Building Equity: Amplify Summer Learning
Summer Learning Benchmarks

These benchmarks provide libraries with core aspirational activities to drive quality summer learning programming and deepen equity and access within current summer learning programs.

ULC's Building Equity: Amplify Summer Learning Cohort

The Urban Libraries Council's Building Equity: Amplify Summer Learning initiative supports engaging summertime learning opportunities for middle school youth who historically have been excluded from STEM and literacy opportunities (e.g., based on race, income, gender, and ability). In partnership with the National Summer Learning Association (NLSA), ULC seeks to support libraries in building equity through deepened summer learning targeting these youth. Steered by a peer-learning cohort of 23 library teams from across North America, the goals are to position libraries as critical community anchors for learning, accelerate the public library's role in summer and reinforce the library as a place in the community for equity and inclusion. Typically, among all library offerings, summertime programming draws the largest number of people to public library spaces and outreach events. Redesigning and enhancing summer learning allows libraries to take a more active role in claiming our space in the learning ecosystem of our communities.

About the Benchmarks

Developed in collaboration with ULC's Building Equity: Amplify Summer Learning Cohort, these Summer Learning Benchmarks support public libraries in strengthening learning and expanding equity and access into the design and delivery. Public libraries have historically offered summer reading opportunities to bolster literacy for students in their communities. As public libraries continue to play this integral role in the learning ecosystem, library staff will broaden their focus from summer reading to summer learning and honor the multiple styles and modalities of learning to increase the appeal of and access to library programs.

These benchmarks, informed by the peer-learning cohort and NSLA's Comprehensive Assessment of Summer Programs (CASP) Guide, present a set of best practices for public library staff members to craft quality, equitable and sustainable summer learning programs. As libraries assess the impact of their participation in this program, they can identify opportunities for growth related to their local community needs and define future impact.

Summer Learning Benchmarks

ASSESSMENT STRUCTURE

The Assessment is divided into three strategic areas: Leadership, Organizational Management and Programs and Services.

Strategic Area 1: Leadership: The Leadership strategic area encompasses the key activities leaders need to take to initiate summer learning across their organizations. Benchmarks and indicators in this section are:

- **Benchmark 1: Library Leadership and Sustainability**
  - 1.1　　Library Director/CEO Communication
  - 1.2　　Mission and Goals
  - 1.3　　Program Sustainability

- **Benchmark 2: Stakeholder Engagement**
  - 2.1　　Stakeholder Identification
  - 2.2　　Partner Engagement

Strategic Area 2: Organizational Management: The Organizational Management strategic area gauges the library's practices, policies and staffing structure. It also measures awareness of community needs and other activities required for building staff competencies and growth. Benchmarks and indicators in this section are:

- **Benchmark 3: Staff Expertise and Support**
  - 3.1　　Staff Recruitment
  - 3.2　　Staff Engagement
  - 3.3　　Staff Support
  - 3.4　　Staff Outcomes

- **Benchmark 4: Community Engagement**
  - 4.1　　Community Needs Assessment
  - 4.2　　Program Recruitment

4.3   Program Marketing

- **Benchmark 5: Program Evaluation and Continuous Improvement**
  5.1   Outcome Goals
  5.2   Quality Improvement
  5.3   Program Measurement

Strategic Area 3: Programs and Services: The Programs and Services strategic area considers the library's services, programs and tools for creating quality summer programming. The benchmark and indicators in this section are:

- **Benchmark 6: Program Design and Implementation**
  6.1   Program Planning
  6.2   Program Development
  6.3   Program Activities
  6.4   Family Engagement
  6.5   Program Schedule
  6.6   Program Environment

- **Benchmark 7: Program and Service Formats**
  7.1   Program Schedule and Environment

SUMMER LEARNING BENCHMARK DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Area 1: Leadership
Key activities leaders need to take to initiate summer learning across their library systems.

Benchmark 1: Library Leadership and Sustainability

1.1 Library Director/CEO Communication

		Yes	No	In Progress
1.1.1	The library director/CEO has established the role of summer learning as a priority within the library.			
1.1.2	The summer program is included in long-term planning for the library system, including being demonstrated in the budget.			
1.1.3	Library leadership and program staff have presented information formally and informally regarding summer learning loss and the program to the: • Library Staff • Library Board • Community Partners • Funders			
1.1.4	The library director/CEO has identified key personnel who lead summer learning initiatives in the library and includes them in the planning and regular presentations to stakeholders about summer learning.			

