



NATIONAL FORUM TO
CONNECT AND ADVANCE
LIBRARY MAKERSPACES

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

FEBRUARY 2026



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PERSONNEL

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Project co-director: Dr. Rebecca M. Teasdale
Project coordinator: Emilie Butt
Team members: Cara Kouse, Sarah Nagle, Leanne Nay, and Dr. Lisa Regalla

ORGANIZATIONS

Champaign-Urbana Community Fab Lab

CU COMMUNITY FAB Lab The CU Community Fab Lab at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign is an open makerspace where people learn, create, and innovate together. We provide tools, guidance, and programs that foster creativity, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary discovery. Our mission is to provide a welcoming environment that builds individual skills and strengthens community capacity, connecting the university with the public.

ALA Core Maker Technology Interest Group

ALA American Library Association The Core Maker Technology Interest Group provides a space within the American Library Association for library makerspace practitioners to connect, network, and exchange ideas.

Key activities include virtual tours of library makerspaces and occasional facilitated online discussions.

Library Makers

LIBRARY MAKERS Library Makers is a practitioner-led community dedicated to those who manage makerspaces or run maker programs in libraries of all types. Whether you're just beginning your maker journey or are a seasoned expert, this community offers a space to collaborate, connect, learn, and grow.

The platform's newsfeed serves as a central hub to ask questions, share best practices, celebrate achievements, and engage in dialogue with a diverse network of professionals. Monthly learning events provide deeper engagement around focused topics.

Membership is free and open to anyone working in or with libraries that have or are planning to develop makerspaces or maker programming, as long as they adhere to the community guidelines.

Nation of Makers Libraries Working Group



NATION OF MAKERS The Nation of Makers Libraries Working Group was established in 2019 at NOMCON (the Nation of Makers Conference) in response to the growing need for library makerspace professionals to connect and collaborate. Since then, the group has hosted numerous virtual discussions with library makerspace leaders from across the country. Their focus is on fostering meaningful conversations that make our work more effective, inclusive, and impactful.

National Maker Collective



National Maker COLLECTIVE The National Maker Collective is an organization for all types of makerspaces to find community, share ideas, foster discussion, and connect in a myriad of ways. Born out of the Nation of Makers Libraries Working Group in 2025, the National Maker Collective sought to continue creating connections between makerspace organizers while also extending our reach to include non-library makerspaces.

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Primary Personnel



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Team Members



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I. PROJECT OVERVIEW

The *National Forum to Connect and Advance Library Makerspaces* was an Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Leadership Grant-funded initiative led by the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and University of Illinois Chicago, in collaboration with the American Library Association, Library Makers, Nation of Makers Library Makerspaces Working Group, and, later, the National Maker Collective, which grew out of the Nation of Makers Libraries Working Group.

The Forum convened library professionals, educators, and researchers from across the United States to reflect on the evolution of library makerspaces and to envision their future. Together, participants explored strategies to strengthen the library makerspace movement and ensure its sustainability and continued relevance.

Beginning August 1, 2024 and continuing through January 31, 2026, the Forum focused on building networks, sharing and applying existing knowledge, and generating new ideas to help library makerspaces better serve their communities. Through collaborative efforts, we explored innovative ways to ensure library makerspaces continue to thrive in the years ahead.

1. PROJECT GOALS

The forum set out to achieve three essential goals:

1. Facilitate systematic coordination and collaboration among various maker groups and leaders to align efforts toward shared goals of fostering sustainability and growth among library makerspaces.
2. Reflect on, synthesize, and leverage accumulated knowledge and expertise in library makerspaces.
3. Chart the future direction of library makerspaces and identify necessary resources and opportunities.

