

2020



URBAN  
LIBRARIES  
COUNCIL

# INNOVATIONS

# Dear Leader

It's hard to believe that 2020 marks the **10th anniversary** of ULC's Innovations Initiative. Each year, ULC members raise the bar with the work they share through this annual celebration, and 2020 was certainly no exception.

The 2020 Urban Libraries Council Innovations Initiative showcases the best of library commitment and determination. During a time of enormous change and stress, ULC member libraries found new ways to provide education opportunities for people of all ages, address systemic racism, meet the special needs of underserved populations, bridge digital divides and advance civic engagement for a strong democracy.

The 2020 innovations include library programs that:

- Support health and safety by converting parking lots into food and supply distribution hubs
- Ensure that marginalized communities have access to essential information about pandemic-related resources through a widely distributed "street sheet"
- Partner with a television station to deliver educational programming to children in homes without computers and internet access
- Empower Mandarin-speaking senior immigrants to navigate community life and build strong relationships with their grandchildren through a comprehensive education program
- Raise awareness of environmental challenges through the creation of original artwork
- Provide customized financial support information and hope to struggling families
- Use a design thinking approach to position the library for a post-pandemic future

The Top Innovators and Honorable Mention award winners were selected based on the inventiveness of the program or service, outcomes achieved and potential for other libraries to adopt and adapt the innovation.

We congratulate all ULC members for their continued commitment to innovation and for making a difference in your communities. It is our privilege to support your work and to showcase your innovations, particularly during this incredibly challenging year.

— **Susan Benton**  
ULC President & CEO

# Contents

<b>2-3</b>	CIVIC & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
<b>4-5</b>	COMMUNICATING THE LIBRARY'S VALUE
<b>6-7</b>	CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE
<b>8-9</b>	DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP
<b>10-11</b>	EDUCATION: ADULTS
<b>12-13</b>	EDUCATION: BIRTH THRU TEENS
<b>14-15</b>	ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE & STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT
<b>16-17</b>	RACE & SOCIAL EQUITY
<b>18-19</b>	WELLNESS, SAFETY & SUSTAINABILITY
<b>20-21</b>	WORKFORCE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
<b>22</b>	ALL PARTICIPATING LIBRARIES

## Climate of Art: Reimagine the Environment

Miami-Dade Public Library System | [mdpls.org](http://mdpls.org)

Miami-Dade Public Library System's Climate of Art program promoted awareness of earth's fragile natural resources through creation of original artwork. More than 300 library patrons attended workshops and created and exhibited their artwork highlighting nature, the environment and the need for community responsiveness.

The program offered an opportunity for Miami-Dade residents to attend art classes taught by library staff who are experts in art, filmmaking and photography. Classes included both individual skill development and discussions about environmental issues to further inspire artwork. Library staff and program participants worked together to plan and curate an exhibit that showcased the artwork and highlighted important environmental concerns.

In addition to instilling pride and leadership in patrons whose artwork was displayed, Climate of Art inspired the creation of a Mobile Resilience Hub constructed by the County's Office of Resilience in partnership with the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center.



"Climate of Art: Reimagine the Environment is a great example of an original program conceived and implemented by a library team with a passion for the environment, art, engaging patrons in creative ways and trying out new ideas that not only draw and keep the interest of patrons but have a lasting impact. This program provides a hands-on experience using recycled materials to create art that raises awareness about the environment while teaching the importance of resilience and preserving our climate through conversation and workshops."

— **Ray Baker**  
Director



## Tips from the Innovators

- Use art exhibits as a way for attendees to learn about tough issues. Bring these problems to the forefront using art as a visual trigger to inspire a call to action.
- Approach difficult topics with facts rather than emotion. Ask community organizations to present informational workshops that support and explain the facts.
- As a leader, you have to be willing to listen to your students. Teach critical thinking and allow students to design solutions to the problems in their own way.

## DeKalb Votes Challenge

DeKalb County Public Library | [dekalblibrary.org](http://dekalblibrary.org)

DeKalb Votes Challenge emphasized the importance of voting to build an empowered community. Leading up to the 2020 election, DeKalb County Public Library partnered with Beanstack to create a self-paced online challenge that engaged and educated community residents about voting even though library buildings were closed because of COVID-19 in the months before the election. Challenge activities provided nonpartisan information on the voting process, helped reduce any confusion about the upcoming election and prepared voters for what to expect at the polls.

More than 1,260 individuals and families participated in the challenge, completing 5,300 activities and earning 4,600 badges in categories such as voter pledge, history of voting, voter rights and the 2020 election calendar.



“The DeKalb Votes Challenge is a great example of how our staff created a fun and interactive option to continue to provide our community with empowering programs. Pairing the Beanstack software with educational programming about voting was a powerful way we could engage with our patrons safely amidst the pandemic. Voting is our most fundamental right — we wanted our patrons to go to the polls fully informed and knowing how to make sure their votes count.”

— **Alison L. Weissinger**  
Director

# DeKalb Votes

## Tips from the Innovators

- Using the Beanstack technology was a great foundation upon which to build the DeKalb Votes Challenge. The flexibility of this technology made it easy to develop, edit and update an informative, educational, engaging and fun challenge.
- Creating this challenge afforded the library an opportunity to strengthen established relationships with existing civic organizations and build new relationships with others.
- The DeKalb Votes Challenge was an opportunity for the library to do our part in encouraging new voters to register and become engaged and involved in the voting and election process on a local, state and national level.

