

LIBRARY OF THINGS

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A SHAREABLE SERIES

Library of Things: A Cornerstone of the Real Sharing Economy

Volume 1, 2020

SHAREABLE

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Library of Things: A Cornerstone of the Real Sharing Economy

Volume 1, 2020



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About Shareable

Shareable is an award-winning nonprofit media outlet, action network, and consultancy. Our mission is to empower communities to share for a more resilient, equitable, and joyful world. We inspire social change by publishing solutions-based journalism, running campaigns, and helping our consulting clients achieve their goals through sharing.

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Additional Publications from Shareable



[Beyond Waste: Community Solutions to Managing Our Resources \(2019\)](#)

The ebook “Beyond Waste: Community Solutions to Managing Our Resources” features our editorial series outlining ways individuals, organizations and communities are reducing waste around the world.



[The Response: Building Collective Resilience in the Wake of Disasters \(2019\)](#)

This collection of interviews, articles, guides, and personal stories is designed to deepen the understanding of community led disaster response and support deeper engagement between neighbors, family, and friends In preparation for a future together.



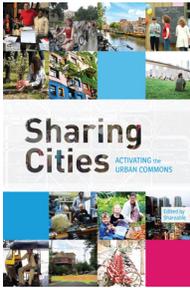
[How Racism Shaped the Housing Crisis & What We Can Do About It \(2019\)](#)

Our very latest ebook is hot off the presses, so to speak. This free ebook is a compilation of all of the articles in our series: “How Racism Shaped the Housing Crisis & What We Can Do About It.” We explore the history of land use and housing policy in the United States, solutions to the housing crisis with a focus on how to increase equity, and conversations we’ve hosted about it.



[Community Solutions to the Loneliness Epidemic \(2019\)](#)

“Community Solutions to the Loneliness Epidemic” is divided into four sections offering a global context before exploring what people, organizations, and governments are doing to address this challenge in the U.S., U.K., Japan, South Korea, and more. Stories range from an op-ed calling for a change in the social climate to get climate change to solutions-focused pieces about time banking, libraries of things, senior centers, coworking, meal sharing, and innovative city policies.



[Sharing Cities: Activating the Urban Commons \(2018\)](#)

“Sharing Cities: Activating the Urban Commons” showcases over a hundred sharing-related case studies and model policies from more than 80 cities in 35 countries. It witnesses a growing global movement and serves as a practical reference guide for community-based solutions to urgent challenges faced by cities everywhere. This book is a call to action meant to inspire readers, raise awareness, and strengthen the sharing movement worldwide. “Sharing Cities” shows that not only is another world possible — but that much of it is already here.



[How To: Share, Save Money & Have Fun \(2016\)](#)

A collection of insightful guides on sharing housing, transportation, food, education, music and more. This book shows you how to lead a more enjoyable life, with your family and in your community, while saving money.



[Share or Die \(2012\)](#)

A series of forays into uncharted territory, this graphically rich collection of essays, narratives, and how-tos is an intimate guide to the new economic order and a must-read for anyone attempting to understand what it means to live within the challenges of our time.



[Shareable Futures \(2010\)](#)

In this collection of short stories and speculative essays, literary futurists imagine a world to come where technology has changed the rules of ownership and access, and people are able to share transportation, living spaces, lives, dreams, everything and anything. These are futures in which we are surviving and even thriving, largely by learning to share our stuff.

Introduction

by Tom Llewellyn

A cultural shift from owning everything we might ever conceivably want to simply having access to good quality items when we need them, started to take shape following the recession in the late 2000s. As the economy recovered, there was a general concern that most people would return to pre-recession levels of consumption and the act of sharing would fall out of vogue. But, according to [Gene Homicki](#), co-founder of [myTurn](#)¹, a cloud-based inventory platform for Libraries of Things (LoT) even as the economy rebounded, Libraries of Things continued to gain popularity.

There are more than 400 publicly accessible libraries that provide tools, kitchen items, toys, audio/visual equipment, electronics, musical instruments, and more on myTurn alone. These comprise more than a quarter-million items available to rent, and nearly a million loans annually.

For the past decade, Shareable has been on the vanguard of covering this trend. We've done deep dives into [how libraries are boldly innovating to meet the needs of changing communities](#), partnered on the successful campaign to [save seed sharing in the United States](#), [advised municipal leaders](#) on the benefits of LoTs for their cities, and [produced several resources](#) to support organizers around the world to start LoTs in their communities.

¹ Note: myTurn is a Shareable sponsor.