FIGURE 1. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

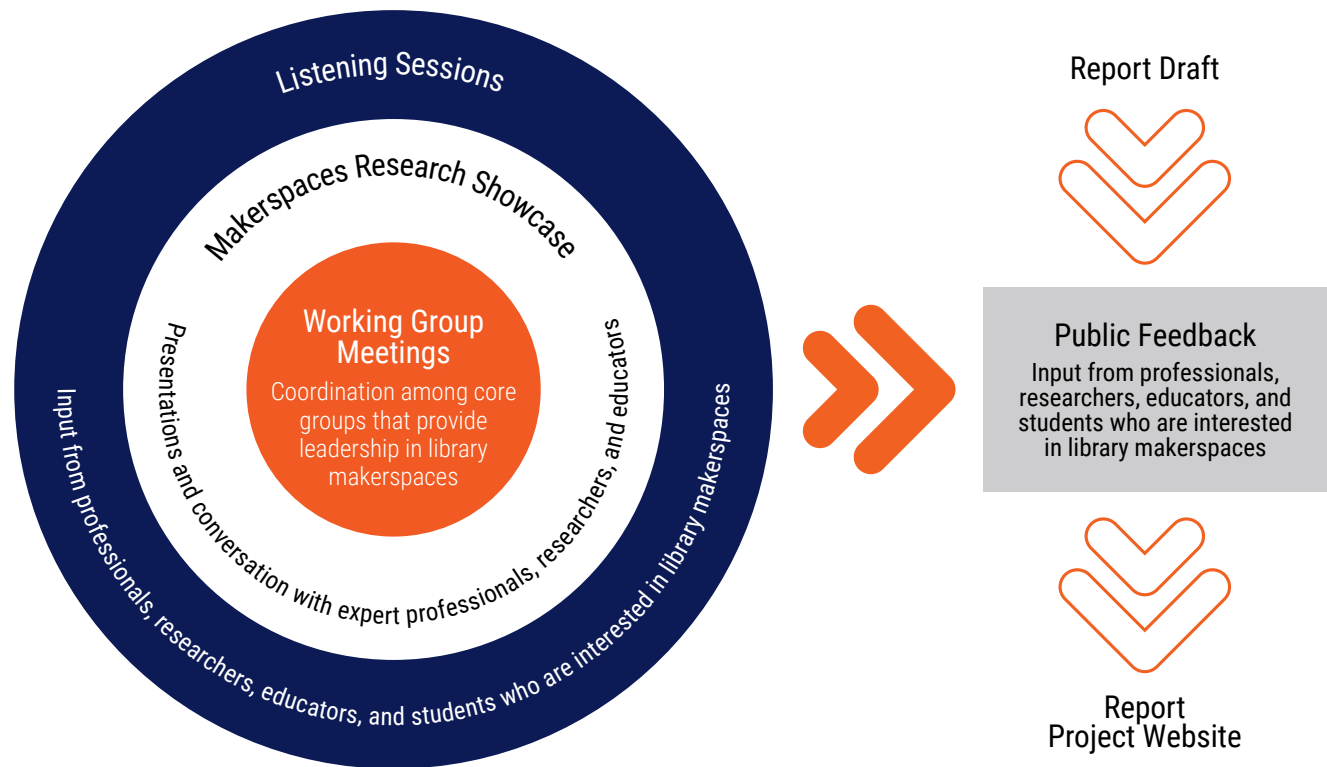


TABLE 1. PROJECT GOALS AND ACTIVITIES

Goals	Outputs
Facilitate coordination among maker groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Held eight working group meetings Strengthened cross-sector collaboration
Synthesize and leverage accumulated knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hosted the <i>Library Makerspaces Research Showcase</i> Collected research insights and best practices Created an open-access archive of presentations and materials
Chart the future of library makerspaces and identify needed resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducted three national listening sessions to gather stakeholder input Released a Public Feedback edition of the Forum findings report and collected feedback

For more information about the project, visit the [website](#).

2. INTENDED OUTCOMES

The project seeks to propose strategic directions for library makerspaces nationwide. This includes defining shared values, a unified vision, key priorities for the next five to ten years, essential resources, and recommendations for the future.

Library makerspaces may adopt and use this report to:

- Articulate their mission and vision to administrators, users, fellow librarians, and broader stakeholders.
- Inform and strengthen their strategic planning and decision-making processes.
- Advocate for their work and priorities by presenting a clear, evidence-based framework to administrators and decision-makers.

Ultimately, this report aims to support libraries across the country in substantiating their efforts and shaping the future of makerspaces in alignment with national priorities.

II. STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR LIBRARY MAKERSPACES

The Forum convened three online Listening Sessions in March 2025. The sessions were open to all who wished to collaboratively envision and plan the future of library makerspaces nationwide. During each interactive session, participants explored four key areas:

1. **Values** — What are our core values?
2. **Vision** — What does success look like for your makerspace—or for library makerspaces in general?
What is the future we want to create?
3. **Priorities** — What should we focus on over the next five to ten years?
4. **Resources** — What crucial resources or opportunities are needed to achieve these goals?

Additional input was collected through an asynchronous feedback form for those unable to attend the live sessions.

