

BEYOND BOOKS

Books are just the tip of the library iceberg. Public libraries help communities learn, explore, connect, and have fun, going well beyond their traditional “library” brand.

Public programs explore arts and culture, health and wellness, civics, science, history, and technology. Career centers and business resources help job seekers, entrepreneurs, and the local economy.

Online library users search databases, browse research materials, stream video, and receive reference services and homework help via chat. Robust online access to library resources ensures that users’ essential information needs are served all day, every day.

Digital labs and makerspaces provide access to the latest technology and support learning-by-doing, whether that’s with state-of-the-art equipment or traditional hand tools. “Libraries of Things” make it possible to check out binoculars along with trail maps, or a sewing machine to go with the latest fashion magazine.

Gallery spaces and special exhibitions showcase everything from local artists to seasonal events and regional culture. Local history collections include personal papers, photographs, maps, and documents. Memory labs help communities digitize their collections and preserve their histories.

If you can read it, hear it, watch it, play it, search for it, listen to it, learn with it, or sign up for it, chances are your library offers it!

GIVING THE COMMUNITY WHAT IT WANTS

- Public programs in California libraries typically attract over 10 million attendees a year.¹ They range from hands-on STEAM activities and sports and games to author presentations and community discussions. These programs bring people together and provide them with opportunities for conversation, engagement, learning, and enrichment.
- Summers in California public libraries are about connecting and exploring as well as reading and learning. In San Francisco, Summer Stride events have taken library users all over the map, with free shuttle service to nearby National Parks—plus talks by park rangers, terrarium-building classes, and visits to local farmers’ markets. In Oakland, library staff create opportunities for teens to explore local resources including free museum days, skate parks, and swimming pools. In Burbank, teens have created and hosted a summer murder mystery night. After-hours quiz nights at the San Mateo Public Library have brought adults together, connected them with the library, and helped them get to know their neighbors.²
- Collections, events, and public programs focusing on video games can help draw young people into the library—including reluctant readers, at-risk youth, and the hard-to-reach segment of male teens and young adults—and improve their academic and life skills.³ Librarians with regular gaming events report increased visitorship among younger users,⁴ and in a nationwide survey of 400 librarians, 76 percent report that participants in their gaming events have returned to use non-game resources.⁵



OFFERING ACCESS TO TRUSTED INFORMATION

- Public libraries provide access to trusted information through extensive collections of databases and other resources. When asked who they trust to provide them with news and information, 78 percent of Americans choose librarians and the library. In fact, 40 percent of American adults say they trust libraries and librarians “a lot”—compared with just 18 percent or less for local news, national news, other government sources, or social media.⁶
- A statewide initiative from the California State Library enables public libraries to provide users with free access to the *New York Times*. The subscription provides access to English, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese-language versions of the newspaper, and archives going back to 1851. In 2020, the database had 6.5 million page views across the state.⁷

INNOVATING WITH LABS AND MAKERSPACES

- The IDEA Lab in San Diego County’s La Jolla/Riford Library includes a computer lab, 3D printer lab, and what is “quite possibly the first biology lab inside a public library anywhere in the world. It contains everything required for the majority of molecular biology techniques, such as a thermal cycler, gel electrophoresis, and centrifuge.”⁸
- Makerspaces—collaborative workspaces with equipment like laser cutters and 3D printers, sewing machines and woodworking tools—support innovation, provide equitable access to technology and tools, and offer opportunities for people to learn and share at all ages.⁹ Programs like the Tech Petting Zoo at the Mission Viejo Library let kids and teens experiment with circuits, create and print 3D models, and try out virtual technology headsets.¹⁰



- Memory labs preserve personal and local history by helping communities digitize photos, documents, audiovisual recordings, and other formats. The California State Library’s California Revealed initiative helps public libraries and local heritage groups digitize and preserve online access to archival materials that tell the incredible stories of the Golden State.¹²
- Berkeley Public Library’s Tool Lending Library, established in 1979, was one of the first in the nation, and has served as a model for many other public libraries. The collection has expanded over the years, from about 500 objects to more than 3,500. New items like a smartphone-and-tablet repair kit reflect the changing needs of the community.¹³
- The Napa County Library’s “Library of Things” supports lifelong learning and creativity by providing the physical “things” necessary to explore new areas of interest. Users can borrow almost everything, including a sewing machine, button maker, telescope, camera, projector, cookie cutters, board games, musical instruments, binoculars, museum passes, and puzzles.¹⁴

NOTES

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12. California Revealed. 2019. "About." Sacramento, CA: California State Library. <https://californiarevealed.org/about>.
13. Berkeley Public Library. N.d. "Tool Lending Library—a Brief History." Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Public Library. <https://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/locations/tool-lending-library/tool-lending-library-brief-history>.
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