“Library of Things: A Cornerstone of the Real Sharing Economy” is both a celebration of how far LoTs have come and a glimpse into where they’re going.

In this book we’ll explore:

- How traditional libraries are reinventing themselves while expanding their offerings and reaffirming their role as a vital community service.
- What you should know before starting an LoT (and how to do it!)
- How pop-up and mobile LoTs like The Thingery and ShareShed are expanding their reach and meeting the needs of more people in their communities.
- What opportunities exist for new services due to several advances in technology.
- And much more.

We hope you’ll feel inspired to support your local Library of Things after reading this ebook and maybe even work with others to start one yourself!



Photo by Karim MANJRA via Unsplash

Coming soon to a library near you: A sharing culture

by Noah Lenstra

In 2017, 59 percent of public libraries in Ontario, Canada reported having non-traditional circulating library collections (e.g., fishing gear, recreation equipment, musical instruments, seed gardens etc.).

According to the Federation of Ontario Public Libraries, the most commonly available items for check-out are: seeds, fishing gear, energy monitors, museum/art gallery passes and pedometers.

Throughout North America — and beyond — public libraries have quietly become the places to share whatever it may be that people wish to share in a non-monetized context. [Katarina Michnik and Catarina Eriksson report](#) how, in some Swedish public libraries, you can now check out bikes, bicycle helmets, bike pumps, fitness equipment and other “tools that facilitate active pastimes.”

This activity typically emerges at the grassroots, with local partners coming together to utilize the infrastructure of the public library to share resources, skills and space. In the United States, approximately 96 percent of the population lives within a [public library service area](#), and about half of U.S. libraries are located in small towns and rural areas. This social infrastructure is extremely decentralized, with nearly 90 percent of library funding coming from municipal or county sources.

In December 2019, Jennifer Johnson of the Vermont Department of Libraries asked members of the Vermont Libraries listserv to complete a form indicating what “non-traditional” objects are available at their libraries for check-out. The results, which are [publicly accessible](#), testify to the heterogeneity of this trend.

The 56 public libraries in Vermont that indicated they have non-traditional collections circulate everything from a Batgirl costume (Cutler Memorial Library) to ski passes to the Snow Bowl and Rikert Nordic Center (Ilsley Public Library) to a 12-foot tree pruner (Winooski Memorial Library). Through a partnership with the Vermont Department of Health, [47 public libraries](#) also check out snowshoes.

The phenomenon also extends beyond objects. The latest trend in public librarianship focuses on how libraries can share their

spaces. [The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation reports](#) that, in Monterey Park, California, “Line dance leader Kit Cheung teaches her class of Chinese-American women in an unlikely place — the parking lot of a local library. No other public location offers both the outdoor space and sun cover the group requires for their twist on the traditional Chinese exercise of tai chi.”

City librarian Norma Arvizu states, “There was a concern for me in the beginning because they would interrupt the flow of folks coming through. Later on I realized that this would be a positive image for the library, because these are residents. These are actual people that live here. Why were we not allowing them to use what their taxes pay for?”

Similar attitudes to sharing of public space emerge across the country. In Bellingham, Washington, the public library removed two rows of shelving to create a [SkillShare space](#). The mission of this space is to “bring people together to share and learn.” Anyone can share their skills in this space, and popular activities have included ukulele lessons, tai chi sessions, arts and crafts, chess and other games, all led by local residents.

National data also backs up these trends. A study commissioned by the [American Library Association](#) in 2018 found substantially more voters said they think libraries should provide “activities and entertainment not found elsewhere” in a community (48 percent, up from 38 percent in 2008), and more think libraries should be “a place for people to gather and socialize” (45 percent, up from 36 percent in 2008).

In my research in North Carolina, I’ve found this approach to sharing public space in both rural and urban communities. Libraries in cities like [Durham](#) and [Chapel Hill](#), and in rural areas like

[Hendersonville](#), all have forms on their websites that anyone can fill out to propose a collaboration focused on sharing skills and knowledge at the library.

All this activity continues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Everywhere from [Salt Lake City](#) to [small-town West Virginia](#), public libraries have continued seed-sharing with their communities. Patrons can request their seeds online and librarians send them out via the USPS. To facilitate the sharing of virtual space, Pennsylvania's Schlow Centre Region Library invites community members to [Reserve a Virtual Community Room](#). Here's how it works:

“Schlow now has seven Zoom rooms available for groups, organizations, and businesses to use for free. The digital rooms can accommodate a maximum of 300 people and be reserved for up to two hours, Monday through Friday between 9 a.m. to noon or 4 to 7 p.m. Groups can reserve a Zoom room for a maximum of two meetings per month.”

