Listen & Discover

- Map Your Maker Ecosystem
- Take Stock of Library Assets
- Strategic Listening with Focus Groups
- Define Purpose and Target Audience
Listen & Discover

We begin our journey focused on the people in your library and community, spending time understanding their talents, interests, and resources. Relationships take time to develop, so it’s best to start here to lay the foundation. This asset-based approach allows the process to grow naturally, rooted in community needs and library capacity.

To that end, we’ll start by mapping our community ecosystem, identifying all of the potential allies and partners that the library has. Then we’ll take inventory of the assets that we have, including tools, materials, and programs already being offered. Once we have a clear view of what we have at our disposal to work with, we’ll spend some time organizing and conducting focus groups—small-group discussions to learn about opinions on specific topics—in order to gain further insight into community needs. And finally, we’ll use design thinking techniques to help define the purpose of your programming and your target audience, ultimately crafting an Audience Statement, Environment Statement, and Framing Question to help get your makerspace programming started.

Maker programs like this Learn To Knit session at Blanchard Community Library are wonderful for skill building, and they also provide a unique opportunity for strengthening intergenerational social connections.
MAP YOUR MAKER ECOSYSTEM

The greatest asset any library has is the people in its community. In this section, we help you identify your maker ecosystem, the network of allies and partners who understand the value of offering maker programming. Right now in your community, people are already making—even if they don’t realize it or if they call it by a different name. For instance, they may be experimenting with digital video on their smartphones, sewing, tinkering with electronics, or gardening.

While your community may not be economically rich, it’s filled with a wealth of people with unique know-how and wisdom, either from cultural traditions, specific skills and trades, family or work experience, or social connections. And in many cases, those who possess that knowledge also have access to the tools and materials necessary to apply the associated skills.

Why do we start with the community? Because these are the people who will make your space sustainable. They could end up helping you in a number of ways, including:

• Knowledge, skills, experience
• Space and other material resources
• Programming content and/or facilitation
• Access to new audiences
• Financial assistance

Building a network of organizations and people who care about the same outcomes—and are willing and able (and hopefully enthusiastic) to fill those gaps—takes time but will be important for sustaining and growing your program. Working together, both entities grow stronger.

We offer tools to help you map these assets so that you can discover the hidden potential that may live just down the street—as well as reveal the riches in your library itself. With a strategic approach, you may find ways to increase your capacity to offer maker programming without increasing your budget.

Identify Allies and Potential Partners

Either individually or in a staff meeting, start with a brainstorm. Ask everyone to list as many organizations, individuals, and businesses that fall in the categories listed below. Participants could write on sticky notes, on white boards, or use digital tools to make their suggestions. What untapped assets are present in your community? Which organizations are vested in achieving similar goals or would benefit directly or indirectly from a library makerspace program?
Consider the following sectors:

- Community makerspaces
- Education
- Arts and culture
- Business and finance
- Science, health, and industry
- Nonprofit, faith-based, and civic organizations
- Government (city/county)
- Library

Asking “Who cares about the library’s makerspace program?” is an important question. Chances are there are many organizations and people in the community who would recognize the value of a library maker program. These are the people who will “get” what you’re trying to do and help you affect change.

If your purpose is to provide access to coding, engineering, and technology resources to equip the next-generation workforce, then it’s likely the local business community will care about the success of your program. If helping children experience and understand scientific concepts is the goal, then schools and children’s science museums will likely care about the program. If passing on cultural traditions of needlework and weaving is part of the maker program, then local sewing and quilting clubs, as well as historical or cultural groups, may be interested.

But it’s important to also think of others who may not “get it” yet, but who you believe would help strengthen your maker program and help it fit into the larger context of your city or town. Search for local organizations and leaders whose mission and values align or overlap with yours. From schools to civic groups, businesses, and clubs, identifying entities with similar goals is the initial step in your partnership outreach.

**Create Your Maker Ecosystem Map**

Once you have your initial list of names and organizations, arrange them in a visual display or diagram. This Maker Ecosystem Map displays possible members of a collaborative network, and this network has the potential to shift culture and open up opportunity to a whole community. How might the library connect with these people and organizations? Are some of them already partnering with the library in other ways? Consider these connections as valued community assets that you can strategically seek and leverage as you build and maintain your makerspace program.
Indicate which ones are already active partners with your library by marking the check box next to the name. Then think about your library’s capacity and what new partnerships could be synergistic at this stage. Highlight the names of least two potential partners that you’ll reach out to first. The example below is from one of our pilot sites, the Ponderosa Library.
What might happen if you start a conversation with two or more organizations in your ecosystem to broaden your reach for makerspace experiences? Now that you’ve made your initial map and recorded information about each potential partner in your spreadsheet, take the next steps to make connections.

