, WA *Data Analysis for Decision Making and Communication* [www.sno-isle.org](http://www.sno-isle.org)

To maximize the use of data for making informed decisions, Sno-Isle Libraries created two new positions: (1) a data analysis librarian to manage data from various sources and assist staff in evaluating outcomes rather than outputs, and (2) a research analyst to communicate the library's value to the community through relevant, easily understood infographics. Expected results from addition of these positions include improved ability to



evaluate project outcomes and a shift to a culture of informed decision making and outcome-driven services.

*"The vision of the Milwaukee Public Library's new strategic plan is to establish MPL as an anchor institution that helps build healthy families and vibrant neighborhoods – the foundation of a strong Milwaukee. Creating these new libraries is an important step toward fulfilling that vision. While keeping abreast of changes in technology and the way people use information to feed the mind, we continue to emphasize feeding the soul through inspired public art, repurposed materials, and holding to our tradition of providing a space for our customers to read, learn, and connect."*

—**Paula Kiely**, Library Director, Milwaukee Public Library

## Top Innovator

**Free Library of Philadelphia, PA**  
**Strategic Initiatives: A Hatchery for Innovation**  
[www.freelibrary.org](http://www.freelibrary.org)

The Free Library of Philadelphia's Strategic Initiatives department serves as steward of the library's strategic plan, an in-house data manager, and the launching point for new and innovative programs. To support the library's focus on statistics and measurable outcomes, Strategic Initiatives has developed a tool for stress testing programs to determine their impact, feasibility, viability, and sustainability.



The process includes analyzing current initiatives to assess value and fit with the strategic plan and evaluating new ideas and proposed services for potential impact.

Since its creation, Strategic Initiatives has stress tested seven library programs and reviewed more than 80 staff suggestions for new programs including expanded prison library services, family literacy, health services, and support for new Americans. The department is also working on a new budgeting process with the library's Development Office to shape the direction of future funding requests.

## Honorable Mention

**Chicago Public Library, IL**  
**Scaling Connected Learning for Teens**  
[www.chipublib.org](http://www.chipublib.org)

Teen participation in Chicago Public Library's YOUmedia sites grew by 50 percent in 2014 thanks to the coordinated work of a new teen services team that was created to scale, accelerate, lead, and support CPL's Connected Learning services. Over the past year, the library hired more than 30 new teen library staff, established teen programs in 25 branches, and integrated a summer youth employment program. The teen services team was charged with overseeing hiring, deepening professional development goals and routines for new staff, and designing and delivering expanded teen services.



*"The Strategic Initiatives department has assessed the viability of new and existing library programs and services, cultivated staff-generated ideas for innovative programming, and developed an idea pipeline. I am so proud of this forward-thinking team that is doing great things to improve library services and ultimately enhance the experience of all those who use the Free Library of Philadelphia."*

—**Siobhan A. Reardon**, President and Director, Free Library of Philadelphia



## Top Innovator

### Des Moines Public Library, IA Virtual Library Pop-Ups <http://dmpl.org>

The Des Moines Library launched its Virtual Library by taking the new resources out to the community through management team “pop-ups” in school hallways, grocery stores, job centers, senior centers, malls, and television and radio stations. Available 24/7, the Virtual Library lets patrons connect with the library from their easy chair or office computer, on a laptop at a favorite coffee shop, or a smart phone while riding the bus. In fact, the Virtual Library is a portal to the library’s entire collection. The goal for launch day was to meet as many city residents as possible – kids, families, teens, students, adults, and seniors – and introduce them to the Virtual Library, virtually!



Pop-up day led to a 30 percent jump in page views, mutually energizing connections between library staff and constituents, and increased awareness of library services. The Des Moines Public Library now has seven branches including one that is virtual and open 24/7.

*“The managers and staff were exceptionally excited and energized about the new Virtual Library Branch that we all worked to create. We wanted to introduce our newly launched e-branch to the Des Moines community with a splash. Our staff ‘popped-up’ not only in the media, but also brought the excitement of the new Virtual Library to places where people gather throughout the city. Armed with maps and tablet computers, we ‘popped up’ with the virtual library in our hands.”*

—**Greg Heid**, Library Director, Des Moines Public Library

## Honorable Mention

### Montgomery County Public Libraries, MD Service Beyond Our Walls [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/library](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/library)

The Montgomery County Public Library’s Outreach Team extends the reach of library resources, services, and collections to potential customers where they live, gather, and meet. As a majority/minority county with significant foreign-born and non-English speaking populations, the bilingual Outreach Team offers a new model of mobile service to residents, traveling to all corners of the county, with particular emphasis on new Americans, to introduce and promote the services available in a free public library. Since 2013, team members have participated in more than 500 events, reaching some 40,000 people.