Every public library is unique, so it is probable that not all of these services are available at your local library. However, the take-away from these facts are as follows:

1. Public libraries wish to maximize their resources to promote sharing of skills, knowledge and resources in local communities;
2. They have already started this work, but could do more with your participation;
3. If you want to promote sharing in your community, and have not yet reached out to your local library, you are “leaving money on the table”.



Organizer Elliot Scher of Seattle's Phinney Neighborhood Association Tool Library (c)Amanda Castleman

Libraries of Things continue to catalog success

by Anneliese Baker

Each spring, the [Barnet Sailing Co-op](#) in British Columbia hauls out its six boats for maintenance, co-opting many of its 80 members to help.

“We found we had more willing hands than equipment, even with a tool shed and a toolbox on each vessel,” says Diane Selkirk.

“We’re member-funded, so buying extra gear that we only need once a year is a waste of money and resources. Plus, then we’d

have to store and care for additional items, something we frankly suck at.”

Enter the [Vancouver Tool Library](#), which loans out more than 2,000 items. It is part of a movement of Libraries of Things (LoT), which are taking the classic “reduce, reuse, recycle” mantra to new heights. These social enterprises share with the public everything from backpacks to boomboxes, baby carriers, and beer-brewing equipment. Some even rent ties and suit jackets for job seekers.

Though the sharing economy is often called revolutionary, LoTs tap into ancient traditions. For most of human history, family groups and communities cooperated to hunt, gather food, and pool resources. The big difference now is that companies are not limited by geography. The internet and other technologies facilitate interactions between strangers on an unprecedented scale. The “sharing economy,” which includes the full spectrum of on-demand services, collaborative consumption initiatives, and community focused sharing resources, is surging and will have a \$335b footprint by 2025, according to DC-based research group the Brookings Institution.

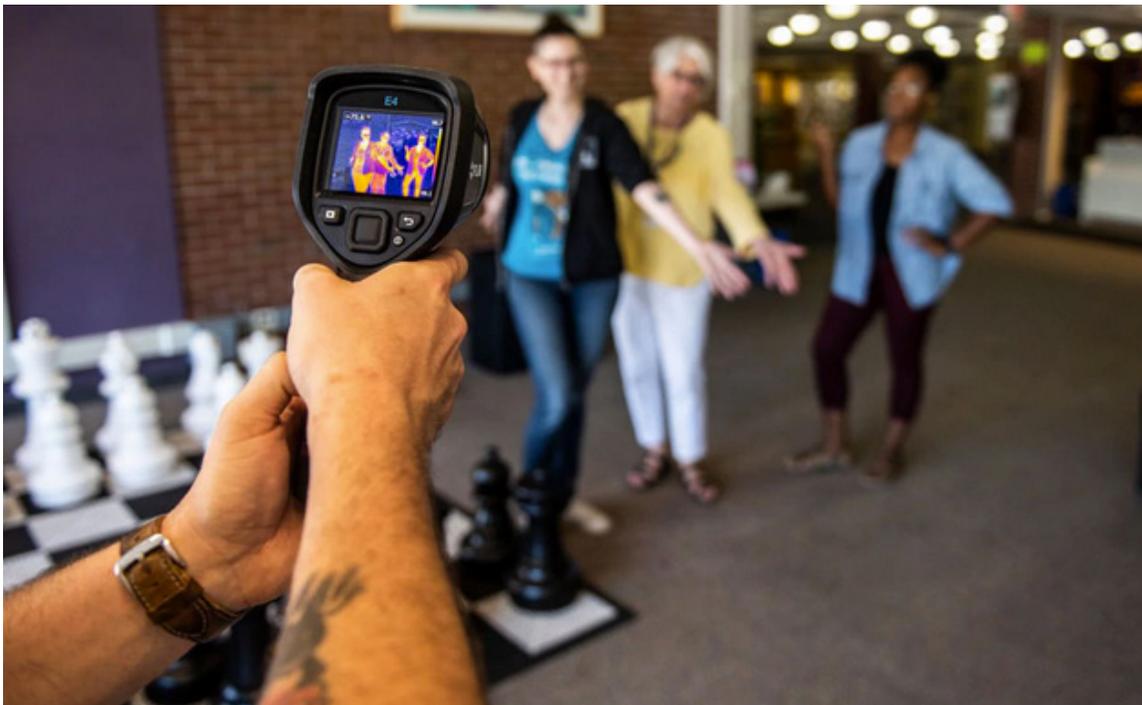
Expect this behavior to increase, says Paul Levinson, a Fordham University professor of communications and media studies and author of “Realspace: The Fate of Physical Presence in the Digital Age.” “Accessing rather than owning products is a sea change that is growing in sync with how informed consumers are in this online age. Information about everything is more available than at any time in history,” he says.