Participation highlights:

- 169 total registrations
- 20-30 participants per session
- 18 asynchronous feedback submissions

Drawing from the insights gathered through the listening sessions and ongoing community input, the Forum synthesized the following **collective values, vision, priorities, and resources** that underpin the strategic direction for library makerspaces. This direction reflects the grassroots perspectives of listening session participants, who shared their experiences with makerspaces in public, school, and university libraries across the country.

1. VALUES



There was strong consensus among listening session participants on five key values that underpin makerspaces and making in libraries. Participants highlighted values that both reflect the broader mission of libraries and define what makes makerspaces distinctively impactful within their communities. These five values—Access, Belonging, Community, Creativity, and Learning—are presented below in alphabetical order.

1.1. Core Values

ACCESS

Access means ensuring that everyone—those of all ages, experience and skill levels, abilities, backgrounds, and identities—can participate in makerspaces by lowering financial, technical, and social barriers; keeping resources free or affordable; and offering clear entry points and guidance.

BELONGING

Belonging in library makerspaces means ensuring that everyone feels welcome, respected, and able to participate fully. It involves creating judgment-free opportunities and environments that are responsive to the needs of the community.

COMMUNITY

Community in makerspaces means both the local community the library serves and the connections formed when people come together to make-sharing ideas, supporting one another, and collaborating on projects.

CREATIVITY

Creativity in makerspaces means imagining, exploring, and expressing ideas and transforming ideas into tangible forms through tools and experimentation. Creativity often emerges through weaving together diverse ideas, traditions, and disciplines. It celebrates both the joy of the creative process and the value of its outcomes, from personal growth to academic and entrepreneurial opportunities.

LEARNING

Learning in library makerspaces is lifelong, hands-on, and learner centered. It values discovery and growth over perfection, fostering curiosity, confidence, and experimentation through iterative practice. Learning also includes developing essential literacies, such as digital and technology skills and creative problem-solving, that enable meaningful participation in making.

“The core values outlined in the report resonate strongly with my experience...it’s encouraging to see that so many practitioners are working toward similar goals.”

— A comment on the Public Feedback edition

1.2. Interconnections Among the Values

The discussions during listening sessions demonstrated that these five values are deeply interconnected in practice. Participants often described experiences that blended multiple values at once, underscoring how makerspaces work holistically. For example, one participant emphasized the importance of “access to tools, programs, opportunities, social connections, expertise, and more,” illustrating how access is inseparable from community. Another noted that library makerspaces are “spaces for people of different backgrounds to meet around common interests,” highlighting the relationship between community and belonging. A third emphasized the importance of “equity, accessibility, and being judgment-free,” which connects access with belonging.

Participants also placed an emphasis on the beginner-friendly character of library makerspaces, stressing the importance that “everyone should be able to explore makerspaces without prior knowledge,” and that makerspaces “support all technical literacy levels,” highlighting the overlap among access, belonging, and learning. Together, these interconnections show that the values of Access, Belonging, Community, Creativity, and Learning do not stand alone, but reinforce and sustain one another in practice.

1.3. Indicators of Key Values

Participants also identified observable indicators—benchmarks that can help determine whether library makerspaces are enacting the key values.

Access

- ▶ Tools and programs are available at low or no cost to all users.
- ▶ Users are able to use tools and technologies with minimal assistance, and resources are clearly organized and easy to locate.
- ▶ Access expands through replicable and scalable pop-up makerspaces, branch locations, or maker programs within communities.
- ▶ Programs introduce new users to makerspace tools and resources, helping them begin participation with confidence.
- ▶ Spaces and materials meet physical and digital accessibility standards.

Belonging

- ▶ Makerspaces provide welcoming environments where all community members feel comfortable and respected.
- ▶ Programs and spaces center and celebrate a wide range of makers and perspectives, ensuring everyone sees themselves represented.
- ▶ Makerspaces recognize and value different approaches to making, including those rooted in various cultural and traditional practices, expanding what counts as creative and technical work.
- ▶ Communities with fewer opportunities receive support and resources to enable full participation, helping to bridge opportunity gaps.
- ▶ Staff and participants create judgment-free, responsive environments that adapt to the needs of all users.