**STEP 1**
**LEARN ABOUT EACH ORGANIZATION**
Check out their website and social media pages. Visit their location, attend one of their events, talk to their staff and beneficiaries, and learn about their work.

**STEP 2**
**INITIATE A CONVERSATION WITH SOMEONE AT AN ORGANIZATION YOU HIGHLIGHTED**
This could be the program director, the school principal, or similar. Invite them out for a cup of coffee, a lunch appointment, or an exploratory meeting. Let them know you’re planning a makerspace and that you’re interested in getting their input.

Listen and find out more about their organization’s goals, strengths, and needs. As you get to know them, keep the door open for ways your organizations could help each other. Keep notes on these meetings, recording their suggestions and their level of interest.

**STEP 3**
**SET UP A DISCUSSION WITH YOUR EXISTING PARTNERS**
(marketed with a check) to talk about the makerspace you’re developing. Ask them what ideas they have and what interest they might have in joining your efforts. Keep notes on these meetings, recording their suggestions and their level of interest.

**STEP 4**
**INVITE THOSE WHO SHOWED INTEREST TO PARTICIPATE**
in or observe an upcoming event in the next few months—an open forum, round table discussion, or similar program—to explore the climate and capacity for making in the community.

Developing relationships and strengthening connections with others in your maker ecosystem takes time—and it doesn’t happen by accident. Don’t get overwhelmed by the size of the task, but start strategically with just one or two organizations that might offer the greatest benefit to you at this stage. The most important part is to initiate and strengthen connections to create a healthy and balanced ecosystem that can grow over time.
FURTHER READING

Maker City: A Practical Guide for Reinventing Our Cities shares how people and organizations are leveraging the Maker Movement to build community, create economic opportunity, revitalize manufacturing and supply chains, reshape education and workforce development, and redefine civic engagement.

The Remake Learning Playbook covers the theory and practice of building learning innovation networks, the resources and strategies required to put networks into action, and the impact of the networks in schools, museums, libraries, communities, and more.
TAKE STOCK OF LIBRARY ASSETS

With the Maker Ecosystem Map, your team identified external organizations in the community that have the potential to offer value to your makerspace and to the local community of makers. Now it’s time to take stock of the library’s own existing assets—the physical items you already have on hand and the facilities that you have available. We offer tools to help. Next, a program inventory exercise will help you take a look at the range of programs that your library currently offers and determine which, if any, might become part of your new makerspace. We also encourage you to start noting what skills, hobbies, and expertise your staff and volunteers have to offer. Often these talents remain hidden unless you take the time to ask. Together, all of these elements will provide your team a starting point for building your makerspace.

Physical Assets: Take Inventory of What You Already Have

TOOLS AND MATERIALS

Makerspaces can be filled with lots of brand new equipment and materials, but that can be expensive and might not even be necessary. Your library may already have many things on hand to run a maker program, so it’s a good idea to start by taking inventory.

Before drafting a budget and starting any purchases, we recommend reviewing each section of the Physical Inventory Checklist. You may be surprised by what you already own, and it may reveal some areas that you might prioritize for purchase. Also consider reaching out to all the departments and branches in your library, in case you have options for shared equipment.

PHYSICAL SPACE

Most libraries don’t have enough physical space to dedicate a fixed room for their makerspace. If you do, that’s great! But if you don’t, that shouldn’t be the barrier to creating your maker program, as many creative options do exist. Some libraries have opted to convert a storage room or computer lab into a makerspace. Others offer their program in a shared program room. Some have an outdoor patio that can be used when the weather permits. Sometimes the makerspace is a mobile cart, or even a mobile unit that moves from branch to branch, designed to be set up and put away with minimal effort.
Maybe one of the assets a community partner can offer is space. Is there a Parks and Recreation room that you can occupy once a week to offer maker programs? Or is a local community makerspace willing to partner with you and make space available?

Consider what spaces you have available for the maker program, for both the active program itself but also for storage. Don't forget storage—it’s essential!