The benefits of using LoTs go far beyond their comparatively affordable price, reduction of clutter, and alleviation of our so-

called “[peak stuff](#)” problem. They also reduce the environmental impact of manufacturing and transporting underused goods.

We need to rapidly innovate, says Gene Homicki, co-founder of [myTurn](#), a cloud-based inventory platform for Libraries of Things (and Shareable sponsor). “We’re starting to hit practical planetary limits on resource extraction. Plastic pollution in the oceans is reaching a critical point, and many solid waste and recycling facilities are reaching or have exceeded capacity. Compounding this, we are seeing a rise in middle classes in developing nations. Billions more people, rightly, want to have access to products that the developed world has enjoyed.”

The durable and repairable products managed with myTurn are typically used 10 to 100 times more than those owned privately. A [UN Resource Panel report](#) suggests sharing like this can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 79-99 percent.



Ann Arbor District Library, courtesy of MLive (contributed by Rich Reyti)

Libraries are a boon for low-income neighborhoods

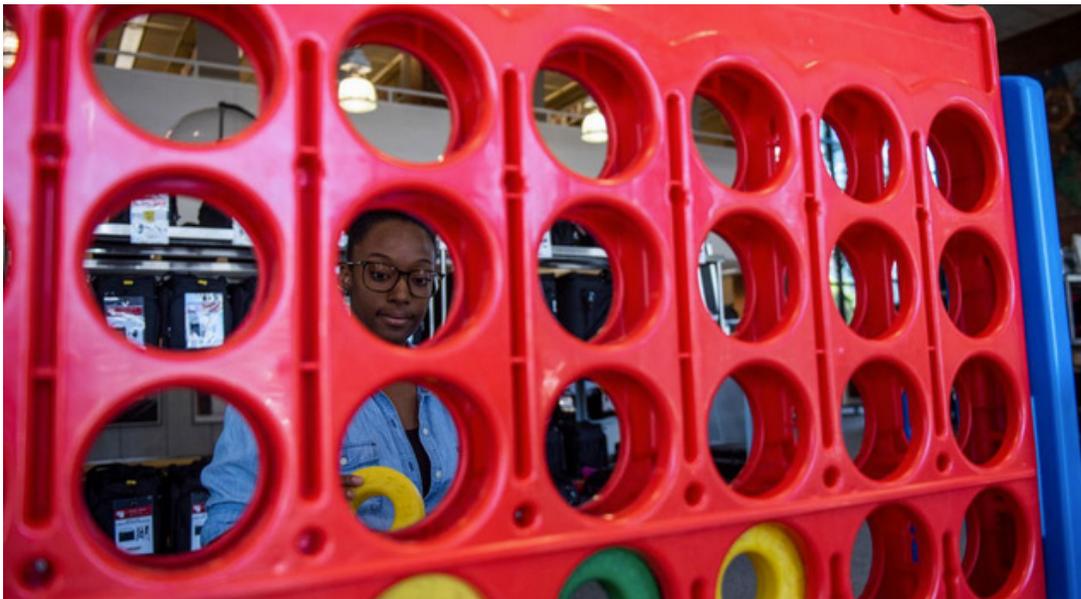
Historically underserved populations, as well as low and mixed-income areas, have the most to gain from Libraries of Things. But LoTs also have the capacity to unite people from different socioeconomic backgrounds through [repair workshops](#) which teach skills to new generations, and other shared experiences.

Members typically use items from LoTs six to ten times per year, with the most prolific checking out 50 or more, Homicki said. At places like the [West Seattle Tool Library](#), that could mean grabbing a 30 ft ladder, drywall lift, hammer drill, or cider press. It could also involve laser-cutting a sign or prototype in the shop. “The city’s all about community sharing,” says the library’s president Christina Hahs. “We love our libraries, lending centers, public transport, block parties, farmers’ markets, and maker spaces. This is traditional Seattle.”

Kari L. O’Driscoll first discovered the area’s LoTs movement while struggling with a clogged toilet as she prepared her house for sale. The [Capitol Hill Tool Library](#) had a plumber’s snake available and also gave her a quick tutorial. “The fact that I was able to do it myself on my own timeline and save some serious money felt like a double-win,” she says. “And in retrospect, it’s a super cool feeling to connect with my neighbors and be reminded that we can all help each other out in simple ways and still have it be meaningful.”