1.2 Mission and Goals

		Yes	No	In Progress
1.2.1	The library's summer program has a clear overarching vision grounded in the needs of its community.			
1.2.2	The library sets annual summer program goals for the organization that drive a continuous cycle of evaluation and quality improvement.			

Benchmark 2: Stakeholder Engagement

2.1 Stakeholder Identification

		Yes	No	In Progress
2.1.1	The library program defines key stakeholders that may include identified groups from the following, and/or others: • Youth • Elected Officials • Families/Caregivers • School Leaders • Program Staff • Community Leaders • Program Partners			

2.2 Partner Engagement

		Yes	No	In Progress
2.2.1	The library builds collaborative summer partnerships with entities that complement its mission and expand its access to information and expertise.			
2.2.2	The library identifies key partners at all levels, allocates time to partnership development and includes partners in year-round planning. Partners include: • Community partners • School Systems • Out-of-School Program Providers • STEM and cultural content providers • National-level organizations			
2.2.3	Partners and the program library team are given time to reflect & evaluate each year.			
2.2.4	The library identifies what it can offer a potential partner and prioritizes ongoing relationship building in partnerships with realistic goals recognizing and including time allocated to partnership development.			
2.2.5	Agreements are in place for partnerships at all levels and clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of each partner as well as the distribution of resources.			
2.2.6	Program staff and partner staff communicate the program goals, culture, and shared language to address consistency surrounding behavior management, including restorative practices.			

Strategic Area 2: Organizational Management

Practices, policies, staffing, awareness of community needs and other activities required for assuring competency and progress.

Benchmark 3: Staff Expertise and Support

3.1 Staff Recruitment & Expertise

		Yes	No	In Progress
3.1.1	The library formally assesses program staff abilities upon hire according to a set of competencies for each position and sets training objectives based on needs in those competencies.			
3.1.2	The library creates staffing patterns that allow branch staff to conduct robust summer learning and outreach.			
3.1.3	Library staff understand the value of connections to the broader community and actively lead community groups or committees with common program goals.			
3.1.4	Library staff leading summer partnerships are given time to meet and respond to partnership needs.			
3.1.5	The library dedicates collaborative planning time for all involved program staff at least twice per year to assess and update the program plan.			
3.1.6	The staff lead and program staff meet regularly during the session to celebrate success, problem-solve and reflect on events of the program.			
3.1.7	Key summer program staff are actively engaged throughout summer activities.			
3.1.8	The library provides summer program-specific staff training for summer program staff.			
3.1.9	The Summer Program Director or immediate supervisor observes program staff members during the summer session and provides feedback at planned intervals.			
3.1.10	The library uses at least two methods to deliver program staff development during the summer, such as staff meetings, online discussions, peer coaching, mentoring, journaling or study groups.			

Benchmark 4: Community Engagement

4.1 Community Needs Assessment

		Yes	No	In Progress
4.1.1	The library uses a variety of information sources, including direct feedback from community members, including youth of color and historically excluded youth, to conduct a community needs assessment.			
4.1.2	The library uses community data and input to define a key target audience focused on historically excluded youth that includes: • Black youth • Girls • Immigrant and refugee youth • Indigenous youth • Latinx youth • Justice-involved youth • LGBTQ+ youth • Low-income youth • Youth with disabilities • Neurodiverse youth • Youth experiencing homelessness • Youth in foster care • Remote and rural youth • Other			
4.1.3	The library identifies library or partner locations designed to geographically reach historically excluded youth with the summer program.			

4.2 Program Recruitment

		Yes	No	In Progress
4.2.1	The library develops and implements a recruitment strategy designed to identify and enroll youth based on specified criteria.			
4.2.2	Library programs are co-designed with priority communities to respond to the needs, as stated, of the youth the library serves, and including youth voices.			
4.2.3	Partners jointly identify and recruit program participants.			

4.3 Program Communication

		Yes	No	In Progress
4.3.1	Partners are recognized in summer program marketing, website and promotional materials.			
4.3.2	The library prepares a report or publication to communicate summer program outcomes.			
4.3.3	The library disseminates the annual outcome report to several external stakeholders (families, board members, community leaders, funders, local elected officials).			

Benchmark 5: Program Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

5.1 Outcome Goals

		Yes	No	In Progress
5.1.1	The library has at least two measurable youth outcome goals aligned with the mission and the needs of the youth served.			
5.1.2	The library works with partners, and includes youth voices, to create youth outcome goals.			
5.1.3	Most programming is directly connected to measurable summer youth outcome goals.			
5.1.4	All summer youth outcome goals are tied to indicators and data collection methods.			