Community

- ▶ Makerspaces are busy and vibrant, with active collaboration, co-working, and peer-to-peer support.
 - ▶ Strong connections form among users and between the makerspace and local organizations, fostering shared goals and partnership.
 - ▶ Regular users return frequently, demonstrating sustained engagement and a sense of connection.
 - ▶ Community awareness grows through outreach and events that highlight creative and collaborative opportunities.
 - ▶ Makerspaces host programs and projects that bring people together to share skills, solve problems, and create collectively, reinforcing community bonds.
- ▶ Programs strengthen essential literacies, including digital skills, technological fluency, and creative problem-solving, for meaningful participation in making.
 - ▶ Makerspaces support both individual and collaborative projects, offering opportunities for personal exploration and shared learning experiences.
 - ▶ Lifelong learning is evident through repeated participation, progressive skill-building, and growth within a community of practice, where users advance from novice to experienced makers and share knowledge with others.

Creativity

- ▶ Users confidently experiment, tinker, and view mistakes as a natural part of the creative process.
- ▶ Users are able to transform ideas into tangible creations using available tools and guidance.
- ▶ Makerspaces encourage users to explore new and unfamiliar tools and approaches through creative challenges.
- ▶ Makerspaces create experiences that help users discover and build confidence in their own creative abilities, often changing perceptions like “I’m not creative” to “I can create.”
- ▶ Programs and environments encourage cross-disciplinary thinking, connecting ideas, tools, and practices from different domains to spark innovation.

Learning

- ▶ Makerspaces are integrated into academic curricula and courses, connecting making with broader instructional goals in school and academic libraries.
- ▶ Users develop practical skills through iterative practice, building confidence and resilience as they refine projects over time.

1.4. Alignment and Contributions to the ALA Core Values

The key values identified through the listening sessions directly align with the [ALA Core Values of Librarianship](#), particularly the values of access and equity. Taken together, the five key values also reflect the [ALA Core Values of Librarianship](#) value of public good, as they collectively emphasize library makerspaces’ commitments to education and literacy for all individuals and communities.

At the same time, these values take on distinct meaning within the context of makerspaces. While rooted in the library’s long-standing mission of equitable access to information, makerspaces extend that mission into hands-on, participatory learning and creation. They translate the ALA’s foundational principles into tangible experiences—where access means not only entry but participation, shared ownership, and agency; where inclusion and community come to life through making as a shared pursuit that connects people across generations and backgrounds; and where learning and creativity merge to spark innovation and personal growth. In doing so, library makerspaces embody the library’s enduring values while uniquely expanding their impact.

2. VISION

Listening session participants described vivid and concrete visions for the futures they hope to create through successful library makerspaces. These visions encompass the makerspaces themselves, the individual makers who use them, and the broader communities and societies they serve.

2.1. Vision for Makerspaces

MAKERSPACES

- ▶ Vibrant, well-utilized spaces
- ▶ A range of users across ages, experiences, identities, and backgrounds
- ▶ Accessible, welcoming, respectful, and supportive environments
- ▶ Seamlessly integrated into their parent organizations
- ▶ Widely recognized and valued by the community

Participants envisioned library makerspaces as busy, vibrant environments used by a range of makers—diverse in their social identities, personal characteristics, academic disciplines, and community affiliations. They imagined spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and accessible to all. One participant shared their vision of “a busy, collaborative space where people comfortably discuss and share projects.” Another envisioned “community members of all ages regularly [using] the space and equipment.” A third participant described “a thriving and connected community where everyone feels a sense of belonging.” A fourth envisioned a future where “makerspaces function as vibrant community centers of connection and sharing.”

Participants also imagined a future in which makerspaces are fully embedded and seamlessly integrated within their parent organizations—whether libraries, campuses, schools, or municipalities—and widely recognized and valued by those communities. As one participant described, “makerspaces become a core library service with allocated budgets, not a novelty.” Another envisioned “connecting

with professors to integrate makerspaces into course materials, enhancing student understanding.” Others shared visions where “citizens feel the makerspace is a good use of tax dollars” and imagined “sustained excitement and engagement within the community.”

2.2. Vision for Individual Makers

INDIVIDUAL MAKERS

- ▶ Expanded knowledge, skills, and literacies
- ▶ Increased confidence and joy
- ▶ Success in creative, academic, and entrepreneurial pursuits

Participants also shared visions for the individuals who engage in makerspaces. They imagined makers gaining new knowledge, skills, and literacies through hands-on experiences. As one participant explained, “success is when customers can utilize the space to learn and grow.” Another envisioned a future where “members are learning new skills,” while a third hoped for “skill development [that is] applicable to daily life.” Practitioners stressed the need to develop essential literacies among users ranging from reading and writing to digital, technological, and maker literacies to enable meaningful participation in making, noting significant gaps in their communities.

