



Children at a St. Louis County Library free lunch program, presented in partnership with Food Outreach. Photography by St. Louis County Library.

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Kitchens are becoming a valuable resource in many library facilities. Adding a kitchen to your library offers unique opportunities to expand your program offerings and community partnerships.

Many contemporary libraries are extending their mission to distribute information by expanding their offerings to cover food and culinary literacy. "Culinary literacy," a term coined by the Free Library of Philadelphia's Culinary Literacy Center, is defined as both learning about food and cooking (health, nutrition, and food preparation skills) and learning about math, science, history, cultural heritage and more through cooking.

Food insecurity in surrounding neighborhoods is an impetus for many libraries to begin offering food-related programming. Others are pursuing culinary literacy programs to advance sustainability in their communities, using cooking programs in tandem with gardening programs promoting locally grown food. Libraries are taking a comprehensive approach to keeping communities healthy, from distributing food to the food insecure, to growing food in on-site garden plots, to educating about how to cook and prepare healthy food. Culinary literacy programs have the added benefit of attracting community members who aren't typical library users and used as a gateway to draw attendees into other library services.

To accommodate this expansion of programming, many libraries have been adding food preparation spaces to their facilities. These kitchens range all the way from full-on cooking show sets equipped with culinary-grade kitchens and state-of-the-art audiovisual equipment for live-streaming demonstrations, to simple DIY setups of hot plates and extension cords temporarily set up in a meeting room.

Library kitchens can be combined with on-site food gardens to create holistic education, sustainability, and food distribution programs.

Read our whitepaper "Integrating Outdoor Spaces Into Library Design" for guidance on how to start a library garden.

What is Culinary Literacy?

- *Learning about food and cooking (health, nutrition, and food preparation skills).*
- *Learning about math, science, history, cultural heritage and more through cooking.*



With multiple plumbing, electrical, and life safety considerations, installing a kitchen is a complex project for a library to take on. The bare necessities of a library kitchen are a table, outlet, and running water.

Our team at Bond Architects has found that the best balance of value and functionality for many of our library clients has been adding a **modest kitchenette with a sink, dishwasher, refrigerator, storage, and counter space in the library's multipurpose room**. This solution provides easy access to running water and storage without the expense and extensive code requirements that come with building out a full kitchen.

Our library clients have found that having an on-site kitchen or kitchenette offers a multitude of benefits:

- Easier clean-up after messy activities
- Better handwashing and clean up for children
- Quicker and more effective cleaning and sterilization of toys (such as plastic building blocks) between programs
- Streamlining food service and distribution programs by providing easy access to running water, and refrigeration for storing perishable foods
- Improving community health with classes and demos about nutrition, food budgeting, and other life skills
- Supplementing book club programming with book-inspired foods (suggestion: skip the Potato Peel Pie, but Butterbeer might be worth a try)
- Celebrate diversity with cultural cuisine programs
- Opportunities for unique partnerships with local organizations and businesses, such as food pantries, county extension offices, and grocery stores

Rendering of a repurposed multipurpose room with a kitchenette installed. The flooring transitions into epoxy flooring near the kitchen to provide a waterproof surface that's easier to wipe down. Flexible, lightweight tables and chairs can be used to quickly set up and take down a demonstration space.

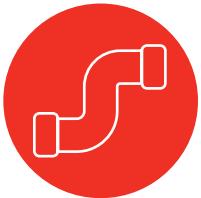


Closer view of the kitchenette. Setup includes a sink with running water, a dishwasher, and plenty of casework for storage.



A smaller, but still highly functional, kitchenette option.

Before beginning a library kitchen project, stop to consider:



PLUMBING: Always have a professional come out to assess how easily plumbing can be added to your proposed kitchen or kitchenette space. The nearer the existing plumbing is to your planned kitchen, the more efficiently and economically your kitchen project can be realized.



ELECTRICITY: Kitchen appliances require substantial electrical power, and not all libraries have enough capacity in their existing systems to support the added load. Many of these appliances require dedicated electrical circuits. Always investigate your proposed space's electrical capacity before making any major appliance or equipment purchases. If you are setting up a DIY kitchen with hot plates and other portable equipment, be careful of overloading sockets or causing tripping hazards with extension cords.



LOCAL CODES: wherever food is being handled for consumption, your local health department will have rules in place you need to follow, such as keeping handwashing stations separate from food prep sinks. Some health departments also have strict restrictions on open flames of cook tops or the venting of ovens. Thoroughly investigate any local code requirements before beginning work on your kitchen project.



CLEANABILITY OF MATERIALS: Meeting rooms often have carpet or other finishes that can easily accumulate stains and debris and require thorough cleaning. You don't want your morning yoga class to discover the remnants of the previous evening's culinary program in the carpet. A portion of your room's flooring near the kitchen fixtures may need to be replaced with a non-porous, scrubable finish that's easier to clean.



CONTAINMENT: Having a way to close off a small kitchen area in a multi-purpose room is a good way to keep little fingers away from hazards or potential messes. Cabinet locks are inexpensive and easy to install. One possibility is to place the kitchen in an adjacent space connected to your meeting room from behind a lockable door.



VENTILATION: It's important your kitchen space is well ventilated to handle any smoke or fumes from cooking. Also, make sure your ventilation system is keeping your kitchen smells separate from other parts of the library — as appetizing as the scent of garlic in hot oil is, not everyone wants to smell it while trying to study in your library quiet room.



ACOUSTICS: Moving around pots and pans and other cooking sounds get noisy — make sure your kitchen space is acoustically separated from the rest of the library to avoid disturbing your patrons reading.

PROJECT TIMELINE

Every project is unique, but here is a rough outline of what steps you'll need to take to build a library kitchen.

Assess Your Capacity

- Talk with your staff and volunteers to see if there is support for a library kitchen and enough staffing available to manage it (organizing programs, cleaning and upkeep).
- Survey your patrons and the wider community to gauge interest in culinary literacy programs.

Facility Assessment

- Have an architect assess your existing facility and access to plumbing, electricity, and ventilations; as well as looking at potential code issues.

Develop A Budget

- Using your facility assessment report, work with your architect to develop estimates for how much it would cost to install a kitchen.
- Research fundraising opportunities.
- Work with your board to develop a budget and fundraising plan. Ask if your architect can support your fundraising with concept renderings and community presentations.

Design The Kitchen

- Work with an architect to brainstorm, review, and refine kitchen design concepts.
- Architect develops final construction documents.
- Begin assessing furniture and equipment needs so you can begin procurement process early, saving money and time further down the road.

Build The Kitchen

- Your architect will work with you to develop an implementation plan that will allow your library to stay open and functional while undergoing construction.