5.2 Quality Improvement

		Yes	No	In Progress
5.2.1	The library identifies at least one significant program quality improvement goal aligned with data collected throughout the summer.			
5.2.2	The library's program quality improvement goals are transparent and shared openly with partners.			

5.3 Program Measurement

		Yes	No	In Progress
5.3.1	The library's data collection includes both qualitative and quantitative approaches			
5.3.2	Staff is involved in both the collection and analysis of data related to program goals and stakeholder perspectives.			
5.3.3	Library staff and partners collectively debrief on evaluation findings and present to executive staff and funders.			

Strategic Area 3: Programs and Services

Services, programs and tools for creating quality

Benchmark 6: Program Design and Implementation

6.1 Program Planning

		Yes	No	In Progress
6.1.1	The library program director begins planning for the next summer session at the close of the current summer session.			
6.1.2	The library's daily program schedule for the entire summer session, including field trips, is complete before youth recruitment begins.			

6.2 Program Development

		Yes	No	In Progress
6.2.1	Programs are designed with the intent to reach a previously unserved population or deepen work with a vulnerable group.			
6.2.2	Programming is offered on a continuum over multiple summers for all young people.			
6.2.3	Staff and youth create jointly developed behavioral contracts that define positive behavior expectations.			
6.2.4	Programs are developed with the principles of Hart's Ladder of Participation.			
6.2.5	Programs link STEM and literacy as a model.			
6.2.6	The library program shows a full integration of strategies to promote academic, social and emotional growth.			
6.2.8	Over the course of the summer learning program, all youth have the opportunity to give feedback as full participants.			

6.3 Program Activities

		Yes	No	In Progress
6.3.1	All program activities show evidence of a detailed program plan.			
6.3.2	In all structured program activities, library staff communicate daily learning objectives that are connected to youth outcome goals at the group or program level.			
6.3.3	In all structured program activities, library staff use open-ended questions and encourage youth to use critical thinking to extend their answers and draw conclusions through analysis of information.			
6.3.4	Most program activities involve a hands-on, kinesthetic or project-based component allowing youth to engage in in-depth investigations with objects, materials, phenomena and ideas and draw meaning and understanding from those experiences.			
6.3.5	Most activities are designed to expose youth to something new—a place, idea, material, skill or talent—and expand on the previous school year's content and activities.			
6.3.6	All program staff use debriefing techniques, recall and checks for understanding throughout the duration and at the end of each activity.			
6.3.7	All program staff use positive reinforcement to recognize movement toward a specific group or individual goals in all activities.			

6.4 Family Engagement

		Yes	No	In Progress
6.4.1	Families are considered primary stakeholders in the library program.			
6.4.2	There are voluntary opportunities for families to participate in the program across the summer.			

		Yes	No	In Progress
6.4.3	Program or partner staff communicate with families in advance of the summer program.			
6.4.4	Program staff communicate with families at regular intervals during the program.			
6.4.5	Program staff provide opportunities for participants and families to reconvene during the school year.			
6.4.6	All program staff make an effort to learn the names of all parents and caregivers and greet them personally.			
6.4.7	All program staff regularly share success stories and constructive feedback with families about their children through written updates and conversations.			

Benchmark 7: Program and Service Formats

7.1 Program Schedule & Environment

		Yes	No	In Progress
7.1.1	The library's summer program schedule outlines activities, including locations and staff responsible for each activity.			
7.1.2	The library's summer schedule is posted and is referenced daily by all staff.			
7.1.3	The library hosts a culminating event that rewards youth for their success and gives all youth an opportunity to showcase their work or new skills to invited guests.			
7.1.4	The program environment is characterized by mutual care and respect between all staff and youth.			
7.1.5	Program staff provides flexible workspace in most activities to accommodate different learning styles and abilities.			
7.1.6	The library's activity space set-up is different from a traditional classroom, with furniture arranged to create an intimate, interactive environment.			
7.1.7	Library program decorations are youth-driven and thematic.			

7.1.8	The library's program creates a spirit of community and pride among all young people through: • Daily shared traditions • Cheers • Competitions • Team designations • Awards for positive actions or attitudes			
7.1.9	The library's summer program offers off-site field trips or otherwise is designed to expose children to a broader worldview, planned in conjunction with partners.			