## Top Innovator

### Nashville Public Library, TN New Southeast Branch Library Design [www.library.nashville.org](http://www.library.nashville.org)

Once a windowless store in a vacant shopping mall, Nashville Public Library's Southeast Branch is a LEED gold facility that features sleek technology, public art, community spaces, a dedicated children's area a teen digital learning space, multilingual signage, and more—all created with extensive community input. The library branch sits within a larger multi-purpose facility near a playground, a four-acre green space, and a practice skating rink used by Nashville's NHL hockey team. The local farmers' market chose to relocate to the green space near the library because of the significant community traffic in the area.

The 700 people who celebrated the library's opening day said they loved what they saw and felt their voices had been heard in the design process. Circulation at the branch is up 34 percent, and the library's bilingual story times are extremely popular in this diverse, growing neighborhood.

The community-input model that shaped the Southeast Branch has become the standard for Nashville Public Library's building and renovation work to ensure that all facilities meet library service goals and address specific community interests and needs.



*"The Southeast Library represents NPL's focus on providing exceptional library services to our growing Nashville community. As we build new libraries and renovate existing buildings, our commitment is always to create space that sustains and engages a diverse population. We call this building the 'library of the future' as we think about the physical space and the program service elements that will advance learning and create a sense of community for decades to come."*

—**Kent Oliver**, Library Director, Nashville Public Library

## Honorable Mention



### Santa Clara County Library District, CA The Green Teen Garden Project@ Cupertino Library [www.sccl.org](http://www.sccl.org)

Teens in Cupertino replace their smart phones and tablets with rakes, seeds, and soil for four months to develop gardening and sustainability skills. The Cupertino Library's Green Teen Garden Project teaches these new skills through a four-month, hands-on program led by library staff and veteran gardeners. Participating teens learn best gardening practices and green living skills by maintaining a self-contained, organic garden located inside the library's courtyard. After two years of operation, the project has produced 40 teen eco-enthusiasts and donated more than 45 pounds of fresh organic vegetables to people in need.

# 2015 Innovations Initiative Participants

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Alexandria Library  
Anchorage Public Library  
Anythink  
Arlington Public Library  
Boston Public Library  
Broward County Library  
Calgary Public Library  
Carlsbad City Library  
Charlotte Mecklenburg Library  
Chattanooga Public Library  
Chicago Public Library  
County of Los Angeles Public Library  
Cuyahoga County Public Library  
Davenport Public Library  
Dayton Metro Library  
Denver Public Library  
Des Moines Public Library  
District of Columbia Public Library  
Durham County Library  
Edmonton Public Library  
Free Library of Philadelphia  
Fresno County Public Library  
Frisco Public Library  
Hartford Public Library  
Hennepin County Library

Houston Public Library  
Howard County Library System  
Indianapolis Public Library  
Jacksonville Public Library  
Kansas City Public Library  
Kent District Library  
King County Library System  
Lexington Public Library  
Los Angeles Public Library  
Louisville Free Public Library  
Madison Public Library  
Mid-Continent Public Library  
Milwaukee Public Library  
Montgomery County Public Libraries  
Multnomah County Library  
Nashville Public Library  
New Haven Free Public Library  
New York Public Library  
Newport News Public Library System  
Palm Beach County Library System  
Pierce County Library System  
Pima County Public Library  
Poudre River Public Library District  
Prince George's County Memorial  
Library System

Queens Library  
Richland Library  
Rochester Public Library  
Salt Lake City Public Library  
Salt Lake County Library Services  
San Antonio Public Library  
San Diego County Library  
San Diego Public Library  
San Francisco Public Library  
San Jose Public Library  
San Mateo County Library  
Santa Clara County Library  
Santa Monica Public Library  
Sno-Isle Libraries  
St. Louis County Library  
St. Paul Public Library  
Stark County District Library  
The Public Library of Cincinnati &  
Hamilton County  
The Public Library of Youngstown &  
Mahoning County  
Toronto Public Library  
Tulsa City-County Library  
Virginia Beach Public Library  
Wichita Public Library

All submissions can be found on the ULC website, [urbanlibraries.org](http://urbanlibraries.org).







# URBAN LIBRARIES COUNCIL

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INSPIRING LIBRARIES.  
TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES.

## **Inspiring Libraries. Transforming Communities.**

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC), founded in 1971, is the premier membership association of leading public library systems in the U.S. and Canada.

With the involvement of its members, ULC strategically advances the value that 21st century libraries provide communities in critical areas such as education, lifelong learning, workforce and economic development, public safety, health and wellness, and sustainability.

As thought leaders and change agents, ULC libraries regularly receive accolades at the national, regional, and local levels. While ULC libraries primarily represent urban and suburban settings, lessons from their work are widely adapted by libraries of all sizes, including those in rural settings.

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