In addition to skill- and literacy-building, participants emphasized personal growth—confidence, joy, and the willingness to take creative risks. One participant envisioned “users [feeling] confident to tinker, fail, and make in a supportive space.” Another imagined “youth [growing] in confidence, tackling challenging projects” and “older adults also [gaining] confidence through hands-on projects.” A third participant captured this transformation with “joyful, confident users (‘I didn’t know I could do that!’).”

Participants also envisioned success in academic, creative, and entrepreneurial pursuits. “Users successfully complete creative projects,” shared one participant, while another described a future where “students learn new skills that spark interests and enhance job readiness.”

2.3. Vision for Community and Society

COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

- ▶ More connected communities
- ▶ Greater sustainability through practices like repair, reuse, and waste reduction
- ▶ More equitable access to tools, resources, technologies, and opportunities

Participants' visions extended beyond individuals to encompass broader community and societal benefits. They imagined communities that are more connected and equitable, with expanded access to making tools, technologies, and opportunities. They also envisioned makerspaces promoting sustainability through repair, reuse, and waste reduction. One participant described "a community built on opportunity, trust, growth, and connection." Another imagined "a sustainable, self-sustaining community with open access to fabrication tools." A third participant envisioned "support for repair, reuse, and recycling practices."

3. PRIORITIES

Across the listening sessions, participants identified five key priorities for advancing library makerspaces over the next five to ten years.

3.1. Sustainable infrastructure: Building stronger and scalable foundations

Participants emphasized the need to build stronger infrastructure as the foundation for consistent operations, fair policies, clear procedures, and scalable services. Infrastructure includes both tangible and intangible elements: physical resources (e.g., equipment, tools, furniture, supplies, and space layout); digital systems (e.g., software, catalogs, databases, scheduling tools); operational systems (e.g., service models, workflows, policies, project management processes); knowledge resources (e.g.,

documentation, training materials, and institutional memory that persist through staff transitions); and support mechanisms (e.g., funding models, staffing structures, partnerships, and administrative backing).

For example, one participant called for "consistent models for delivering maker services," while another stressed the importance of "fair and equitable policies to manage shared resources." Participants also pointed to the need for systems to manage equipment, consumable supplies, learning resources, program documentation, and institutional knowledge. Suggestions included identifying baseline equipment and core capabilities and "developing systems to catalog learning resources effectively." Others emphasized the importance of preserving documentation through staff transitions and maintaining clear records of past programs and community feedback.

3.2. Community engagement and partnerships: Deepening connections and building strategic partnerships

Authentic engagement with communities was seen as essential to ensuring makerspace programs and services align with local needs, priorities, and aspirations. One participant urged libraries to "listen to the community rather than assuming their needs." Community engagement strategies included listening practices (e.g., surveys, interviews, listening sessions), collaborative planning (e.g., advisory boards, co-designed programs, reflecting "community interests to plan for training, supplies, and tools"), and responsiveness to change (adapting to evolving user needs and interests).

Participants also highlighted the importance of building strategic partnerships to extend capacity and strengthen offerings. This included resource-sharing collaborations (e.g., with schools, nonprofits, and local businesses), expertise partnerships (e.g., guest instructors, community mentors), and institutional alliances (e.g., municipal or regional networks). Together, these strategies position libraries to align makerspace services with community priorities while extending their reach and sustainability.

3.3. Staff development: Investing in people

Participants described staff development as essential to the long-term success of makerspaces. They emphasized the need for expanded training and support for makerspace staff across multiple pathways. Strategies included formal education (e.g., courses, degrees, and certificate programs in library and information sciences), on-the-job learning (e.g., mentoring, peer learning, project-based training), and continuing professional development (e.g., workshops, conferences, communities of practice). As one participant noted, the field must “create new staff development pipelines and training systems,” while another emphasized “training in library school,” and a third stressed “providing more training opportunities for librarians” after graduation.

These strategies should be developed concurrently to create a robust ecosystem of learning opportunities. Overall, participants emphasized the importance of ongoing, multi-path professional growth to ensure staff are equipped to deliver high-quality makerspace services.

3.4. Advocacy and Communication: Strengthening internal and external voices

Clearer communication and stronger advocacy were described as necessary at both internal and external levels. Internal strategies included clarifying makerspace roles and services (towards “clarity among all library staff about what the makerspace does”), sharing information across all levels (“from leadership to branch staff”), and building internal advocacy to overcome administrative or political resistance.