Program Assets: Take Inventory of What You’re Already Offering

What programs are already being offered at your library? Are any of them aligned with making? If so, would you consider including these as part of your makerspace program? Why or why not? We recommend looking at what you’re already doing as a library and then considering how the makerspace program fits in, which existing programs can fit under its umbrella, and if any existing programs might add more elements to complement your new program.

As you work to identify the purpose for your own makerspace, it’s important to be able to articulate to staff and stakeholders why certain programs are or are not included. Don’t worry if you struggle to answer some of these questions now. We heard from our sites that this tool was helpful to keep coming back to time and time again as you start to fine-tune the “identity” of your makerspace.
STRATEGIC LISTENING WITH FOCUS GROUPS

There’s no standard template of what a maker program or makerspace should look like, and the offerings are as varied as the communities they serve. Finding out the needs and desires of your unique community is at the root of determining the content, style, and format of your program or makerspace. Which target populations require services? What types of services should you provide? And which kinds of services will be most effective? If you’ve wondered these same questions, you’re not alone.

One method for getting these answers is through a focus group. By allowing you to gather data from a range of stakeholders, focus groups can be a useful means to gain a lot of information in a relatively short amount of time. Here we outline the steps to assemble, conduct, and analyze your own focus groups to help guide the direction of your maker programming.

A focus group meets at Blanchard Community Library.
**how to RUN A FOCUS GROUP**

**STEP 1**
**CREATE YOUR INVITATION WISH LIST**

Think about who would give you really insightful information to move your project forward. Work with staff to determine the characteristics of participants you would like to include (age, race, gender, organization, ethnicity, etc.) and make sure there is diversity. To get a complete picture of the needs, think about running three separate focus groups consisting of:

- **Staff and Volunteers:** Full-time, part-time, administration, as well as temporary staff and volunteers
- **Patrons:** Especially people from the demographic groups you think your makerspace program will serve
- **Community Members:** People who you consider current or potential future partners of your library (refer to your Maker Ecosystem Map to include a representative from a school, a civic organization, an art club, a nonprofit organization, and a local business)

Chances are that not everyone on the list will be available or willing to participate, so include as many people as you can on the invitation wish list.

**STEP 2**
**MAKE AN INITIAL PLAN**

Sketch out how many focus groups you want to run, and block the time and space you need for these meetings. Keep in mind that each focus group should have no more than 8–10 people. Sessions generally run between 45 minutes to one hour and take place in a comfortable, quiet setting that is free of distractions. Participants should be seated at one table where they can all see each other, as well as the moderator. Providing refreshments also helps establish a relaxed atmosphere for participants.

**STEP 3**
**INVITE THE PEOPLE ON THE LIST**

Contact the people on the list via email, social media, or in person, and ask them if they’re willing to participate. Consider inviting several people who happen to be at the library that day for a group activity or meeting, or ask some of your patrons or volunteers to invite a friend. Remember that a personal message is hard to ignore!

Recruit and schedule more participants than needed (around 12–14) to account for those who don’t show up or cancel at the last minute. It’s helpful to include language about the purpose of the focus group as part of any participant recruitment material and give invitees a deadline to respond (e.g., one week). Make sure to send a thank you to those who say yes, and then confirm the date, time, and location. Send a reminder the day before.

**STEP 4**
**PLAN YOUR QUESTIONS**

Structure your questions from general to specific, starting first with a brief icebreaker to put the group at ease. Questions should be open-ended to generate discussion, so you’ll want to avoid “yes” and “no” questions. Starting questions with “what” or “how” will frequently encourage the most participation from the group.

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**TOOL**

**FOCUS GROUP RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS**

Unsure of what to say when reaching out? This tool offers suggested scripts for inviting and following up with potential focus group participants.
**How to Run a Focus Group continued**

**Step 5**

**Assign Roles**

If possible, the session should be audio recorded. If there’s anyone who doesn’t wish to have the session recorded, then someone should be assigned to take detailed notes of the discussion. Sessions need a moderator to facilitate the group discussion. The moderator should be an effective communicator and someone who can build rapport with the participants, encouraging them to speak.

Consider using a facilitator who’s not closely associated with the spaces, services, or other topics that will be discussed in the focus group. For example, you may want a non-library staff member to lead a focus group about a library’s spaces and services. Having a facilitator removed from the issues for discussion may help the participants share honest feedback.