## Be Inspired

Milton Public Library | [beinspired.ca](https://beinspired.ca)

Milton Public Library's new "be inspired" rebranding effort was part of a comprehensive strategy to better meet the needs of the library's larger, younger, more ethnically diverse and highly-educated constituents. Between 2001 and 2018, Milton changed from a largely rural, homogenous community of 31,000 to a diverse town of 110,000 with an average age of 34, median income among the highest in Canada and 75% holding at least a bachelor's degree. The most frequently read language at home other than English is Urdu.

The "be inspired" brand driver and complementary "bee" logo were chosen to symbolize the library as a hive of activity that provides ongoing opportunities to read, learn, create and connect. All physical and virtual channels were rebranded including a new library URL – [beinspired.ca](https://beinspired.ca). To promote the brand, the library has installed beehives at its Beaty branch to support STEM programming and make organic "Bee-ty" branch honey which will be available for sale in 2021.



"In undertaking a review and ultimately overhaul of the Milton Public Library brand, we wanted to ensure that the new branding resonated with as many Miltonians as possible, exemplifying Milton Public Library as a true community resource and a hive of activity. To have so many residents of the town respond favourably through their active participation in the programmes and services we provide has been the ultimate reward and suggests that while the new brand may be successful in introducing new patrons to the public library experience, the overall 'offer' that MPL represents is one that ensures the active participation continues to remain so high."

— **Mark Williams**  
Chief Librarian & CEO



## Tips from the Innovators

When embarking on a rebranding effort:

- Know your audience
- Keep it simple
- Be creative
- Don't be constrained by convention

## Building a Data Warehouse and Protecting Privacy

Salt Lake County Library | slcolibrary.org

A data warehouse which stores data with all personally identifiable information removed helps the Salt Lake County Library make solid business decisions about service needs while respecting patron privacy. The library removes personal information from data that is captured across multiple platforms including library vendors which all report data differently, transforms and standardizes the information to ensure data quality and stores it for a variety of uses. The warehouse can be adapted to accommodate new data sources as needed.

The historical data stored in the warehouse has changed the way the library does business by eliminating barriers to library services created by outdated policies, streamlining data analysis and reporting and providing data-driven insight into library performance.



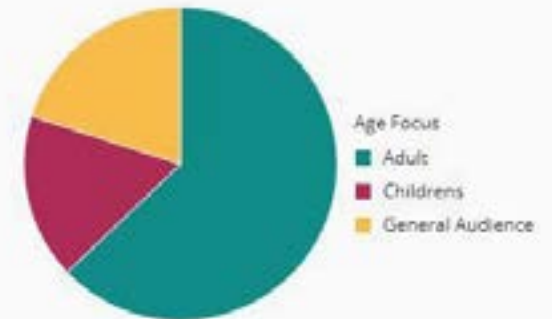
“The data warehouse has changed the way we do business, allowing the library to keep historical data longer, and to correlate data to provide insight into the library’s performance while respecting patron privacy. As a result, barriers to library services created by outdated policies have been removed; librarians have more tools to analyze collections, including total (physical and digital) collection usage; and the library uses shelver and circulation workload statistics to address staffing at our branches.”

— **Jim Cooper**  
Director



### Online Retrievals

Retrievals by Age Focus



## Tips from the Innovators

- Standardization of data across platforms allows us to go beyond the standard “counts” and make decisions based on workload.
- We filter decisions we make about use of data through ALA’s Library Bill of Rights.
- Our database administrator adds notes in the warehouse to indicate service changes, library closures or anything that might skew the data away from normal trends.
- Looking at data across platforms inspired us to change how we report collection data. Because many of the platforms count different things, we decided to count “retrievals” in the databases to better compare the data.

## APL+

Austin Public Library | [library.austintexas.gov](http://library.austintexas.gov)

APL+ is Austin Public Library's all-in-one video platform that supports high-quality programming to meet diverse customer needs. Key components of APL+ are:

- A workflow that empowers hundreds of staff members to create virtual programming
- An aesthetic that is professional and engaging
- A solution that is compatible with education partners to support at-home learning
- Partnerships with non-profit organizations, school districts and other city agencies to deliver digital programming

The entire project was completed while all staff were working remotely.

After an April launch, more than 120 virtual programs are available on APL+ with 15,000 views tracked on Vimeo. When cross-posted on social media, APL+ programs show a 300% increase in views beyond what is tracked on the library platform.



“Innovation and technology are crucial to serving diverse customers and communities. The pandemic elevated the role of technology and using it to reach as many people as possible. Libraries must continue to innovate in order to meet the demand of current and future challenges.”

— **Roosevelt Weeks**  
Director of Libraries



## Tips from the Innovators

- **Embrace creative thinking:** Allow and encourage staff to think outside the box. Evaluate your pre-existing in-person programming, and instead of simply recording a video of it, try to leverage the medium's uniqueness.
- **It's OK to make mistakes:** With the use of video editing, there is no need to record everything in one sitting. Be playful on camera, and let your personality shine through.
- **Be adaptable:** After seven months into APL+, we have reconfigured and pivoted numerous structural components of the platform in order to better fit APL's needs.
- **Develop your skillset:** Utilize online tutorials in video editing and sound engineering to develop staff skills, and conduct peer-to-peer learning sessions to create institutional knowledge.

## Expanded Access to Technology: Courtyard Upgrade

Cincinnati & Hamilton County Public Library | [cincinnati.library.org](http://cincinnati.library.org)

A long unused outdoor courtyard at the West End branch of the Cincinnati & Hamilton Public Library was repurposed as a vital technology center to meet community needs during the coronavirus pandemic. Space limitations and physical distancing protocols in the branch library, which serves one of the community's poorest neighborhoods, limited internet and computer access when needs were at their greatest.

Revitalization of the courtyard along with the purchase of new laptops and an eight-unit laptop cart for checkout provided a safe and welcoming resource for the community. Since opening the courtyard, the branch has recorded a 42% increase in computer sessions and a 43% increase in in-person visits. The outdoor space is particularly popular among young customers who feel less constrained than inside the library and families who want to work together.



