

LIBRARY MAKERSPACES **WORKING GROUP** MEETINGS

**COORDINATING EFFORTS
TOWARD SHARED GOALS**

FEBRUARY 2026



NATIONAL FORUM TO CONNECT AND ADVANCE LIBRARY MAKERSPACES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. LG-256680-OLS-24.

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I. OVERVIEW

The Forum convened a series of working group meetings, bringing together five core groups that provide national leadership in library makerspace services, professional development, and research.

Each meeting was organized around a central guiding question:

How might we coordinate efforts and strengths among maker groups toward common goals?

Partner groups rotated in leading the discussion, sharing their mission, key strengths, current challenges, resource needs, and opportunities for collaboration and mutual support.

Meeting Schedule and Focus Areas*:

- **ALA Library Makerspace Round Table** — September 2024
- **Makerspaces Researchers** — November 2024
- **ALA Core Maker Technology Interest Group** — January 2025
- **Makerspace Educators** — April 2025
- **Nation of Makers Library Interest Group** — April 2025
- **Library Makers** — May 2025

This report provides a summary of insights and outcomes from each working group meeting.

**Note: In addition to these six official meetings, two follow-up sessions were convened to reflect on the Forum's findings and discuss future directions, held in October 2025 and January 2026.*

II. ALA LIBRARY MAKERSPACE ROUND TABLE — SEPTEMBER 2024

Background and Outcome

As part of our efforts to expand the national visibility and sustainability of library makerspaces, the Forum team—composed of leaders from various maker-centered groups—submitted a petition to establish a new Round Table within the American Library Association (ALA) in January 2024.

The proposal received strong support from ALA Round Table staff and was signed by more than the required number of active ALA members in just a few days. The Committee on Organization (COO) reviewed the petition and provided a favorable evaluation.

Despite this early momentum, the request was declined by ALA leadership, including administrative representatives from the CORE division. The reasons cited included ALA's limited organizational capacity due to budget and staffing constraints, as well as the belief that the goals of the proposed Round Table could be met through the existing ALA Maker Technology Interest Group under the CORE division.

The chairs of the Maker Technology Interest Group were also part of the Forum team, and we had hoped that establishing a Round Table would provide a more visible, higher-level, and enduring structure for advancing our shared goals.

This experience highlighted differing understandings and expectations around ALA's organizational levels—particularly regarding their roles, required resources, and the processes involved in communication and decision-making. These challenges, including elements of organizational bureaucracy, ultimately prevented the group from establishing a formal home within ALA, despite strong support from individual members who signed the petition.

Proposed Mission

The ALA Library Makerspace Round Table was originally proposed to cultivate expertise and connect library makerspace professionals across diverse library types, educators in higher education, and makerspace researchers. Its objectives included providing ongoing professional development, fostering research-practice partnerships, supporting pre-service education, and strategically advancing library makerspaces to reinforce contemporary librarianship's core values of access, community, and learning, as well as intentionally building EDI (Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion) goals and practices.

Proposed Strengths

- **Reputation and Impact to the field:** As the world's oldest and largest library association, ALA provides national leadership in library and information services. Establishing a home within ALA provides legitimacy and formal endorsement and could significantly impact libraries and their communities.
- **Sustainable Infrastructure:** Affiliation with ALA offers a stable organizational structure extending beyond short-term grant cycles, ensuring longevity and continuity.
- **Affordability and Accessibility:** Round Tables offer a lower personal membership rate compared to ALA divisions, increasing accessibility and encouraging broad participation.
- **Cross-Divisional Reach:** Makerspaces inherently span multiple ALA divisions, facilitating broad collaboration and integration.
- **Complementary Synergies:** Due to overlapping interests across library types, there is potential for fruitful collaboration with established Round Tables, such as the Games and Gaming Round Table and the Graphic Novels Round Table.

Challenges

- **Organizational Capacity:** Constraints regarding budget, staffing, and resources at ALA posed significant hurdles to formalizing the Round Table.
- **Bureaucratic Barriers:** Complex decision-making processes within ALA resulted in misunderstandings and diverging expectations about organizational roles, scope, and capacities.
- **Membership Costs:** Although more affordable than divisional memberships, membership fees still presented potential barriers to participation, especially for professionals from smaller or resource-constrained institutions.