Externally, participants highlighted the importance of raising public awareness (“make the space essential and visible through advocacy”), demonstrating value (“find ways to show the ‘awesomeness’ of makerspaces to stakeholders”; “demonstrate makerspace value beyond statistics”; using compelling stories, photos, and qualitative data), and policy advocacy (“advocate for makerspaces as a core library service at state and federal levels”). Participants also suggested innovative branding approaches like reframing terminology to improve understanding, such as shifting

from “makerspace” to terms like “creative space” or “creative technologies” to improve understanding and support.

Overall, participants urged the field to amplify its message—“shout it from the rooftops.”

3.5. Adaptability and Innovation: Meeting Evolving Needs While Bridging Technology Gaps

Participants emphasized that adaptability in makerspaces means more than adopting new tools; it requires addressing basic technology literacy gaps while introducing and experimenting with emerging technologies. Many communities face challenges with foundational digital skills, making accessible entry points essential before moving toward advanced tools. At the same time, staying responsive to rapidly changing technologies and trends remains critical.

Strategies included professional learning to “stay current with evolving technologies and knowledge,” prioritizing “research, development, and application of new technologies,” and responsible community engagement to foster critical literacies for both existing and emerging tools. One practitioner noted that makerspaces serve as an important entry point to advanced technologies, highlighting the need for guided discovery.

Ultimately, adaptability is not only about adopting new tools but also about experimenting responsibly and sharing innovations with the community. Participants agreed this balanced approach will be vital for sustaining makerspaces in a rapidly changing landscape.

4. RESOURCES

Our listening sessions revealed five interconnected, critical resources needed to achieve the shared visions and priorities outlined above.

4.1. Adequate and sustained funding

Participants emphasized the fundamental need for sufficient and reliable funding to equip, operate, sustain, and evolve library makerspaces. They called for “adequate funding to meet goals and priorities,” including “startup, tech refresh, and training funds.” Some suggested private donors, university development offices, and corporate funding as potential funding sources.

4.2. Appropriate staffing and protected staff time

Staff capacity was recognized as a cornerstone of successful makerspaces. Participants noted the importance of “hiring staff who understand and represent the vision and values of the space” and noted that “representation matters—staff diversity encourages patron engagement (e.g., Spanish-speaking staff, teen staff).”

A recurring concern was the lack of dedicated staff time. Many library staff juggle multiple responsibilities, leaving little room for makerspace work. As a result, some resort to completing tasks at home or are unable to stay current with equipment and resources. Participants called for more staff members or more hours dedicated to makerspace work.

4.3. Resources for professional development and training

Participants emphasized the need for makerspace-related training and professional development resources. They called for field-level structures that provide “clear pathways for professional pipelines and development” and advocated for “integrating maker programming into library school

curricula.” They also pointed to the need for “continued staff training to build knowledge and confidence.”

Potential strategies included support from state libraries through training and financial assistance, peer-to-peer learning across makerspaces, and integrating maker-related sessions into library staff development events.

4.4. Structures for knowledge sharing and networking

Enhanced systems for networking and knowledge exchange were seen as critical to strengthening infrastructure, communication, and adaptability. Participants asked for “inter-library communication and collaboration” and “nationwide networking and communication systems,” along with practical platforms such as “spaces to discuss concerns” and “platforms to ask specific questions and share feedback.”

They also highlighted the value of sharing existing resources— “documentation, guides”—to “avoid reinventing the wheel.” Ultimately, participants envisioned structures that would enable the field to align, consolidate, and extend makerspace efforts nationwide.

4.5. Organizational and community buy-in

Organizational and community support was described as another essential resource. As one participant explained, “we need buy-in from our staff and customers—if we throw too much out there without staff and customers actually wanting it, we run the risk of creating apathy or chaos.”

Participants highlighted the importance of “administrative support,” “buy-in from both staff and the community,” “student buy-in,” and “getting the attention of stakeholders with money or influence (administration, potential donors or grant funders, board members).”

III. INSIGHTS FROM THE FIELD: STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

This section draws on a synthesis of insights from all Forum activities—including Working Group Meetings, the Research Showcase, and listening sessions—as well as ongoing discussions among the project team and stakeholders. Extensive input from practitioners, researchers, and partners highlights the strengths, challenges, and emerging opportunities that shape the current and future landscape of library makerspaces.

Library makerspaces exemplify the evolving role of libraries by extending their core mission into hands-on, participatory, and community-centered learning. They bring enduring values—equitable access, inclusion, and public good—to life through creative, learner-driven experiences, strengthening libraries’ relevance and vitality in contemporary society.

Throughout the Forum, it was clear that the greatest asset of this field is its people—librarians, maker professionals, and makers in the community. Several library maker groups exist, including Library Makers, ALA’s Maker Technology Interest Group, and Nation of Makers (now National Maker Collective). Most of them are volunteer- and passion-driven, providing essential spaces for connection, sustaining motivation, and sharing solutions.

Research in this area also reflects a commitment to bridging academic scholarship with real-world practice, and library makerspace scholarship demonstrates diverse and creative approaches.

MOVING FROM NOVELTY TO ESSENTIAL CORE SERVICES



While passion is high, infrastructure is often fragile. We must move beyond the initial “hype” to chart a path for long-term sustainability and integration. —Dr. Kyungwon Koh

At the same time, makerspaces face challenges that impact visibility, equity, sustainability, and shared knowledge. Public perception often frames makerspaces as niche or peripheral services, rather than integral public services. Unclear definitions of “makerspace” hinder communication and advocacy, and many stakeholders—both within libraries and in the broader public—do not fully recognize how makerspaces advance the library’s mission.

While inclusion and equity are widely shared values in library makerspaces, they remain aspirational in many contexts. Persistent barriers such as underrepresentation of certain demographic groups, limited accessibility for patrons with disabilities, and narrow types of making continue to challenge progress.

Further critical challenges include unstable funding—for equipment, spaces, staffing, and research—along with uneven professional development and organizational constraints such as bureaucratic and political hurdles within institutions and associations. A lack of comprehensive national data, including a formal census or demographic study, and a fragmented knowledge base—where resources are dispersed across disciplines, networks, and platforms—make it difficult to assess progress, benchmark impact, or secure institutional support.

Looking ahead, emerging technologies have raised the need for both innovation and social responsibility. Makerspaces are uniquely positioned to explore new technologies such as artificial intelligence while addressing critical issues of equitable access, ethics, privacy, and digital inclusion. They can lead in modeling environmental sustainability through repair, reuse, and upcycling initiatives, and strengthen research-practice connections to ensure scholarship remains relevant and actionable. Advancing these areas will help makerspaces remain future-ready and aligned with the library’s mission.

Based on these insights, we offer the following strategic recommendations for the future.

STRENGTHEN THE FOUNDATION: ORGANIZATIONAL AND FIELD-WIDE SUSTAINABILITY

1

Building a sustainable foundation is essential to ensure that library makerspaces can operate consistently, adapt to change, and scale their impact over time.

Often, individual library makerspaces with small teams lack the capacity to develop all aspects of this infrastructure. Some elements of this work can be developed and shared collectively across institutions. Therefore, it is critical that library makerspaces collectively seek opportunities to develop systems and resources that can be shared across institutions, reducing duplication and enabling smaller or emerging makerspaces to benefit from shared resources and proven models.

At the same time, there are aspects of infrastructure and programming that must be developed locally to reflect the unique character of each community. In these cases, adopting inclusive and participatory approaches—such as co-creating policies, programs, and space designs with

community members—ensures that makerspaces remain culturally responsive, accessible, and representative of diverse voices and practices.

Sustainability for the field also requires a strong evidence base that can inform makerspace development and operations and enable libraries to evaluate and communicate the value and impact of their makerspaces. Strategies and advocacy to protect and increase funding dedicated to library makerspace research are needed to provide a strong foundation for evidence-based practice and continued innovation. Identifying field-wide research priority areas can help focus and guide future research efforts.

Sustainable operational systems: Establish clear and transparent policies, workflows, and service models that promote consistency, equity, and accountability across programs and staff transitions.

Robust physical and digital infrastructure: Invest in essential equipment, tools, furniture, and well-designed spaces (including mobile carts, pop-up setups, or shared environments) that support safe, inclusive, and adaptable maker activities. At the same time, develop or adopt digital tools for managing equipment, scheduling, tracking evaluation data, cataloging learning resources, and more. Effective systems can streamline operations and improve coordination across teams and sites.

Diversified and stable funding models: Depending on the library context, a mix of funding streams—including institutional support, grants, community partnerships, and fee-based or revenue-generating activities—can help ensure resilience during funding gaps and reduce dependency on single sources. Research funding provided by a mix of federal agencies (such as IMLS and NSF), private foundations, and corporate sponsors can ensure continued scholarship and evidence-based innovation that strengthens practice.