“We heard loud and clear the need for increased access to technology and dynamic, engaging and flexible spaces, especially during the pandemic when the need is so great. In the words of West End Branch Manager Keloni Parks, the creative and dynamic staff member at the heart of this project, ‘Operating with reduced occupancy limits and limits on the duration of customer visits during the pandemic has forced us to get creative. The laptops allow us to increase access without exceeding our building occupancy limits. That means our kids are able to enjoy the computers without competing for computer time with adults.’”

— **Paula Brehm-Heeger**  
**Eva Jane Romaine Coombe Library Director**



## Tips from the Innovators

- Our staff have found that children and teens are generally more easygoing about sitting outside than adults when indoor capacity has been reached. This expanded outdoor area also became a way to offer “quiet spaces” vs. “noisier spaces.”
- With adding another service point, it’s important for staff to include the courtyard on their roving duties, checking on customers, troubleshooting equipment and ensuring the devices are charged up.
- Keep an eye on your outdoor space’s facility needs and make sure the upkeep is under someone’s responsibilities, because it can easily get overlooked.
- One donor-related tip we have is to be ready to pivot! Our private donor was originally interested in helping to fund a summer reading program, but with the pandemic, we went back to the donor to ask for something different, and they were completely onboard.



## MeckTech – Leveraging CARES for Digital Equity

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library | [cmlibrary.org](http://cmlibrary.org)

Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, in partnership with Mecklenburg County, is making free computers available to 1,400 households using CARES Act funding allocated to the county. MeckTech responds directly to the urgent need for digital access in Mecklenburg County, where an estimated 80,000 households don't have home computers. The partners have a long-term goal of scaling up the program to deliver 5,000 total devices after an assessment of the pilot.

The pilot program showcases a model for meeting the technology challenges of the pandemic in terms of sustainability, economic opportunity, green economies and digital equity. The library is working with a partner who is providing Endless OS, an open-source operating system designed specifically for digital novices, and a refurbisher who provided the hardware and accessories to complement the open-source software. Perhaps most importantly, the library's role as program administrator and primary distributor ensures confidence in the mission of MeckTech.



“Charlotte Mecklenburg Library is honored to serve our community through the important work of reducing the digital divide, especially during this difficult time of COVID-19. With the support of CARES Act funding from Mecklenburg County, we've placed 1,400 free laptops into the hands of residents in search of work, students and parents struggling with virtual learning, people dealing with physical challenges and the elderly navigating the healthcare system. Our library works to improve lives and build a stronger community, and the inspiring responses of laptop recipients affirm the vital leadership role we play in connecting our neighbors to the digital ecosystem.”

— Lee Kessler  
CEO

— Seth Ervin  
Chief Innovation Officer



### Tips from the Innovators

- **Network and convene with others participating in the digital equity space:** CML is privileged to be a part of the Charlotte Digital Inclusion Alliance. This Alliance has led to relationships, which have led to collaborations, including MeckTech.
- **Invest in sustainable and circular economies:** MeckTech addresses several needs all at once. It breathes new life in aging devices and gives them a renewed purpose and it provides devices to those who need them in a time when devices are hard to come by.
- **Iterate and be passionate about the customer:** Focus on the good your library can achieve, versus the perfect. Good can be all that is needed as long as the library remains committed to delivering an excellent customer experience. The biggest factor in MeckTech's success was our ability to rapidly adjust and learn from our customers so we could do this very new work better.

## Beyond Branches: Mobile Wi-Fi Hotspot Program

Newport News Public Library | [library.nnva.gov](http://library.nnva.gov)

Newport News Public Library took the internet on the road to fill the digital access gap created when the library spaces closed due to COVID-19. Library staff drove to designated locations throughout the city according to a published schedule where two Wi-Fi hotspots were available for at least two hours allowing up to 30 simultaneous free connections. Signs were posted at each location with information on how to connect personal devices to the hotspots.

Working safely from their cars, children and adults were able to complete school assignments, check email, apply for jobs or various benefits and more. The library provided more than 21 hours of service each week over three months to 180 connected devices, easing the stress of being disconnected until libraries were able to reopen.



“Now more than ever, libraries are at the forefront of eradicating digital inequity and digital poverty, and fighting to level the playing field for our communities. At NNPL, we endeavor to meet people where they are. The Mobile Wi-Fi Hotspot Program showcased our agility and allowed us to connect with residents at a time when access to the library was limited during the pandemic.”

— **Sonia Alcántara-Antoine**  
Director



## Tips from the Innovators

- Researching and identifying Wi-Fi and internet deserts within the community is key to meeting digital equity needs. We had a GIS map created that showed which parts of the community had limited internet access and planned our route accordingly.
- Due to the digital divide, it is important to identify new mediums of marketing since the target audience may not be able to access information on the program digitally. For example, we had large sandwich board signs next to the vehicles that provided instructions on how to access the Wi-Fi.
- It is not possible to generate data showing how many users connect to a hotspot. To track the program's success, we counted the number of cars parked near the library vehicle and noted how many individuals/devices we could see in the parked cars. We adjusted our route in real time based on the popularity of certain stops or scheduled times.

## Grand Family Fundamentals Class

Queens Public Library | [queenslibrary.org](http://queenslibrary.org)

Recognizing the many barriers immigrant seniors face, Queens Public Library designed a comprehensive learning program to address the needs of an underserved population – low-income, Mandarin-speaking seniors in Flushing with young grandchildren. The Grand Family Fundamentals program supported the library’s “We Speak Your Language” theme by offering virtual classes on basic English, digital literacy, arts and crafts and cultural competency needed to access social services and bond with grandchildren.