III. MAKERSPACES RESEARCHERS — NOVEMBER 2024

Background and Purpose

This second Working Group Meeting discussed the state of research within library makerspaces, emphasizing the dual objectives of building the academic knowledge base and strengthening practical makerspace operations. Recognizing the rich diversity in makerspace research across various contexts—including school, academic, public, rural, suburban, and urban libraries—the group examined key strengths, challenges, and strategies for future development.

Strengths

- **Diverse Contexts and Audiences:** Research addresses multiple makerspace contexts (school, academic, public, rural, suburban, urban) and engages various focal audiences, including youth, adults, and individuals with disabilities.

- **Interdisciplinary Foundations:** Library makerspace research draws from library and information science (LIS), education, design, and other disciplinary traditions, encompassing both academic research and practice-based scholarship.
- **Practical Impact:** LIS research has a proven track record of providing strong, practice-based foundations, exemplified by influential frameworks such as HOMAGO (Hanging Out, Messing Around, Geeking Out), BIG6 information literacy model, and Guided Inquiry Design (GID).

Challenges

- **Fragmented Knowledge Base:** Research findings are dispersed across numerous disciplinary communities, publication venues (journals, conferences), and professional networks.
- **Limited Funding Sources:** Dependence on a few primary funding sources (e.g., Institute of Museum and Library Services [IMLS], National Science Foundation [NSF]) limits research scope and sustainability.
- **Research-Practice Partnerships:** Necessity for robust, reciprocal relationships between researchers and practitioners to identify meaningful research topics, recruit diverse research sites and participants, align expectations and timelines, and ensure application of findings to shape practice.
- **Resource Allocation:** Challenges in sharing resources meaningfully across research and practice contexts.
- **Motivational Alignment:** Navigating differing motivations among knowledge generation for scholarly purposes, practice-oriented studies to advance makerspace operations, and advocacy-driven work aimed at securing support and funding.
- **Fostering Evidence-Based Practice:** The need for infrastructure (e.g., data collection, assessment, documentation, knowledge management, research access & integration systems, and more) to promote evidence-based practices within library makerspaces.

Needed Resources

- Opportunities for building connections among researchers and between researchers and practitioners.
- Establishment of research priority areas to guide future research efforts.
- Strategies and advocacy to protect and increase funding dedicated to library makerspace research.

Collaboration and Support Areas

- Creating more opportunities for researchers and practitioners to communicate and interact. Potentially establish a shared space or platform for both researchers and practitioners.
- As a first step toward addressing the identified need, the Forum convened the Library Makerspaces Research Showcase (see Section IV. Research Showcase).

IV. ALA CORE MAKER TECHNOLOGY INTEREST GROUP — JANUARY 2025

Background and Purpose

The Core Maker Technology Interest Group originated around 2014-2015, initially starting as a 3D printing-focused interest group within the Library Information Technology Association (LITA) division of the American Library Association (ALA). Recognizing the need to broaden its scope, it evolved into a Maker Tech Interest group under the ALA Core division in 2015.

The group's stated purpose is to explore and share knowledge about makerspace technologies, including but not limited to 3D printing, textiles, electronics, and content creation technologies, aiming to support library makerspace organizers in managing and enhancing their spaces.

Strengths and Available Resources

The primary strength of this group lies in its informal yet effective format of **virtual tours** (typically 15-30 participants per session) and discussion sessions (often exceeding 50 participants) during ALA annual conferences. These activities allow makerspace professionals to share practical and operational knowledge for successful makerspace management in real time.

Consistent participation is achieved due to the group's practical relevance, informal nature, and accessibility, as events are **free and open to both ALA and non-ALA members**. Additionally, the virtual format significantly reduces barriers such as travel costs, enabling broader participation across diverse library types and geographic locations.

Affiliation with ALA enhances the group's reputation and credibility within the library community. The group also currently leverages ALA infrastructure, such as the ALA Connect platform, Core's Google Drive for document storage, and occasionally Core-provided Zoom rooms for events. Recent discussions have identified opportunities for increased promotional support from ALA Core through channels such as newsletters and Core learning webinars, which could enhance the group's visibility and reach.

Challenges

The primary challenge facing the Core Maker Technology Interest Group involves navigating the administrative processes within ALA. Although operating under the Core division, the group experiences limited active oversight and structured support. While this autonomy is beneficial, it also leads to challenges, such as gaps in organizational memory,

promotional efforts, and consistent access to resources. Additionally, the absence of dedicated funding limits the group's capacity to expand or host larger, in-person events or activities.

Needed Resources

- **Funding:** Dedicated funding sources are needed to expand the group's activities.

