



ULC Civic Makers Lab Info Session

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Civic Makers Lab Team



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Today's Agenda

1. Overview
2. Program Experience
3. Application & Timeline
4. Financials & Reporting
5. Q&A



Overview



Overview

The Civic Makers Lab is a grant and peer-learning program that equips librarians to serve as civic learning facilitators, and empowers young adults ages 18-24 to be active contributors to their communities. Through experiential civic learning (the process of acquiring civic knowledge and skills through action), libraries will build new pathways for young adults into civic life, rooted in curiosity, connection, and community problem-solving, rather than partisanship.

Why This Matters

Civic education is receiving renewed attention because deep political division, misinformation, and low trust in government have raised questions about the health of U.S. democracy.

- Public confidence in government is at historically low levels
- Young people, in particular, widely feel politics is failing to meet the nation's challenges.
- Many Americans lack basic knowledge about how government works and the rights protected by the Constitution, which further weakens democratic participation.

Why This Matters (cont'd)

- Pandemic-era remote schooling reduced in-person interaction opportunities.
- Many young adults report anxiety about speaking publicly or presenting ideas.
- Employers and educators are noticing lower confidence in live collaboration.
- This reflects a broader **soft-skills gap**, not intelligence or motivation.

Experiential Civic Learning for American Democracy

“Education that delivers civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions and virtues that support participation in our constitutional democracy AND that is carried out by actively practicing democracy”

Table 1. Experiential Civic Learning Goals and Objectives

Primary Goals	
Build civic knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Core civic knowledge, including about the institutions of constitutional democracy, the philosophical foundations of self-government, changes in American institutions over time, and the many histories that weave together into a shared story of the American people• Awareness of community relationships and resources• Awareness of public service career opportunities
Develop civic skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ethical decision making• Civil discourse and conflict resolution• Career and college skills, such as communication and teamwork
Foster civic dispositions and virtues	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Self-efficacy and agency• Reduced apathy and cynicism• Optimism, and a sense of belonging in community and country• Decreased prejudice/increased tolerance• Empathy and understanding
Secondary Goals	
Strengthen constitutional democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reductions in affective polarization allow for bridge-building• Decreased civic empowerment gap• Increased civic engagement for young people with school, community, and government in meaningful way• Participatory citizenship

In library settings....

Listen First: Community Story Sprints

- Participants practice listening to community members in the library, reflect on what they hear, and share key themes through a simple poster or presentation, building empathy and understanding.

Civics Circle at the Library

- Guided conversations help participants explore a community question, practice respectful dialogue, and understand different perspectives without needing to agree.

Library in Service to Community

- Participants complete a small project that benefits the library or its users while reflecting on who it serves and why the work matters.

In library settings....

Map Our Community

- Participants gather stories and information about local places and resources, then create a community map that highlights assets, gaps, and shared experiences.

Library Democracy Lab

- Participants take part in a mock civic process—such as a town meeting or budget decision—working in roles to weigh tradeoffs and reach a group decision, followed by a short reflection connecting the experience to real community decision-making.

Civic Creators Club

- An ongoing group where young adults meet at the library to discuss community issues and create small projects or events, building leadership, collaboration, and a sense of belonging over time.

Objectives

- Train librarians in experiential civic learning
- Expand civic learning opportunities for young adults
- Strengthen local civic ecosystems through partnerships
- Build a national network of civic-minded libraries
- Generate new, replicable models of civic engagement

Two-Phase Project

- **May-Sept. 2026: Micro-pilots**
 - *A micro-pilot is a fast, low-cost, real-world experiment designed to test a new program or service before full implementation.*
- **Dec. 2026-Sept. 2027: Full program implementation**



Program Experience



8-10 Selected Libraries Will Receive:

- \$15,000 of program support funds
- Support for one staff member to travel to two 1.5-day in-person convenings hosted by ULC
- Skill-building for staff focused on topics including young adult engagement and co-creation, civic program/service design, facilitation, and stakeholder alignment
- Access to a national network of libraries implementing civic learning models
- Access to expert guidance, including office hours with ULC staff

8-10 Selected Libraries Will Be Expected To:

- Implement young adult civic learning experiences such as simulations, community design challenges, project-based civic action, and civic awareness campaigns, including a micro-pilot and at least one larger project
- Attend two 1.5-day in-person convenings and monthly virtual cohort meetings from June 2026 to November 2027
- Participate in ULC-led evaluation and grant reporting activities

Testimonials from Past ULC Cohorts

*"The presenters were wonderful and I enjoyed [learning] from the cohort members' challenges and experiences through the activities. Hearing directly from the youth panel was **empowering and valuable**."*

*"you made us all feel so special. thank you for the social dinner, the experts from all over and **thank you for the kindness and daily check-ins**."*

*"**It was excellent!** I can't think of any improvements."*





Application & Timeline

Application & Program Timeline

- The application is currently live
- **March 4, 2026:** Application closes
- **March 30, 2026:** Libraries will be informed
- **May 2026 – October 2027:** Cohort program for selected libraries
 - Monthly virtual meetings
 - In-person convenings: October 2026 & April 2027

Eligibility

- Library must be a ULC member
- Library must be based in the United States

Application

Access now



Application: The ULC Civic Makers Lab

Thank you for your interest in the Civic Makers Lab. Applications are **due March 4, 2026** and selected libraries will be informed by March 30, 2026.

Contact ULC Senior Program Manager Katie Sullivan with any questions at ksullivan@urbanlibraries.org.

When you submit this form, it will not automatically collect your details like name and email address unless you provide it yourself.

* Required

Library and Staff Information

1. Library System *

Enter your answer

2. City or County *

Enter your answer

Selection Criteria

- Selection criteria will include:
 - Community need
 - Staff capacity
 - Local civic ecosystem and partnerships
 - Commitment to young adult programming
- Please be honest - we are looking for a diverse range of experience levels, geographies, library sizes, and other attributes.



Financials & Reporting



Payment & Reporting Schedule

- **July 1, 2026:** Micro-pilot plans and budgets due
- **July 15, 2026:** Micro-pilot funds distributed (\$2,500)
- **September 30, 2026:** Micro-pilot must be completed
- **November 15, 2026:** Full program plans and budgets due
- **December 1, 2026:** Remaining program funds distributed (\$12,500)
- **September 2027:** Library program must have been completed and all funds used

Additional Financial Details

- No final budget or actuals will be required unless you significantly change your project
- Inallowable expenses
 - No alcohol
 - Otherwise, follow your library's internal guidelines
- Be sure to spend down all funds by the end of the project

Program Evaluation

- ULC will manage a national program evaluation, led by ULC Research & Data Analyst Corissa Goodrich
- Participating libraries will be asked to contribute to the evaluation through methods such as completing benchmark assessments and participating in interviews
- Optional survey tools for use with program participants and partners will be provided



Q&A



Thank you!

Contact:

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