The program integrated resources and services from diverse library departments including Youth Services, the New Americans program, Job and Business Academy and Adult Learning, along with several community partners, to provide a one-stop shop for the target audience. Grandparents learned and used new skills during the virtual classes that would help them navigate community resources and enjoy fulfilling relationships with their grandchildren.



“Many of our senior customers in Flushing are facing language, technology and cultural challenges in addition to the social isolation brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. Grand Family Fundamentals helped them improve their English and learn how to use email, online meeting platforms and apps to connect them to vital services, ease everyday hurdles and, more importantly, strengthen the bond they share with their grandchildren.”

— **Nick Buron**  
Chief Librarian, Senior Vice President



### Tips from the Innovators

- Collaboration is key. Work with other departments within your library and/or other community-based organizations to provide content in their area of expertise.
- Even though there are many tutorials out there, students appreciate when you spend time creating your own tutorials for your virtual classroom.
- Meet each student wherever they are in terms of technology, language and coping skills. Build from there for each student.
- Whenever possible, have a helper in the class (staff member, volunteer, student, etc.) to assist with translation, sharing content and modeling activities.

## The Podcast on Natural Dallas (The P.O.N.D.)

Dallas Public Library | [dallaslibrary2.org](http://dallaslibrary2.org)

The Podcast on Natural Dallas (P.O.N.D.) connects city residents to the natural world in Dallas and the surrounding area. Working with local nature groups, the Dallas Public Library program offers podcasts featuring professionals and serious amateurs sharing their expertise about and passion for the natural world, a newsletter and an annual nature expo. The program is designed to enrich lives by deepening awareness of local nature, build community among nature lovers and increase scientific literacy.

Response to the program has been enthusiastic with nearly 2,000 downloads of the 41 available podcasts over six months, 167 newsletter subscribers and 336 attendees at the 2019 expo.



“The Podcast on Natural Dallas establishes Dallas Public Library as part of the effort to make the city greener by partnering with local nature organizations to help disseminate their information to a broad audience. The P.O.N.D. shows how we can contribute to community efforts not normally associated with the library by acting as convener and general resource. There is nothing we enjoy more than community collaborations in Dallas.”

— **Jo Giudice**  
Director



### Tips from the Innovators

- Don't make the mistake of thinking urban is the opposite of nature. Most states have Master Naturalist Programs with chapters in metropolitan areas. Local universities might have a herpetological or lepidopterist society. Most cities have a city biologist, and state park systems have educational departments.
- When building an audience for a podcast, leverage the followings of the guests you invite. Make sure your guests are sharing information about the podcast on their platforms.
- Joy and curiosity are infectious. Ask questions and book experts that love what they do.

## Liftoff to Learning

Houston Public Library | [houstonlibrary.org](http://houstonlibrary.org)

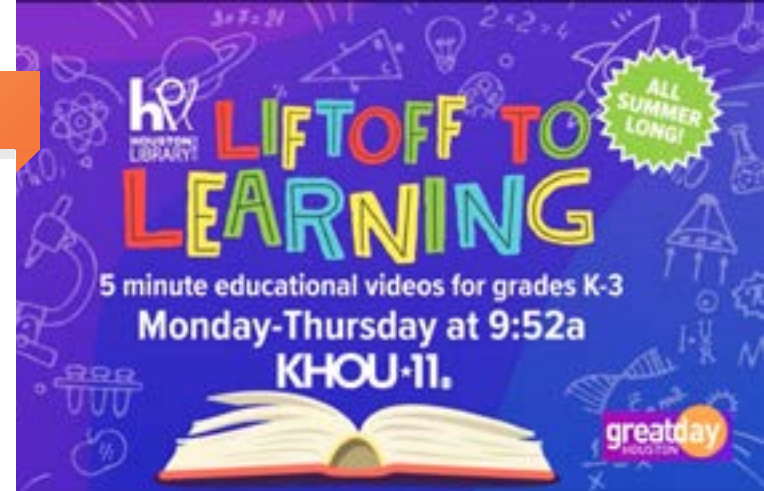
Houston Public Library's Liftoff to Learning is an innovative education program created to reach children in homes that have access to local television but not technology. A Houston first-of-its-kind library-television station partnership, Liftoff to Learning started as a call-to-action to address the learning risks that the COVID-19 pandemic posed to young learners in homes without computers or internet connections.

The initiative mobilized library staff to reinvent programming designed for in-person learning to online education with a local television station as the delivery system. Working with KHOU-TV, library staff produced 48 five-minute videos featuring popular HPL education programs, services and learning resources aimed at kindergarten through third-grade students, parents and teachers. The program raised the library's profile as a community leader, produced a robust video library and enhanced staff skills that will be valuable beyond the pandemic and created a pathway for new library-media partnerships and delivery systems.



“The Houston Public Library is absolutely thrilled to be included among the ULC 2020 Top Innovators! If there is a silver lining in 2020 – the challenges of this year made us even more intentional in our quest to provide equitable services – especially for early learners and their caregivers who have little or no access to computers or Wi-Fi. KHOU-TV was the perfect community partner to help us reach thousands of Houston households with essential early literacy and STEM programming during this unprecedented time.”

— **Dr. Rhea Brown Lawson**  
Executive Director



## Tips from the Innovators

- To reach customers in homes that have access to local TV but not computers, start by reaching out to TV stations in the local area who have aired positive stories on the library or that have a community component to their broadcast programming.
- Another good place to start is with the public broadcast media station in your city, as their mission is to support educational public programming. Also consider your local government entity's municipal channel.
- Staff have many talents and the creation of imaginative and engaging programs to support television and/or online broadcasting requires the use of them all and a lot of it! From project management to script writing to editing, there are many opportunities for staff to use their talents in new ways that will allow them to grow their portfolios and their passion for the work they do in general.