Collaboration and Support Areas

- **Mission Scope:** Considering whether refining the group's mission would strengthen its focus, or if maintaining an open-ended approach better supports diverse interests.
- **Utilizing ALA Resources:** Exploring how to leverage ALA's infrastructure, support, and visibility to enhance the group's impact.
- **Expanding Collaborations:** Identifying opportunities to collaborate with and complement the work of other maker-focused groups.

V. MAKERSPACE EDUCATORS — APRIL 2025

Background and Purpose

The primary goal of the working group meeting was to enhance maker education and professional development for librarians and maker professionals, particularly through creating a stronger, interconnected, complementary, and sustainable maker education system for librarians.

The discussion highlighted existing paths for learning maker skills and knowledge:

1. **Formal Education** (higher education LIS programs)
2. **Workplace Training** (structured programs, mentoring, shadowing)
3. **Communities of Practice (CoPs)** (Library Makers, ALA Maker Tech Interest Group, Nation of Makers Library Working Group, regional groups)
4. **Self-directed Learning** (personal projects, online resources, trial and error)

The current landscape indicates limited formal maker-related coursework within LIS programs, with specialized certificates primarily emerging from education disciplines (Rutgers, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of North Carolina Greensboro). Additionally, many library makerspace staff do not hold formal LIS degrees, relying significantly on previous work and creative experience, informal communities, and on-the-job learning.

Strengths and Available Resources

- **Access to Knowledge:** Informal learning platforms through communities of practice, providing accessible, practical knowledge-sharing.
- **Professional Engagement:** Demonstrated need and strong participation in National Forum activities, particularly Library Makerspaces Research Showcase and Listening Sessions.
- **Funding:** Availability of funding and institutional support for continuing education at some libraries.
- **Specialized Training:** Existing specialized certificate programs and courses (e.g., Rutgers, UW-Madison, UNC Greensboro, University of Texas-Arlington).
- **Formal Maker Education:** Most LIS programs offer at least one or two maker-related courses.
- **Independent Learning Opportunities:** Self-directed learning resources (YouTube tutorials, IDEO's design thinking certification, online workshops).

- **Diversifying Educational Pathways:** Increasing recognition of non-traditional and informal educational pathways as valuable for professional growth.

Challenges

- **Specialized Professional Development:** Difficulty locating specialized, relevant professional development opportunities and maker-specific conferences.
- **Personnel Gaps:** Staffing makerspaces effectively during staff absences for professional development.
- **Attracting Expertise:** Difficulty attracting and retaining individuals with technical skills due to low salaries compared to corporate or other opportunities.
- **Library Knowledge Gaps:** Bridging gaps between technical expertise and foundational library values and knowledge for staff without LIS backgrounds.
- **Resource Development:** Creating professional development resources that cater to varied skill levels, interests, and makerspace staff needs.

Needed Resources

- **Accessible Professional Development:** Increased access to affordable, structured maker-specific conferences and professional development workshops.
- **Institutional Support:** Sustainable financial resources and institutional support to enable regular participation in professional development.
- **Makerspace-Specific Programming:** Clear pathways and accessible programs tailored specifically to library makerspace professionals.
- **Systematic Knowledge Sharing:** Platforms and mechanisms to systematically share knowledge and best practices among diverse skill levels and backgrounds.
- **Mentorship Opportunities:** Resources to facilitate structured mentorship and leadership development between pre-service and current maker professionals.

Collaboration and Support Areas

- **Access to Credentials:** Lowering entry barriers by developing comprehensive and accessible certificate programs for library makerspace professionals.
- **Research-Practice Collaboration:** Strengthening partnerships between LIS programs and active practitioners to ensure practical, relevant curriculum.
- **Professional Development:** Expanding structured professional development opportunities with ongoing support.
- **Leveraging Communities of Practice:** Facilitating structured use of communities of practice to systematically address common challenges and training needs.
- **Developing Knowledge-Sharing Infrastructure:** Creating integrated frameworks for informal knowledge-sharing platforms.
- **Providing Mentoring Connections:** Connecting pre-service and current maker professionals for mentorship and sustainable leadership development.

VI. NATION OF MAKERS LIBRARIES WORKING GROUP — APRIL 2025

Background, Mission, and Purpose

- Established in 2019 following connections made at NOMCON.
- Purpose: Support a network of library professionals developing and delivering maker programs and supporting makerspaces across school, academic, and public libraries.
- Initially hosted vibrant interactions via the Libraries Slack channel within the larger NOM Slack server.