**Step 6**

**Run the Focus Group**

Follow these tips during your focus group discussion:

- At the start, provide the group with a brief introduction to the makerspace, purpose, and process.
- Try to stick to the questions you prepared. You may, however, occasionally want a participant to elaborate on a comment by asking additional follow-up questions.
- Consider showing relevant imagery to encourage discussion. During our pilot program, we showed all of the focus group participants a collection of pictures illustrating a broad range of maker activities and asked them questions about their interest in these activities. These images sparked a lot of discussion and helped participants understand what we were talking about.
- Make note of factors that might help you later to interpret your findings, such as passionate comments, body language, or nonverbal activity. Watch for head nods, physical excitement, eye contact between certain participants, or other clues that would indicate level of agreement, support, or interest.
- Try not to react personally to what you hear. If participants don’t like a particular activity or service, they may say so in the bluntest terms. Avoid the temptation to react to this candor in an audible, animated way.
- Try to encourage participants who may be reticent to speak. You may say, “I would love to hear from people that haven’t had an opportunity to speak yet.”
- Finish the session with questions allowing patrons to supply any additional thoughts and ideas.

**Step 7**

**Send Thank-You Notes**

Send participants a thank you afterward, and consider inviting them to an event in your library in the near future.

**Step 8**

**Reflect**

As soon as you’ve finished, try to take time to debrief with members of your staff. Discuss your overall impressions of the group’s responses and make note of any comments or nonverbal communication that the notetaker or audio recorder may have missed. This is also a good time to jot down any themes that emerged during the discussion, while everything is fresh in your mind.

**Tool**

**Focus Group Questions**

Naturally, the questions you ask will be unique to your community and library, but we also provide sample questions to consider asking each of your stakeholders.

**Tool**

**Focus Group Facilitation Script**

If you (or your staff) have never run a focus group before, we provide a sample script to use when facilitating the discussion.
Interpreting the Results of Your Focus Group

If you were able to audio-record the session, transcribe all of the focus group comments. Consider using a digital tool or app like Rev, Otter.ai, or TranscribeMe. If you plan to transcribe yourself, keep in mind that it can be quite time-consuming!

Consider these notes as you analyze your results:

- If you conduct more than one focus group, rearrange the comments so that you collate the answers for each interview question.
- Look for thematic patterns and identify ideas that occur again and again in responses. Then create categories of topics based on these themes. Note that sometimes the same basic idea occurs in answers to multiple questions.
- Identify quotations that illustrate each theme.
- Write your findings in an engaging narrative. This document can be shared with various stakeholders to help showcase why your community needs a makerspace and the rationale behind your audience and programming decisions.

“A makerspace could help us to learn more about our community and what they really want. It gives us that opportunity for even further connection with our community.” — Library Staff
DEFINE PURPOSE AND TARGET AUDIENCE

As you gather and synthesize data from people—in focus groups, staff meetings, and more—you develop insights into their needs and motivations. This information will help you define the problems or needs of your target audience and the outcomes you hope to achieve.

At this stage, you’ll need to draft a few key statements about the people you hope to serve with your makerspace. Collaboratively crafting precise language to guide your work will help you stay the course, maintain focus through this process, and communicate about your work to others. The steps we outline in this section will lead you through a process to build clear statements and questions about who you want to serve through your makerspace and why.

Chart paper and colorful sticky notes, like these ones from JFK Library, can be helpful as you interpret the focus group findings with your team.
how to IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCE AND DEFINE PURPOSE

STEP 1
GATHER YOUR TEAM

These might be your fellow staff members, or, if your library is very small, you might need to enlist the help of some volunteers or colleagues at other branches. Conversation and collaboration during the following exercises make the process richer and more productive. Crafting these statements can be very challenging to do on your own and may lead to statements that are biased by your own ideas and preferences.

Start with a detailed review of your notes and transcripts from the focus groups you conducted, and have a discussion with your team. What messages were coming through? What stories were shared? What passions emerged? What barriers did people describe? Who is left out and why? Allow participants to review the themes that emerged, and name each one with a word or phrase that describes the issue they have in common.

Discussions like this might amplify problems or challenges that people in your community face. These issues might be connected to transportation, economics, lack of resources, etc. Talk about what you might know already about the background of these ideas or issues. Although it’s not easy to do, try to avoid the temptation to immediately think up solutions, and instead focus more on the reasons why the problems exist.

STEP 2
CREATE AUDIENCE STATEMENTS

Then challenge each team member to fill in the blanks in the Audience Statement sentence below, using their own words to describe who the maker program will be for and what need it could serve. Each one of you might have your own idea, and that’s okay at this stage. Remember, this is an exercise to identify who has a need, and the underlying belief about that need, but not how your program might help address the problem.