## STEM Challenge Yo'Self

San Francisco Public Library | [sfpl.org](http://sfpl.org)

STEM Challenge Yo'Self is a new library web series designed to help budding scientists and engineers practice scientific methods from the safety of their computer screens using household items. The web series aired weekly during the San Francisco Public Library's redesigned Summer Stride program which had featured nearly 300 STEM events in previous summers, each crafted by neighborhood libraries. When COVID-19 forced cancellation of live events, a team of youth librarians created the nine-part web series in less than three weeks to be ready for Summer Stride and offered city-wide.

STEM Challenge Yo'Self quickly earned loyal followers with more than 7,000 views over the summer. And, because the programs were available on the library's social media channels and the website along with pickups by the YMCA and other community resources, STEM Challenge Yo'Self reached a much wider audience than traditional summer learning events and provided a foundation for similar online STEM offerings in the fall.



"SFPL's Youth Service Library staff demonstrated their ingenuity and passion for public service during this pandemic. Instead of being limited by distance and technology, our staff and a dedicated group of teens rose to the occasion and created an exceptional body of work that is both creative and altruistic in spirit. Everyone gained valuable skills and insight through this experience, and we look forward to expanding on our success in the future."

— **Michael Lambert**  
City Librarian



## Tips from the Innovators

- Set the stage ahead of time — discuss expectations, gauge level of comfort with online video format, be generous with space and time.
- Be open to teens' expertise and lean into letting teens lead.
- Use icebreakers as inspiration, keep to topic and leave it open for brainstorming by teens and library staff.
- Discuss community impact, audience and how-to's for utilizing library resources.
- Offer templates, timelines, feedback and guidance so teens feel supported.
- Provide resources for inspiration and point out tools to complete projects (i.e., open-source software and basic film techniques).

## A Design Thinking Approach to Crisis Response

Calgary Public Library | calgarylibrary.ca

Calgary Public Library drew on its commitment to design thinking to ensure continuity of service when COVID-19 disrupted library operations and to position the organization for a new future. The overall approach helped the library quickly adapt to the impact of the pandemic by focusing on crisis communication, urgent community supports, critical baseline service and staffing and a path to reopening that enabled some locations to open 10 days after the lockdown was lifted.

An interdepartmental virtual charrette was used to identify key community needs which led to 11 critical projects and new interdisciplinary teams to refine and launch services safely while the pandemic continued. Key areas that supported the library's plans included health and safety measures, communication methods, reopening models and new service ideas. Outcomes of this strategic work include a 33% increase in digital circulation, nearly 120,000 views of library-at-home content and transition to a fine-free system as an urgent community support.



“Calgary Public Library is proud to be the recipient of this award, particularly as it recognizes the work of our entire team mustering a coordinated, impactful and timely response to a community-wide crisis. This response involved rapid prototyping and piloting and continuous iteration and learning. Leveraging our team's strengths in strategically aligned design thinking, a key success was keeping the post-pandemic future front of mind in responding to present day needs: deliberately contemplating how what we are building today is preparing us for a different library world that will not simply be a return to the traditions of the past.”

— **Mark Asberg**  
CEO



### Tips from the Innovators

- Formalize a temporary approval structure to accelerate the flow of pilot services. This should complement your crisis communication approval process.
- Assemble a cross-departmental group to define urgent community needs and ideate potential solutions.
- Create form-focused working groups to develop and quickly mobilize select tactics to test and refine.
- When considering implementation, keep in mind both short- and long-term implications to manage capacity, packaging and overlap of services and sustainability. You don't want to overwhelm staff or the public.

## Know the Need, Deploy the Solution – Learning Pods

Chesterfield County Public Library | [library.chesterfield.gov](http://library.chesterfield.gov)

When COVID-19 forced county schools to shift to virtual learning, Chesterfield County Public Library anticipated the need for safe learning spaces with technology access to support struggling students. Despite significant COVID-related budget cuts and furloughs, staff teams mapped out small reservable spaces in library buildings to address new learning needs, rehired and recruited trained staff and developed safety and usage policies and a marketing plan.

Four weeks later, all 10 library branches opened with newly designed learning pods that provide safe spaces, access to library technology and skilled staff. During the first three weeks of operation, the pods were booked for 1,627 hours of meetings (almost 68 days) serving more than 475 students, educators and virtual learners. The library has partnered with the local food bank to provide meals at the learning pods for students experiencing food insecurity.



“CCPL’s learning pod initiative is a visionary and bold contribution towards the health and well-being of our community. Staff overcame the fear and confusion presented by COVID-19 to serve our customers in ways that were meaningful and impactful. They rapidly designed, developed and implemented an entirely new service in response to community needs, while continuously evaluating outcomes and ensuring safe and secure conditions.”

— **Michael R. Mabe**  
Director of Library Services



## Tips from the Innovators

- Use technology and collaborative tools to reach as much of the organization as possible and maximize your message – traditional hierarchical communication pathways are too time-consuming, and can leave room for misinterpretation when time is short.
- Set up your evaluation parameters at the start of the project and allow them to inform your program development. Commit to frequent assessment so you can rapidly iterate.
- When launching a new service, think about data collection at the beginning, and try to collect from automated systems (vs. hand tallying) whenever possible.
- Think about data from a point of, *what sorts of decision axes are available?* In other words, don’t collect data for its own sake, but to try to inform concrete decision points. In this project, for instance, opening hours were an important decision point, so we looked hard at when meetings were being booked.