The founder of [Kitchen Share Southeast](#) in Portland, Oregon, also praises this sense of connection. In 2012, Robin Koch pioneered a library of culinary tools — ranging from dehydrators to ice cream

makers — and the space now hosts workshops that only charge material fees. “The library promotes important community values like volunteering and trusting each other with loans. Members often take it upon themselves to find parts or do repairs,” she says. “One guy broke the handle of an apple chopper, but had access to a metal shop and fabricated a new one. It was stronger and he etched our logo on it. The tool came back better than it arrived from the factory!”



Ann Arbor District Library, courtesy of MLive (contributed by Rich Reyti)

Traditional libraries evolve to keep pace

Traditional lending institutions have also expanded their collections beyond media. Maine’s [McArthur Public Library](#) and Washington’s [Port Townsend Library](#) encourages its members to get moving and outdoors by lending them adventure gear like snowshoes, fishing rods, and croquet sets. Port Townsend Library Director Melody Sky Eisler said: “Not all families can afford a \$125 doll or \$400 telescope, but everyone can enjoy them through their public library.”

Michigan's [Ann Arbor Library](#) circulates toys, tablets and even Theremini (an electronic musical instrument), along with special event equipment like giant Jenga and lighting rigs, explains librarian Audrey Huggett. Some of their most popular items are the 770 pieces of art — prints from local and famous artists — that members can borrow for up to eight weeks.

“It’s a powerful thing to have these experiences through your local library and to think about how we define sharing information.”

Innovators like Gene Homicki are ready for even more radical reinventions. “I see this movement vastly expanding and also moving from primarily individual locations to clusters of connected organizations and public-private equipment sharing,” he says.

“In the future, we’re going to see new developments with Libraries of Things built-in. They’re not only an amazing amenity, but they also allow for smaller spaces that still ‘live large’ and keep us connected.”



Image credit: Eddie Hamilton

The future of Libraries of Things is digital and bright

by Nithin Coca

All around the world Libraries of Things (LoTs) are emerging and giving the residents of their communities the option to borrow instead of buy.

They range from entire buildings full of tools or sports equipment, to local goods for rent in smaller venues like [shipping containers](#), pods, and even tiny street-side stands. All together

they are part of a growing movement which puts community and sharing at the center.

“It is absolutely a trend,” says Ken Haycock, a professor and coordinator of graduate programs in Library and Information Management at the University of Southern California. “What is happening is that libraries are seeing needs in their communities, and responding to them.”

LoTs themselves are not new — some, like [Berkeley, California’s tool library](#), have been open for decades — and are now also run by nonprofits, social enterprises, and local communities directly.

“Libraries that offer tools or a wider range of products for lending seem to have a remarkable cultural function,” says Najine Ameli, a researcher at Bochum University of Applied Sciences in Germany, who is doing her thesis on LoTs. “They present a deviation from the standard, a viable alternative to the previous use-own standard.”

The future of LoTs is likely one where technology empowers more efficient sharing, communities play a direct role in management, and the impact is not merely economic, but social as well — a direct counter-model to unsustainable consumerism — and one that is not only more sustainable, but easier, too.

Technology can increase scale and impact

James Dong started [Last Minute Gear](#) in his San Francisco apartment back in 2015 with a simple focus — one particularly relevant to Northern California, where there is ready access to outdoor



Image credit: Eddie Hamilton

activities: Create a platform for the renting and sharing of outdoor gear.

“The mission is to reduce waste and increase access by developing scalable alternatives to buying,” says Dong. He saw technology as crucial to the success of Last Minute Gear. He knew that success for a start-up meant that it had to be financially sustainable, focusing on usability and convenience. Last Minute Gear was competing with the ease of the buy-and-keep or throw-away alternatives people were used to, like Amazon.

“Our economy has evolved in such a way that customers have come to expect to be able to eat almost every slice of the cake and have it for later, too,” says Dong. “People can ‘virtue signal’ about shopping small and local all they want, but it’s not enough people, not enough instances to reverse the trend.”

After some early success, Last Minute Gear moved to a showroom in 2016, and then to a regular retail shop in 2017. Physical presence was crucial, as Dong aimed to build a platform that allowed people to rent and borrow goods whenever they wanted, regardless of staffing.

“Last Minute Gear’s rental program is available 24/7,” said Dong. “You can be outside the shop when no one is working inside, place an order on your smartphone, then get a button on your phone to unlock the door, and access gear from a locker inside.” This allows him to be both more sustainable, cheaper, and faster than Amazon.

Tech has also been key to a London, England-based LoT start-up. When the very aptly named [Library of Things](#) opened their first sharing library in 2016, it was a retail location like Last Minute Gear. Now they’ve turned to a more tech-driven solution: self-



Image credit: Eddie Hamilton

serve kiosks in accessible community spaces, some of which are public libraries.

“The kiosk itself can look different in different places, and can be configured to any community space,” says Rebecca Trevalyan, one of the original co-founders of Library of Things. “It’s designed to be modular, so it can be larger or smaller to fit different places, and even be moved if the host space needs to use that particular spot for other activities. Additionally, they all have community boards, photos, and spaces for the community to adapt themselves.”

Like Last Minute Gear, Library of Things relies on technology to function, having built their own platform after realizing that existing platforms were not quite adaptable to the needs of local communities or users.

“Without the right tech it’s not a user-friendly experience, and so it’s difficult for borrowers to borrow,” says Trevalyan. “Having the right technology drives usage, and also means you can replicate the model.”

Sustainable impact for communities

Historically, LoTs have performed a primarily economic function; allowing people to rent or borrow items saved them money. While that is still an important factor, the goals are far broader today: to promote local, sustainable development, with the understanding that [mass consumerism is a key driver](#) of environmental degradation.

Ameli believes that, in the future, LoTs can be a direct tool for communities to reduce their environmental and climate impact

through the sharing of reusable goods, while also helping reduce waste.

“Possibly, municipalities could help provide suitable space or financing,” said Ameli. “Sharing libraries are [part of] the urban model for a sustainable or sharing city, since it enables the intelligent use of raw materials and energy, and furthermore improves the quality of life of inhabitants.”

Considering that, it is no surprise that the success of modern sharing libraries are directly connected to other factors that make sharing cities vibrant. London’s Library of Things has found that certain types of locations are more amenable to LoTs.

“Our model is particularly suited to densely populated urban areas,” says Trevalyan. “Seventy percent of borrowers come from within one mile of the kiosk. Hyperlocal neighborhoods are really instrumental to building community, because it is about creating connections between individuals.”

Dense, walkable neighborhoods are enablers [to other forms of sharing as well](#), so it is no surprise that LoTs work better in this setting. The impact can be measured in ways beyond the direct benefit of any single transaction. Dong sees the potential to empower communities in an increasingly automated world.

“Beyond reducing waste and increasing access, not buying has some other really cool potential positive impacts as well,” said Dong. “Scandinavian studies have shown that rental programs help resist automation and provide apprentice-like skills development by creating a strong adjacent market for repairs.”

The past and future

Public libraries are certain to continue to be at the center of future LoTs, which — despite the shift to people accessing information digitally — remain central to vibrant communities and are more popular than ever.

“People are seeing that libraries are evolving as unique community spaces,” says Hancock. “They are safe, inclusive spaces that provide access to information and ideas that are neutral. The reality is that more people are going to libraries than ever before.”

Hancock sees some types of items as more “educational” than others and hopes public libraries can find a balance between lending non-traditional items while remaining focused on their missions to provide access to information and ideas. That means there will always be additional space for startups and community-driven platforms like Last Minute Gear and Library of Things to allow community members to share things that libraries cannot provide.

Both platforms are already looking to expand. Library of Things is opening up six more kiosks in London, and is talking with city officials in Briston, Brighton, Cambridge and Manchester about launching there. Meanwhile, Last Minute Gear recently had a tool rental pop-up in their store. Dong sees an opportunity to expand to other product verticals, but with the same goals. Longer term, he hopes the borrowing movement may even spur changes in how goods are produced.

“I always hope that demand for rentals incentivizes the design and manufacture of more sustainable products, rather than planned obsolescence, since you want rental gear to last,” says Dong.



Image credit: Robert Raymond

Public libraries are expanding the sharing economy by adding Libraries of Things to their catalogs

by Robert Raymond

I'm a bit of a minimalist. A few years ago, I went through all of my stuff and got rid of most of it. This was before Marie Kondo's "[items that spark joy](#)" method went viral — a philosophy based on reducing the material clutter that permeates our lives under consumer capitalism.

As the saying goes, it is much easier to accumulate things than it is to get rid of them. Anyone who has ever had to go through a deceased family member's belongings, or who has a storage unit filled with content that makes their stomach churn, knows this very well.

But there was a bit of a problem after I got rid of most of my stuff. Suddenly, I noticed that there were things I needed that I no longer owned. For example, I had donated a bunch of old board games to The Salvation Army. I hadn't used them in years, and then a friend of mine suggested that we have a board-game night. There were similar examples that kept popping up: irons, cordless drills, decorative baking pans — these were all things that took up so much space and that I rarely used. But when I did need them, they were no longer available.

There must be a solution to this, I thought. And it turns out, there is: [Libraries of Things](#). Imagine a public library, but for items like gardening tools, board games or food dehydrators. They exist to some extent more informally, and people have been utilizing them for years now. But there is an exciting new trend that could really be a game-changer in how many people access them: They're starting to pop up in public libraries themselves.

There are now dozens of public libraries which have incorporated Libraries of Things into their catalogs, from [Berkeley Public Library](#) in California to the [Fletcher Free Library](#) in Burlington, Vermont. The Library of Non-Traditional Things (LONT) in Burlington is a particularly unique collection. It began about 20 years ago as a modest tool library, but has since grown in scale to include all sorts of different items such as musical instruments like djembes and ukuleles; tools like air compressors, snow shovels

and rakes; sports and outdoor equipment; and a wide variety of kitchenware.



Image credit: Robert Raymond

“One of the things that’s been really neat to see over time is how many different people use things for different reasons,” says Emer P. Feeney, the Fletcher Free Library’s assistant director. “For example, we’ve had people come in with teams of volunteers [to borrow rakes] to rake their neighbor’s large lawn because the neighbor can’t do it themselves. We’ve had folks who are marginally housed come in when there’s a big snowstorm [to borrow shovels] to go shovel out driveways and make something like \$200 a day.”

The idea to expand the original tool library at Fletcher came from the library’s collection development librarian, Christine Webb. “The nontraditional focus is really exciting — you can borrow anything almost,” Webb says. “But that’s the whole wonderful goal of it, to support that borrowing, sharing economy. So we don’t have to consume everything all the time.”

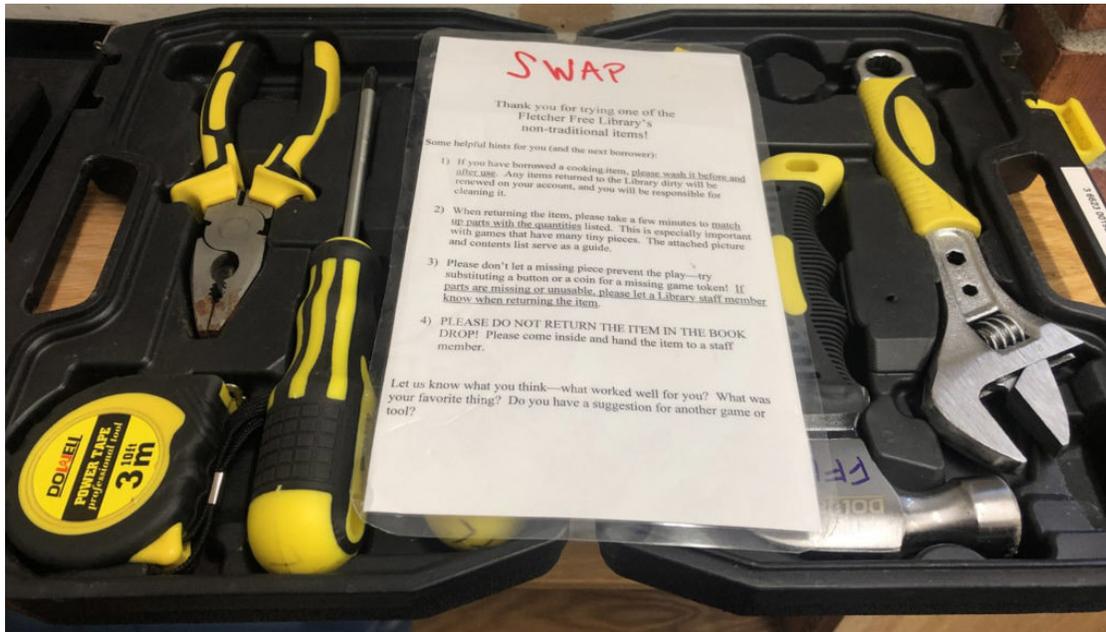


Image credit: Robert Raymond

Community members seem to really like the idea too. “We moved to Burlington this summer and it was a nice surprise to find that they had board games at Fletcher, so we checked a few out,” Jessica Waite, a patron at Fletcher Free Library, says. “We wanted to plant some bulbs and so we borrowed their bulb planter, which was great. It’s not something that we were going to do all the time, so it was really nice to just borrow it once and return it.”