Fill in the blanks below to create an Audience Statement:

WHO need/want/have WHAT IS MISSING OR THE PROBLEM but/despite/because of UNIQUE ASPECT ABOUT THE PROGRAM DESIGN OR ATMOSPHERE

For example, you might come up with statements like:

Teens need access to digital media equipment and software because they’re really interested in creating their own YouTube channels and recording original music.

Seniors living alone need more social connection and engaging activities because they’re isolated, on limited incomes, and prone to depression.

Give each team member a chance to write one or two Audience Statements using this framework. Once penned, share them with one another and give yourselves time to think about them before reconvening.

TOOL
PEOPLE AND PURPOSE

This tool prompts you to define your primary and secondary audience while also challenging your team to consider what kind of attitudes and behavioral qualities you hope to encourage and support. You’ll develop an Audience Statement, Environment Statement, and a Framing Question.
how to IDENTIFY TARGET AUDIENCE AND DEFINE PURPOSE continued

STEP 3
DIG DEEPER

Use the time between meetings for each team member to dig deeper and seek more information about the challenges and opportunities of the audience you’re considering. Request input from colleagues, family, and friends, or go out into the community to gather more information.

There may be valuable takeaways from these follow-up investigations that can inform the direction you take. The more you understand the people, what motivates them, and what barriers they face, the better you can put their needs at the center of your makerspace design.

STEP 4
REVIEW YOUR LIBRARY’S MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS

Understand the goals that are stated in your library’s most current strategic plan, if there is one. What are the values stated in these documents? What is your library as a whole working toward? As you define your own maker program’s purpose and decide who you’re serving, keep in mind how you’re working to help your library achieve its overall mission, and let others know how your efforts contribute to that work.

STEP 5
CRAFT ENVIRONMENT STATEMENTS

Reconvene the team to share their ideas and discoveries, as well as your thoughts on how each works toward the library’s overall vision. Work together to rank which audiences are the highest priority, keeping in mind the skills and assets you have to leverage right now, both inside and outside the library.

Then fill in the blanks below to craft an Environment Statement:

This maker environment helps support people to be/feel because

For example, you might come up with statements like:

This maker environment helps support people to be collaborative because they’re able to work together in a shared space.

This maker environment helps support people to feel confident because it gives participants a safe place to try something new.
**STEP 6**

**CREATE YOUR FRAMING QUESTION**

Now it’s time to take those two parts—the Audience Statement and the Environment Statement—and set up your Framing Question. You’ll use this as the starting point for the next stage of your program development, which is brainstorming and prototyping.

This framing question sets some boundaries for what you want to achieve. Again, we want to start small, so choose one audience, one problem, and one intended outcome. That being said, you may have two very distinct aspects of your maker programming. Don’t be afraid to create two questions if you need, one for each audience or need.

Fill in the blanks below to create your Framing Question:

How might we design a maker program for **WHO** that addresses the need **NEED OR PROBLEM** and fosters/cultivates **FEELING/DISPOSITION/QUALITY**?

For example, you might come up with a statement like:

How might we design a maker program for young children in our community that addresses the need for quality resources and fosters creativity and hands-on learning?

Here’s a two-sentence example:

How might we design a maker program for teens that addresses the need for a safe, positive, enriching recreational and social space and fosters collaboration, innovation, and learning?

How might we design a maker program for adults that addresses the need for free education and training and fosters the development of community and new personal and professional skills?

**STEP 7**

**SHARE YOUR FRAMING QUESTION WITH COLLEAGUES**

Consider posting a printed version of the Framing Question in the office. Listen for feedback and ideas, or place a suggestion box or writing pad nearby to collect input. Over the next several months, your team will move ahead imaginatively, developing and testing different ways to meet the needs you’ve identified through this exercise.
The process we’ve outlined is flexible and adaptable, so don’t worry, you can revise your Audience Statement, Environment Statement, and Framing Question as you go. This design thinking-based approach allows for frequent reflection, revision, and review.

Later, if you feel like you set out down the wrong path, regroup, listen again, and redirect your team. Making is about having the courage to learn from experience, being willing to take risks, embracing failure as a way to learn, and trying it differently the next time. For now, it’s helpful to start with a common purpose that you can all articulate, even if it changes a few months down the road.