## Community Street Sheet

Kansas City Public Library | [kclibrary.org](http://kclibrary.org)

With the pandemic-related closing of Kansas City Public Library's physical locations, reaching vulnerable populations became a challenge at a time when connections and library support were more important than ever. To fill the need, the library's community resource team created a printed resource sheet – an old-fashioned but reliable communication tool – to reach people who don't have access to technology, the internet and digital media.

The Street Sheet provides information about critical resources such as shelters, meal services, COVID-19 testing and other health services to people who are experiencing homelessness, are unemployed and not in school. The sheet is updated weekly and distributed to more than 200 community agencies, police officers and security guards.

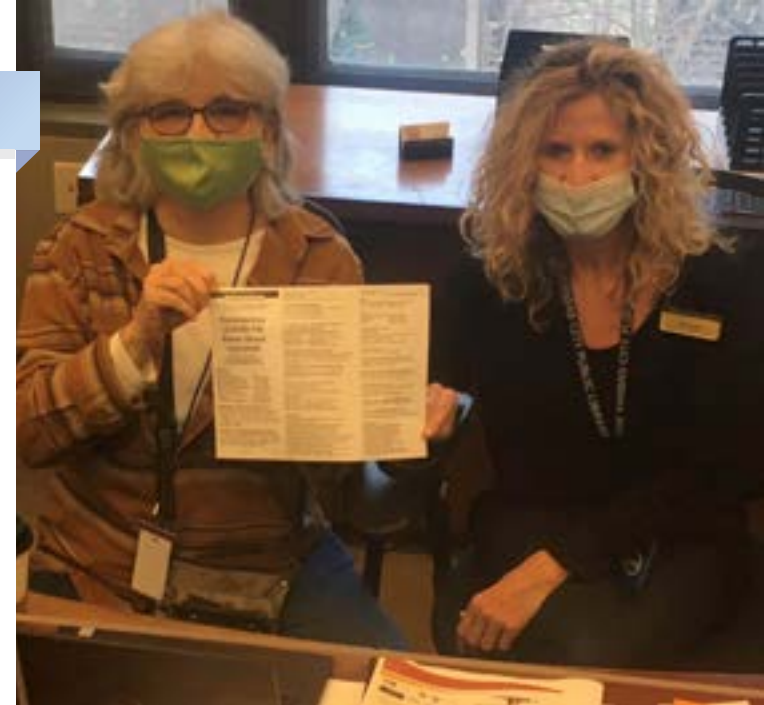
Key to Street Sheet's success is an innovative collaboration among a well-developed network of community partners who contribute up-to-date information about available resources and facilitate broad distribution to people who are often hard to find. The Street Sheet ensures that Kansas City's most vulnerable populations are familiar with a broad menu of essential resources and reaffirms the library's commitment as a vital community connector.



"We are very proud of the impact of the Street Sheet — it is more than information, it is an invaluable community connector. The Street Sheet is a prime example of how our Community Resource Team responds to the needs of our most underserved patrons. It is a key part of our continuing effort 'to meet people where they are.'"

— **John Herron**  
Director & Chief Executive

— **Mary Olive Joyce**  
Director of Library Outreach & Community Engagement



## Tips from the Innovators

- The communication of information is the key — ask, listen and provide according to the need. The Street Sheet is a product of established relationships with our patrons experiencing homelessness and trusted community partners.
- Design the Street Sheet from the position of an individual living on the street. What would their very basic needs be at this time? And keep them current.
- Ask community partners what they need. The Street Sheet was a request by the Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness early on in the pandemic.

## Pride at PGCMLS

Prince George's County Memorial Library System | [pgcmls.info](http://pgcmls.info)

A systemwide staff team at Prince George's County Memorial Library System led an expansion of LGBTQ+ online content, programs and special projects to address a longstanding deficit in support to the LGBTQ+ community. The primary goal of the initiative was to reset the library as a visibly welcoming home for LGBTQ+ Prince George's residents.

While there were significant quantitative accomplishments such as 14 systemwide events, an LGBTQ+ pride heritage web page and a crowdsourced virtual pride quilt, the qualitative outcomes were more significant. The library's pride programs were highlighted by local elected officials, partner agencies and libraries throughout the state, and parents shared testimonials of how the programs taught them better ways to support their LGBTQ+ children.



“Prince George's County Memorial Library System affirms its role as an essential social impact organization with equity, diversity, inclusion and social justice at the forefront of all programs and services. Pride at PGCMLS is a staff-led initiative to focus on advancing the Library's systemwide, proactive approach to demonstrating inclusion to increase the sense of belonging for all community members. In addition to year-round LGBTQ+ programs, staff have curated online resources through the Heritage Hub to celebrate Prince George's County's diversity and the intersectionality of different identities, making staff and customers Prince George's Proud.”

— **Roberta Phillips**  
CEO



## Tips from the Innovators

- LGBTQ+ visibility needs to be part of a library's overall programming, outreach and inclusion strategy. It can't just be a focus during Pride Month or LGBTQ+ History Month.
- Demonstrating support for the LGBTQ+ community touches all areas of the library, including staff training/resources, collections development, youth services, social services, communications and marketing.
- Be prepared for customer reactions that do not align with your library's commitment to inclusion and equity. All staff, board members and government stakeholders should have a clear sense of why the Library is proactively supporting the LGBTQ+ community. This requires year-round messaging and dialogue about equity, diversity and inclusion values and the communications team being prepared with talking points that are not defensive but focus on the importance of being an inclusive environment.

