



2026

URBAN
LIBRARIES
COUNCIL

INNOVATIONS

OPENING ON AUGUST 3, 2026



2026 INNOVATIONS

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ULC's annual Innovations Initiative showcases out-of-the-box thinking and successful library programs that revolutionize the field. Through each year's submissions, ULC members share groundbreaking projects that build awareness of the library, further education for people of all ages, address inclusion and digital equity, prioritize health and wellness, enhance strategic internal operations and staff management, and champion the importance of workforce and economic development.

Entries for this year's Innovations Initiative will be accepted from August 3 to September 18.

Submitted applications will be published on the ULC website throughout the fall.

This document provides an overview of the 2025 Innovations categories. An independent panel of judges will select Top Innovator and Honorable Mention award winners in each category, and winners will be announced this December.

Explore Categories

ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS

EDUCATION: CHILDREN AND ADULTS

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

LIBRARY OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

[CLICK HERE TO REVIEW INNOVATIONS
FAQs AND SUBMISSION TIPS](#)

Advocacy and Awareness

Share your library's innovations that help you advocate for your library, **increasing the awareness of the library as a vital community resource and the importance of its many programs**, such as the right to read freely, civic engagement resources, and the library's overall role as a community hub.

Examples of library projects to highlight in an application include:

- Storytelling and how you communicate the impact of library services and programs in the community to external audiences.
- Strategic brand extensions and rebranding initiatives.
- Advocacy or fundraising campaigns.
- Initiatives that build policies and actions around democracy and intellectual freedom in our communities.
- Civic engagement and voter education and / or services.

Advocacy and Awareness



Education: Children and Adults

Share your library's innovations that increase access to **high-quality learning opportunities for all children and adults**, such as how the library advances personal and family learning goals and develops literacy in all forms, for all ages.

Examples of library projects to highlight in an application include:

- Education and community engagement partnerships with PK-12 school leaders, school districts and community organizations.
- Summer Learning programs, as well as youth mentorship, internship and leadership initiatives for teens and young adults.
- Trauma-informed programming, caregiver workshops and learning circles.
- Adult education for reading, media, digital, financial and other types of literacy.
- Early literacy programs and partnerships that employ principles of the science of reading



Education: Children and Adults



Equity and Inclusion

Share your library's innovations that address **systemic inequity, digital inclusion and social justice** within the library and across the community.

Examples of library projects to highlight in an application include:

- Partnerships that enhance the library's reach to under-resourced audiences or offer much-needed resources at no cost.
- Community engagement initiatives, partnerships and programming that lift up those in marginalized communities.
- Organizing and strategically planning for anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion outcomes.
- Partnerships to bring high-speed broadband directly to all households to support community-wide digital literacy and access.
- Success stories of equitable library design.

Equity and Inclusion



Health and Wellness

Share your library's innovations that help library staff and customers **better understand and make informed decisions about personal and public health issues**. This can be accomplished through educational programs, social services/partnerships, mental health services and other holistic wellness programming.

Examples of library projects to highlight in an application include:

- Programming and community engagement partnerships to support customer well-being.
- Mental health resources and support for staff dealing with trauma in the library and/or through lived experience.
- Programs and partnerships to address public health and public safety.
- Programming that highlights the library's sustainability efforts.
- Initiatives that successfully couple library usage and physical activity.
- Initiatives that reimagine approaches to library safety and security.

Health and Wellness



Library Operations and Management

Share your library's innovations that **advance the operations, strategy and culture of the system.** This can be accomplished through thoughtful decision-making, safety and security strategy, organizational change, leadership trainings, performance management and reporting, impact assessment and all-around process improvements.

Examples of library projects to highlight in an application include:

- Internal/crisis communications systems and tools.
- Staff programming for well-being and professional development.
- Leadership and organization benchmarking and strategic planning.
- Strategic planning informed by data collection and community engagement.
- Data-driven evaluation and impact assessment systems.
- Administration of business practices to create the highest level of efficiency possible within an organization.
- Facility changes to reduce carbon emissions and enhance energy efficiency.

Library Operations and Management



Workforce and Economic Development

Share your library's innovations that promote **equitable economic mobility and opportunity** for all local workers, jobseekers, entrepreneurs and business owners.

Examples of library projects to highlight in an application include:

- Entrepreneurship and advanced digital skill-building.
- Professional coaching and certification programs.
- Business challenges and fellowships.
- Unique applications of a library's makerspace
- Small business and entrepreneurship incubators
- Career services offered to communities who may need extra support, such as people previously incarcerated or those with disabilities
- Community job fairs and expos.



Workforce and Economic Development





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Applications accepted August 3 to September 18

Honorees announced in November 2026

FAQ, Application Form, Previous Years' Entries and More:

www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations