

Fordham Law School

FLASH: The Fordham Law Archive of Scholarship and History

Staff Publications

Law Library

6-9-2017

Making It Happen | Programming

Jennifer Dixon

Fordham University School of Law, jdixon22@law.fordham.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/staff_publications



Part of the [Law Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dixon, Jennifer. "Making It Happen | Programming." *Library Journal* 9 Jun. 2017: n. page. Online

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Library at FLASH: The Fordham Law Archive of Scholarship and History. It has been accepted for inclusion in Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of FLASH: The Fordham Law Archive of Scholarship and History. For more information, please contact tmelnick@law.fordham.edu.

Making It Happen | Programming

by [Jennifer A. Dixon](#)

Jun 09, 2017 | Filed in [News](#)

LJ surveys public libraries to benchmark how Maker initiatives are taking hold across the field

AS MAKER SPACES IN LIBRARIES become increasingly common, often backed by grants from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)—and Maker activities without a dedicated space even more so—anyone who follows the professional literature and conference presentations is surely aware of the buzz around Making. But just how much does that buzz represent widespread practice, and of what precisely do these offerings consist? *LJ* recently surveyed public librarians in the United States and Canada to understand how common Maker programs really are and what types of creative lineups are gaining traction. *LJ* distributed links to the Public Library Maker Survey to 7,000 public librarians on March 10, 2017, and the survey closed on April 3, with 404 responses. (*LJ*'s Public Library Maker Report is available for download at thedigitalshift.com/research.)

	POPULATION SERVED				
	Total	<25K	25K–99K	100K–499K	500K+
Less than \$500	25%	30%	30%	17%	8%
\$500–\$999	30%	38%	28%	30%	8%
\$1,000–\$4,999	31%	27%	30%	33%	39%
\$5,000–\$9,999	8%	3%	9%	10%	23%
\$10,000 or more	6%	2%	4%	10%	23%
Average	\$2,952	\$1,644	\$2,491	\$3,767	\$8,154
Median	\$914	\$760	\$859	\$1,400	\$4,599

SOURCE: *LJ* Public Library Maker Survey 2017

WHAT IS MAKER ANYWAY?

While some selection bias in who chose to take a survey on this topic was probably in play, Maker activities do seem to enjoy broad adoption, with 89% of respondents reporting offering some type of Maker programs, frequently for children and teens. Maker programming is much more common in larger libraries: 77% of libraries serving populations under 25,000 provide some type of Maker program, versus 96% of libraries serving 100,000 to 499,000. Most of the

librarians from institutions that do not already offer Maker programs expressed an interest in doing so, with 66% of the non-Maker libraries wanting to know how to get started and 63% asking about how to fund their own offerings.

Some librarians who initially said their library did not offer Maker programming nonetheless did report that they offer activities often embraced under that rubric, particularly low-tech ones such as cooking, painting, and creative writing—demonstrating a lack of consensus within the profession as to what constitutes a Maker program. The *LJ* survey defined the term broadly, encompassing creative activities like crafting and sewing that may rely only on older technologies. Library programming runs the gamut, from “drop-in” crafting activities to organized coding classes.

Because not everyone defines the term as broadly, some survey respondents rejected the term *Maker*. Wrote Aaron Pickett, East Brunswick Public Library, NJ, “We also are trying to steer away from the ‘maker’ label as we feel that it can read very bro-y and tech-y, and [we try to] emphasize that these types of DIY programs are for everyone, all ages, every skill level, with a desire to learn, and try to be as eclectic in our programming as our community is.”

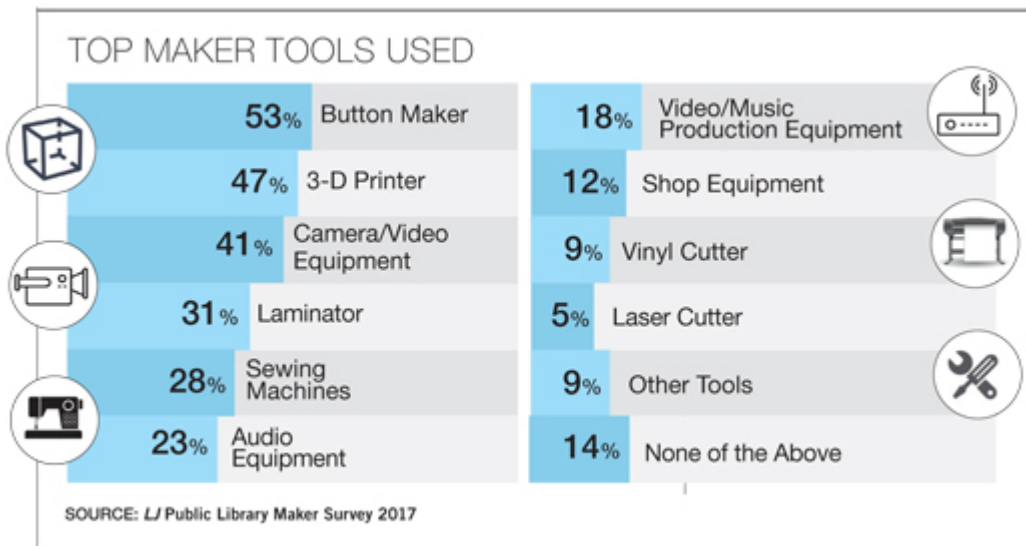
TRENDING TOWARD TECH

Overall, however, while the full spectrum of Maker activities remains popular, the trend seems to be toward programs that promote digital literacy by using newer technologies, especially for younger audiences. The most popular adult programs are predominantly, though not completely, low-tech: crafts (30%), cooking (28%), 3-D printing (27%), and sewing (25%). However, for teens, the most popular Maker program offerings are cooking (27%), coding (26%), 3-D printing (22%), and crafts (20%); for children, the most popular are LEGO/building kits (35%), crafts (29%), robotics (19%), and cooking (10%).

This reflects a shift from the results of an *LJ* creative programming survey of patrons conducted in 2014, which asked respondents about some of the same activities. The earlier survey revealed crafts, knitting/crocheting, LEGO/building kits, gardening, and cooking as the most popular activities in public libraries. In the last three years, the programs showing the most dramatic jump in popularity are coding/programming (from 36% of public libraries to 65%), painting/drawing (43% to 69%), 3-D printing (23% to 45%), robotics (32% to 53%), and building kits (71% to 87%). Activities such as cooking, gardening, crafts, and scrapbooking have all had a small decrease in popularity.

Other in-demand activities for all ages include jewelry making, gardening, scrapbooking, origami, music, book making, animation, circuitry, vinyl or laser cutting, graphic design, and video editing. One librarian from Colorado noted, “Anything related to learning to code fills up quickly,” while an Idaho librarian found that 3-D printing workshops for teens and adults fill up “months in advance.” Less techy crafting programs have a strong appeal, according to Gina Dreyer, La

Quinta Library, CA, because teens “are also interested in learning more skills that are not taught in schools, older skills that were traditionally passed down between family members such as sewing, knitting, [and] beading.”

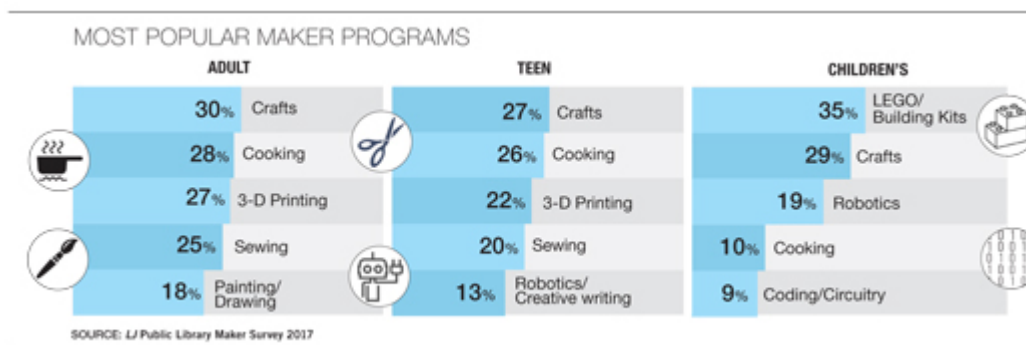


WHY MAKING?

The majority of library patrons (73%) see Maker programs as an opportunity to explore new creative outlets. Consequently, many participants are beginners in the program area, developing brand new skills. For slightly over one-quarter of patrons, Maker programs and equipment use fill a specific need, helping them accomplish projects or goals like creating family scrapbooks.

Librarians in the *LJ* survey found that Maker activities draw an increased volume of patrons to the library. The more technologically oriented activities cause the biggest attendance bump. Libraries offering 3-D printing for children reported the largest percentage increase in attendance, and libraries with a coding program for adults or teens had the highest percentage of increased attendance among those age groups.

According to Nick Taylor, Arapahoe Libraries, CO, “Our most successful Maker programs involve making a custom thing that a patron can leave with.... Our less successful programs have been ‘open hours’ type programs that are meant to introduce people to the space. Our patrons need a specific project/thing to do...and aren’t as amenable to open-ended activities.”



TEACHER INTENSIVE

Presenting such creative classes requires knowledgeable teachers who can guide patrons. Libraries frequently design Maker programming around the existing skills of library staff, or train staff in appropriate skills for desired courses. Coding, in particular, is a subject in which librarian instructors often study skills to keep ahead of their classes, while libraries tend to partner with local experts when it comes to cooking.

Responding librarians expressed a desire to develop their own skills in more “techie” subjects such as coding, robotics, animation, video game design, and circuitry. Some survey respondents noted that their Maker programs fell flat when the technical requirements of the materials exceeded the skills of available staffers.

Libraries with an already limited number of employees need to ensure that they have enough people on hand to support ambitious Maker programming. At the Randolph County Public Library, NC, a stop animation video program “could have gone much better,” according to librarian Ann Przybylowski, but because there “were not enough leaders to assist/answer questions in a timely manner, as a result the duration of the program was too short.”

There is a nearly even breakdown of volunteer (64%) vs. paid (52%) instructors, with libraries in the Northeast more likely to pay instructors while libraries in the West are more likely to rely on volunteers. Some 61% of libraries aim to recruit diverse instructors, with libraries in the Northeast more frequently recruiting with an eye toward diversity.

For example, the Highland Township Public Library, MI, invited a local university group to teach children about lightbulbs and electricity. According to librarian Brenda Dunseth, the “university students who led the program were all women, which was a plus because many girls signed up for the program,” making for a “nice mentoring opportunity.”

Over half of responding libraries partner with local community members, experts, or organizations to guide Maker programs. The majority, 72%, ally with local organizations to coordinate Maker projects, most commonly schools and clubs. Other common partners include museums, civic associations, and camps. Nearly all (97%) libraries not currently partnering with local organizations would either like to or would consider it.

MAKING ROOM FOR MAKER SPACE

Physical equipment and supplies, as well as a venue, are also key to the success of Maker programming. Some 43% of survey respondents have a dedicated Maker space, and 18% of those spaces are all-ages. Slightly over half of libraries with a dedicated Maker space (56%) created it by converting an underused existing area such as a meeting or storage room, while

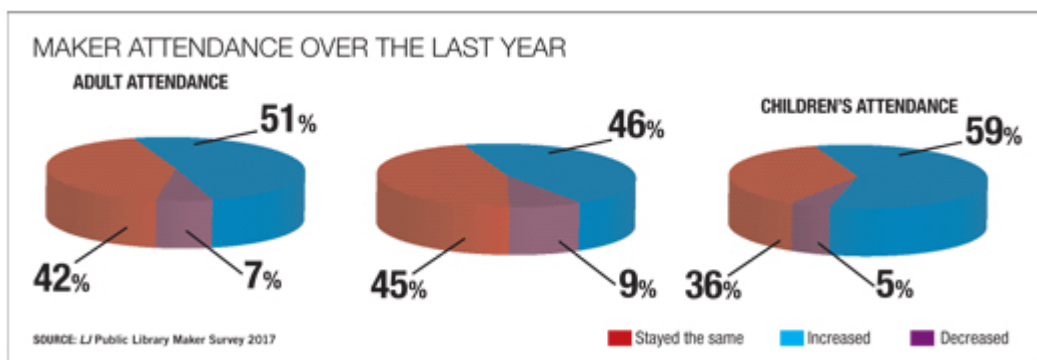
21% reduced stacks to accommodate the effort. For nearly a quarter of libraries, the creation of this Maker space involved construction: for some, the area was part of a new building, while others included the Maker space in an addition.

Suburban and rural libraries are most likely to have a community garden, while small-town and rural libraries are most likely to have kitchens. Media studios are most commonly found in urban and suburban facilities. Libraries without a dedicated Maker space adapt what they have. According to Jessica Zubik, Chelsea District Library, MI, “Without a dedicated Maker space, my library has gotten creative with storage and using regular programming spaces for Maker programs. We’ve also started a nontraditional circulating collection that allows our patrons to check out items like Snap Circuits kits, MaKey MaKey kits, and knitting needles, among other tools.”

The most common tools found in responding libraries and used to support Maker programming are button makers, 3-D printers, and cameras or video equipment. Others include laminators, sewing machines, audio equipment, video equipment, laser cutters, and vinyl cutters.

Librarians also employ LittleBits (found in 48% of public libraries with Maker programming), MaKey MaKey, and Scratch (both found in 40% of libraries reporting). In the largest libraries, LEGO Mindstorms are the most common Maker space products. Other familiar items include Snap Circuits, Raspberry Pi, Beebot, Cricut, and other circuit kits, programmable robots, and microcontrollers. The vast majority of libraries—88%—don’t allow their Maker kits to circulate outside the building, but 74% share supplies and equipment among multiple branches.

Responding libraries spent an average of \$2,952 on Maker programming over the last year. Many libraries use those funds to purchase arts and craft supplies, books, circuit kits, and robotics kits. Only 20% of responding librarians said that they expect an increase in funding for Maker programs next year. In addition to the general library programming budget, libraries also rely upon Friends of the Library support and grants. Only 8% of responding libraries had a dedicated Maker budget.



FACING CHALLENGES

While these types of materials have become very popular with public librarians and their patrons, they do have a learning curve. The C.H. Booth Library, Newtown, CT, for example, has not used the Arduino and Raspberry Pi kits “as much as we thought we would as we have been unable to find the right instructor,” per librarian Kim Weber.

While libraries seek out exciting and new tools for their programs, some have encountered issues with troubleshooting. For example, Kiki Durney of Palm Harbor Library, FL, wrote, “We tried to have CoderDojo here, but our wireless couldn’t support the large amount of downloading. We don’t have the budget to increase our Internet speed, so the program had to pick another location.” Booth’s Weber also notes her library was “unable to sustain the LittleBits program because the bits were not that durable and led to frustration.”

A lack of funding, supplies, and staff capacity are the biggest factors that hold libraries back from trying new Maker programs. For libraries that don’t yet have programming, many also cite a lack of space, as well as expressing concerns about a lack of patron interest.

Some respondents stated that they have trouble publicizing and scheduling Maker programming in a way that consistently attracts attendance, while others have difficulty bringing patrons to inconvenient branch locations. Some technology-oriented programs are beyond the capacity of library staff and equipment, while more involved crafting projects frustrate younger patrons who may not know skills like sewing.

Multiple responding librarians noted that adult patrons seem less at ease with Maker programming than their younger counterparts. Jane Jankowski, Warrenville Public Library, IL, stated that adults “like programs where they come in, sit still, and get lectured at,” while Mary Lorenz, Grand Forks Public Library, ND, has found that “programs we planned for adults weren’t well attended, and I think that’s because they are not used to coming to the library for these types of programs. We have only recently started the Maker programs for adults.”

Maker programming can offer exciting opportunities for libraries to connect with their patrons and community in new ways, establishing the library as a venue for creative expression and learning. As the *LJ* survey responses indicate, however, public librarians are still testing out what types of programs and equipment resonate with their institution’s resources and community’s needs. While many libraries are experiencing challenges and frustration, they are committed to experimenting with Making something new.

Jennifer A. Dixon is Serials and Electronic Resources Librarian, Fordham University Law School Library, NY