Strengths

- **Online Community Building:** Established a supportive community for library professionals engaged in maker programming.
- **Focused Online Discussions:** Successfully hosted regular virtual discussions since inception.
- **Variety of Programming:** Flexible format with open sessions for general exchange and topic-specific sessions with guest presenters.

Challenges

- **Consistent Online Engagement:** Significant decrease in interactions due to the inactivity of the larger NOM Slack server.
- **Funding and Organizational Challenges:** Nation of Makers impacted financially and organizationally by the Strong City Baltimore scandal, resulting in an inability to fund staff, services, or conferences.
- **Parent Organization Support:** Uncertain future and lack of clear organizational support from Nation of Makers.

Needed Resources

- **Improved Collaboration Platforms:** Stable and reliable platform for ongoing communication and collaboration.
- **Resources for Independent Operation:** Independent operational and financial resources to sustain future activities.
- **Increased Engagement:** Continued involvement and active participation from library professionals.

Collaboration/Support Areas

- **Maintaining Online Community Engagement:** Continue hosting monthly virtual discussions to maintain community engagement.
- **Identifying Stronger Community Platforms:** Explore new platforms or channels independent of NOM to ensure consistent connectivity and collaboration.
- **Diversified Partnerships:** Establish strategic partnerships with other library and maker communities to share resources and expand reach.
- **In-Person Events:** Work towards the launch of a new in-person conference .

VII. LIBRARY MAKERS — MAY 2025

Background, Mission, and Purpose

Library Makers originated in 2018 as a California-wide initiative funded through LSTA and IMLS, addressing the need to support small and rural libraries in utilizing maker equipment and developing sustainable, community-centered maker programming. Initially, the project identified that simply having equipment, such as 3D printers, was insufficient without comprehensive support and training. Through iterative and collaborative processes, the project developed the “Makers in the Library Toolkit,” designed to provide practical guidance, including forming partnerships, fundraising strategies, and sustainable community engagement.

Following the toolkit’s launch in 2020, the project expanded nationally under a new IMLS grant (2021-2024), involving key partners such as the Nation of Makers, Association of Rural and Small Libraries, and Rockman as evaluator. Library Makers established an active online community

emphasizing professional development, collaboration, and resource sharing among library practitioners from various library settings.

- The community’s explicit mission is to foster professional growth, build community, and support librarians in gaining the confidence and skills needed for successful maker programs.

Strengths and Available Resources

- **Robust Online Community:** Over 2,000 members, including international participation, with diverse library representation.
- **Established Toolkit:** “Makers in the Library Toolkit” provides comprehensive resources for operationalizing sustainable makerspaces.
- **Structured Leadership and Committees:** A clearly defined, elected leadership team supported by committees focused on sustainability, events/programming, and community-building.
- **Programming and Events:** Regularly hosted webinars, “tool talks,” book clubs, blog posts, newsletters, and sponsored conference attendance, particularly benefiting under-resourced and rural librarians.
- **Professional Development Opportunities:** Offering platforms for new speakers and fostering growth among librarians less experienced with national presentations.

Challenges

- **Loss of IMLS Funding:** Recent grant termination significantly impacts administrative support and programming continuity.
- **Sustainability Concerns:** Maintaining regular programming, administrative tasks, and community engagement without paid administrative staff. Potential difficulties in funding the Mighty Networks platform used for the community without external financial support.

Needed Resources

- **Funding and Financial Support:** Securing alternative sources of funding to maintain platform costs, administrative support, and community programs.
- **Administrative Assistance:** Establishing solutions for managing administrative tasks previously covered by grant-funded positions.
- **Volunteer Capacity:** Developing strategies to sustain volunteer commitment and leadership without financial incentives.
- **Strategic Prioritization:** Determining essential community activities through a minimal viable community approach to focus limited resources effectively.

Collaboration and Support Areas

- **Strategic Adjustments:** Evaluating core activities and potentially scaling back on events frequency, blog posts, and newsletters to maintain a sustainable model.
- **Enhanced Partnerships:** Leveraging the established community structure to foster deeper collaborations. Encouraging external groups and projects to utilize the Library Makers platform for professional development and collaborative events, promoting shared benefits and increased community engagement (e.g., potentially accommodating pre-service librarian education and researchers)
- **Community-led Sustainability:** Emphasizing continued transition towards full community-led governance and operational decisions, ensuring adaptability and responsiveness to evolving needs and opportunities.