## Drive-Thru Services

St. Louis County Library | slcl.org

St. Louis County Library's parking lots became distribution hubs to meet community needs safely during the region's COVID-19 shutdown. The library drew on existing and new partnerships and its stature as a major regional convener to distribute food and other urgent supplies in the community including diapers, hygiene products, eyeglasses, STEM crafts and activity kits, books, masks and other PPE. In addition, the library provided free Wi-Fi access in parking lots for people without home internet. Resources were distributed three times a week at 10 library branches in areas with the greatest needs.

The scope of the library drive-thru services is remarkable – 900,000 meals distributed between March 27 and July 13 which is 40 times more than the number of meals provided in the previous school year, 450,000 diapers and nearly 50,000 personal hygiene kits. Overall, St. Louis County Library distributed two million products to help make the COVID-19 shutdown more bearable for individuals in need.



“St. Louis County Library stepped up and took an active role during the COVID-19 pandemic. Together with our community partners, we came up with creative ways to support our community during this crisis, including using our parking lots to deliver critical services such as meals, diapers and period products. We are an organization that likes to start with yes and work back from there. We can't only be a place where people check out books — we have to keep evolving and responding to community needs particularly during a pandemic.”

— **Kristen Sorth**  
Director and CEO



## Tips from the Innovators

- Start with saying *yes* and then work backward from there. Doing so removes barriers that may prevent a timely implementation or moving forward at all.
- Work with community partners who are experts at serving their clients and know what is needed.
- Ask for feedback from your employees who will be delivering the services and make changes based on their perspective. They are on the front line and can see what works and what doesn't.
- Develop the plans with the public in mind. In our case, we considered how the public would access the services and how we could make it convenient, accessible and safe for them and for our employees. This applies to everything we deliver outside of our buildings from meals, to diapers, to period products, to COVID-19 testing and flu shots.

## 3-D PPE Printing Program

Contra Costa County Library | [ccclib.org](http://ccclib.org)

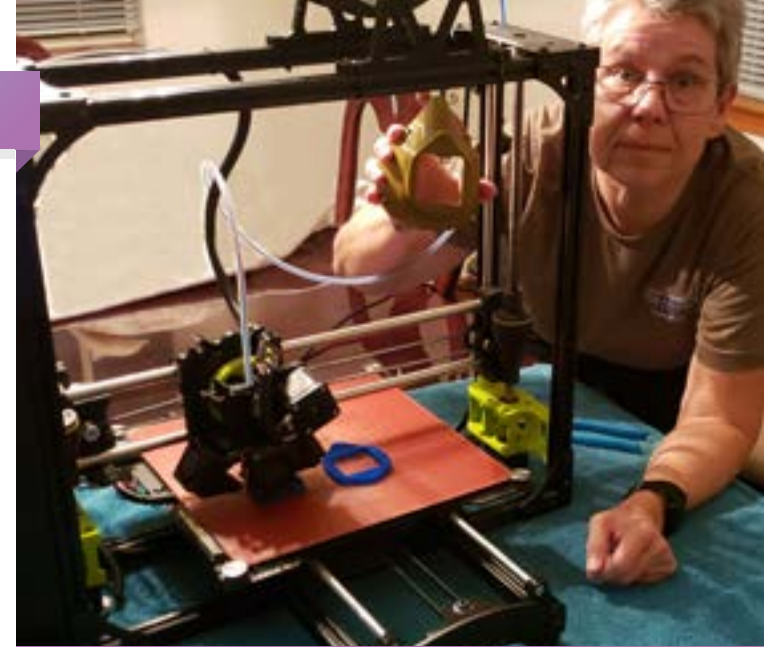
Library system 3-D printers helped meet an urgent need for medical masks at the county hospital and clinic system after a shipment from the national stockpile arrived with faulty elastic bands. The Contra Costa County Library dedicated several 3-D printers running nearly 24 hours a day to produce reusable “clips” with new elastic bands to repair the faulty masks.

The library system produced more than 3,000 sets of clips that were used on more than 200,000 previously defective masks. The library also produced 150 “Montana masks” which are full masks printed on a 3-D printer with a slot for inserting a cloth filter to extend the life of the mask. The printer files are available at no cost to any community maker interested in assisting in mask production for county or community use.



“When this innovation was launched the world was experiencing a global shortage of personal protective equipment. This project allowed us to serve the community and help the County by creating PPE for essential workers on the front lines. These are unprecedented times, and we are proud that the library and our dedicated and talented staff could step up and answer the call for help.”

— **Alison McKee**  
Interim County Librarian



## Tips from the Innovators

- 3-D printing is a great way to cheaply make prototypes or large quantities of small plastic parts, and — with careful planning and coordination — 3-D printers are a great asset for meeting the need for PPE parts.
- It is important that someone familiar with 3-D printing coordinate with the client to help design parts to maximize the capabilities of the 3-D printer, and to guide the client to have realistic expectations of what can and cannot be done. Not all part shapes can be made on 3-D printers, and printing of parts can take a long time. Also, part drawings and/or specifications must be carefully converted to the CAD drawing files that control the printing process.

## Find Financial Assistance

King County Library System | [kcls.org](http://kcls.org)

King County Library System became a vital resource navigator and a source of hope for residents facing financial loss because of COVID-19. Sudden changes in economic status – a lost job, a long-term furlough, failing business, reduced work hours — left many in the community unsure about where to go for help or how to navigate the complex and rapidly changing web of relief programs. As experts in connecting people with trusted information, King County librarians were well equipped to help people find and learn about the financial resources that could meet their specific needs.

Patrons use an online form or a phone call to describe their need, ranging from small business loans to unemployment claims to assistance with rent, food or tuition. A member of the library's financial assistance navigator team reviews relevant programs and responds with a customized list of resources and referrals in the patron's preferred language. In the first six months of the program, the library helped 150 patrons find financial assistance for small business, basic needs, unemployment compensation and tuition funds or career resources. Most individuals requested multiple kinds of assistance. Patrons say the resource lists not only helped them make new connections, but also renewed their sense of optimism and hope during these challenging times.