GROW THE PEOPLE: LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

2

A sustainable future for library makerspaces depends on the people who lead, teach, and innovate within them.

Professional learning and leadership development should span all career stages, fostering pathways for growth.

Formal learning pathways: Currently, there is a gap in formal education on library makerspaces. The field will benefit from certificate programs, coursework, and continuing education opportunities within Library and Information Science (LIS) and related disciplines.

Mentorship and leadership opportunities: Create more structured mentorship programs and peer-learning networks that connect pre-service students, new professionals, and experienced practitioners.

Equitable access to professional development: Support accessible, affordable, and flexible professional learning opportunities for library workers across all career stages and community contexts, including rural and under-resourced areas. Provide funding and support for early career researchers to establish makerspace-related research agendas and for mid-career researchers to deepen and expand their lines of inquiry.

CONNECT AND BUILD THE NETWORK: PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATION **3**

Sustaining momentum across the library makerspace field requires intentional collaboration and strong networks. By connecting people, institutions, and ideas, the field can move from isolated innovation to collective progress.

Shared digital infrastructure: Sustain and further develop online platforms that enable professionals to connect, share, and collaborate. Examples include repositories of educational resources and tutorials, toolkits, research and best practices, and virtual communities of practice. Ensuring sustainability requires attention to long-term maintenance and platform governance.

Coordinate regular opportunities for dialogue and exchange: Establish ongoing opportunities—such as forums, conferences, or working groups—for sharing insights, aligning efforts, nurturing professional relationships, and facilitating collaboration between practitioners and researchers. Regular interaction helps surface emerging needs and fosters a sense of shared purpose.

Cross-sector partnerships: Foster collaboration among researchers, educators, practitioners, and community partners to align goals, co-develop projects, and spark innovation. Facilitate the exchange of ideas and information across academic disciplines that can inform makerspace practices, including library and information science, education, design, and other disciplinary traditions, encompassing both academic research and practice-based scholarship.

ELEVATE THE MESSAGE: ADVOCACY GROUNDED IN CLEAR STRATEGIC IDENTITY **4**

A strong and shared identity is essential for sustaining the visibility, credibility, and support of library makerspaces. By articulating who we are and why we matter, the field can more effectively communicate its impact, inspire investment, and build lasting public trust.

Clarify definitions: A clear, shared definition of library making and makerspaces can support communication and advocacy. Describing makerspaces as learning spaces, creative spaces, technology spaces, and/or community spaces resonates with different groups based on their varying values.

Reframe the narrative through shared values: Leverage the library's core values—community, access, creativity, learning, and inclusion—to position makerspaces as dynamic services that foster participation and belonging. Present them as extensions of the library's enduring commitment to equitable and lifelong learning and resilient community building.

Craft compelling and strategic narratives: Develop clear, evidence-based messages that resonate across audiences, from funders and policymakers to library leaders and the public. Shared storytelling frameworks, visual assets, and impact metrics can help articulate the collective significance of library makerspaces and the futures they enable. Comprehensive national data and a formal census, paired with local stories, will provide a compelling narrative.

LOOK AHEAD: INNOVATION AND EMERGING ISSUES

5

To remain vibrant and relevant, library makerspaces must continue to evolve alongside broader societal, technological, and environmental shifts. Looking ahead means not only adopting new tools, but also critically engaging with the values, challenges, and opportunities that shape the future of learning, creativity, and community life.

Create space for exploration and experimentation:

Dedicate time and resources to investigate emerging topics such as artificial intelligence, environmental sustainability, and the intersection of physical and digital making. At the same time, library makerspaces must bridge the technology gap by addressing foundational digital skills and basic technology literacy needs in our communities.

Collaborate across disciplines and sectors: Partner with allied fields—including design, education, community development, and the creative industries—to broaden the scope and societal relevance of library makerspaces. Cross-sector collaboration can spark fresh perspectives, generate new models of engagement, and strengthen the role of libraries as hubs for inclusive innovation.

Together, these five directions outline a roadmap for sustaining and advancing library makerspaces as vital components of 21st-century librarianship. By pursuing these directions collectively, libraries can reinforce their role as community-centered spaces for creativity, learning, and inclusion—places where people not only access information, but also imagine and build the future together.

NATIONAL FORUM TO CONNECT AND ADVANCE LIBRARY MAKERSPACES