“Find Financial Assistance is an economic lifeline for those who have been financially impacted by COVID-19. The service offers compassionate and customized one-on-one assistance by phone or email, and connects residents to critical resources and information. This program illustrates the importance of libraries during both good times and challenging ones.”

— **Lisa G. Rosenblum**  
Executive Director



## Tips from the Innovators

- Plan to follow up with patrons a few weeks after they use the service. You can find out which resources worked best for them, and hear their success stories. Their feedback will help you improve your service and communicate your impact.
- Give patrons open space to elaborate on what kind of services they need.
- Don't dismiss advisory support for small businesses. Even if it is essential to get financial help as soon as possible, business advisors may be able to help patrons look forward and plan ahead.
- Encourage people to be persistent in their attempts to contact organizations and access resources. Basic needs resources are limited and demand is high, so it is normal not to hear back after the first try. This may mean leaving multiple messages or sending multiple emails until they receive a response.

## Carlson Center for Intellectual Property

Rochester Public Library | roccitylibrary.org

The Carlson Center for Intellectual Property is a patent and trademark resource center at the Central Library of Rochester & Monroe County which helps independent inventors and entrepreneurs advance their creative ideas without needing to hire an intellectual property attorney. The library works with the Rochester Institute of Technology's Simone Center for Entrepreneurship and Venture Creations incubator to provide expert search for their students and staff on site. A partnership with an intellectual property lawyer provides free consultations.

Rochester Public Library is one of two public libraries in the country with a Patent Virtual Assistance Center that allows individuals to meet virtually with a patent examiner, cutting down on office actions that can slow down progress on a new venture and lead to increased fees.



“The work of the Carlson Center for Intellectual Property at the Central Library of Rochester & Monroe County supports the rich culture of innovation and creation in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. Expert librarians provide the resources needed by students, entrepreneurs, inventors and the business community, wherever and whenever they are needed, allowing those customers to thrive and succeed in a competitive marketplace.”

— **Patricia Uttaro**  
Director

# CARLSON CENTER FOR Intellectual Property

Chester F. Carlson

## Tips from the Innovators

- A common misconception about patent searching is that it will be easy, and that it will be complete once you search Google for similar inventions. People are often surprised to learn that an invention can be granted a patent even if it's not found on Google or sold in stores. A comprehensive patent search includes looking for results as far back as the first granted patent in 1790. Prior art includes anything, even if it's 230 years old.
- Access to an attorney is another obstacle our inventors face. Attorney's fees are steep, and the patent process is long. It is recommended by the Patent and Trademark Office that you hire an intellectual property attorney to help you write your Claims portion of a patent application. If this portion is written incorrectly, the inventor runs the risk of disclosing too much or laying claim to something that is not part of their invention.

## 2020 ULC Innovations Initiative Participating Libraries

Including the Top Innovator and Honorable Mention award winners highlighted in this document, ULC was honored to receive 260 entries for our 2020 Innovations Initiative from 93 major urban library systems across North America. [View all 2020 entries at urbanlibraries.org.](http://urbanlibraries.org)

Alameda County Library	Dayton Metro Library	Las Vegas Clark County Library District	Roanoke County Public Library
Alexandria Library	DC Public Library	Los Angeles Public Library	Rochester Public Library
Allen County Public Library	DeKalb County Public Library	Louisville Free Public Library	Salt Lake City Public Library
Anne Arundel County Public Library	Do Space	Madison Public Library	Salt Lake County Library
Anythink Libraries	Douglas County Libraries	Mandel Public Library of West Palm Beach	San Antonio Public Library
Austin Public Library	Edmonton Public Library	Markham Public Library	San Diego Public Library
Baltimore County Public Library	Enoch Pratt Free Library	Memphis Public Libraries	San Francisco Public Library
Barrie Public Library	Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library	Miami-Dade Public Library System	San José Public Library
Birmingham Public Library	Fairfax County Public Library	Mid-Continent Public Library	Santa Clara County Library District
Boston Public Library	Forsyth County Public Library	Milton Public Library	Sarasota County Public Libraries
Brooklyn Public Library	Frisco Public Library	Nashville Public Library	Scottsdale Public Library
Broward County Library	Grand Rapids Public Library	New York Public Library	Skokie Public Library
Calgary Public Library	Gwinnett County Public Library	Newport News Public Library	Sonoma County Library
Carlsbad City Library	Hamilton Public Library	Oak Park Public Library	St. Charles City-County Library
Cedar Rapids Public Library	Hennepin County Library	Ottawa Public Library	St. Louis County Library
Central Arkansas Library System	Houston Public Library	Palm Beach County Library System	St. Louis Public Library
Charlotte Mecklenburg Library	Jefferson County Public Library	Palo Alto City Library	Stark Library
Chattanooga Public Library	Jersey City Free Public Library	Pima County Public Library	Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library
Chesterfield County Public Library	Kalamazoo Public Library	Pioneer Library System	Toledo Lucas County Public Library
Chicago Public Library	Kansas City Public Library	Prince George's County Memorial Library System	Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library
Cincinnati and Hamilton County Public Library	Kent District Library	Queens Public Library	Toronto Public Library
Columbus Metropolitan Library	King County Library System	Richland Library	Tulsa City-County Library
Contra Costa County Library	LA County Library		Wichita Public Library
Dallas Public Library	La Porte County Public Library		

## About the Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and action tank of North America's leading public library systems. We drive cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions for the 21st century. We identify significant challenges facing today's communities and develop new tools and techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, workforce and economic development, digital equity and race and social equity.

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