Despite fairly successful circulation numbers, there have been challenges that have popped up as the catalog of things has expanded. Cataloging itself, for example, is much more involved when you’re talking about things other than books.

“With books, you can just buy a mark record that makes that item findable through the catalog and also manageable through our software,” Feeney explains. “With physical items, you have to create it, you have to describe it, you have to use weird fields that have been defined in cataloging to describe things accurately so

that, for example, a certain kind of shovel in our collection would be roughly approximate to the same kind of shovel in someone else's collection.”

Packaging is another issue. For example, it's not uncommon for board games or puzzles to come back with pieces missing. “When I use a board game at home, I always end up losing a piece,” Feeney admitted. “You have to factor that in, because then someone's going to have to source that piece or find a replacement. And so, there's an extra budgeting process that has to happen there.”

And, of course, certain items can be much more expensive than books. Things like GoPros, DVD players and other smaller, valuable items are always subject to theft. Webb and Feeney did not describe this as a challenge that they've had to face often, but this is perhaps because they have avoided leaving these items out on the shelves, and instead have them listed as available.



Image credit: Robert Raymond

As their collection continues to expand, library staff continue to reference circulation numbers and also solicit recommendations from patrons in order to tailor their catalog to the community's needs. They are also exploring different ways to collaborate with other public libraries.

“There's been a lot of discussion amongst the Vermont libraries,” Webb says. “People discovering, ‘Oh, wait, you have a Library of Things, too?’ We're all starting to notice that we all have various things, so I'm hopeful that maybe down the road we can get into regional resource sharing of some kind.”

Public libraries already strengthen equity in access to knowledge, and thus seem like ideal institutions to expand that access out to many of life's essential items. And not just for tools like snow shovels, but for things that provide joy and meaning in life to those who may not otherwise have access to them. Things like portable DVD players for those currently experiencing homelessness, for example.

Further, by challenging the ownership culture that has been imposed upon us through more than a century of consumer capitalism, the move toward public Libraries of Things is a crucial component in reversing the endless cycles of consumption which lead to overflowing landfills and contribute significantly to climate change.

But, finally — and perhaps most significantly — public Libraries of Things help to expand the town commons. They build community, encourage sharing and civic responsibility, and give communities a sense of connection.



Image credit: Robert Raymond

“We’re a really monetized culture and most spaces in the public sphere are not really public, you know,” Feeney explains. “When you walk down the street, you really often have to have money to go in somewhere to spend time somewhere. And the library isn’t that kind of space — it’s the living room of our town.”



Image credit: Edinburgh Tool Library

The lending ripple: How libraries of things are changing their cities for the better

by Marina Kelava

Libraries of things may have diverse missions and origin stories but they have two things in common: they increase well being in their communities while lowering their environmental footprint.

The revolution of borrowing, not buying, is gaining traction around the world and where lending libraries thrive, they are lifting their communities. Here are four libraries of things around the world that are changing their cities — one loan at a time:

Croatian tool library inspires tolerance through sharing



Image credit: Croatian tool library

In the Eastern Croatian rural town of Beli Manastir, stands the country's first and only tool library. "We saw a story about one tool library in the United States and thought why not start it here," says Duško Kostic, the president of non-government organization Luna, which runs the library. "Lots of tools you will just use twice a year. Why would you waste money buying it, when you can borrow it in our library."

Luna works with the region's marginalized Roma population but the library is open to the whole community, which today includes

many unemployed or retired people struggling with financial issues.

“All of this certainly had a lot of impact. Roma people are closer with their neighbors now and some people even managed to get jobs or started their own businesses,” Kostic says.

As well as lending tools, the library runs trainings on how to use them and provides certificates for the use of potentially dangerous tools. This upskilling gives community members an advantage when looking for work.

“We also bought equipment for hairdressers and beauticians. We have girls from Roma community going to these schools but they need practice to have better chances to get a job. So they use this equipment and give free haircuts to older people in the community,” says Kostic.

The tools are used to produce vegetables in two greenhouses and distribute the vegetables free to community members.

Ski hire could level the snowfield for Norwegian kids



Image credit: Croatian tool library

Schools throughout Norway frequently hold “ski days” which despite being fun for some, disadvantage children who do not have access to the expensive equipment. An Oslo initiative is calling on schools to get into the library of things business.

“Children that have access to ski equipment go skiing and the ones that don’t are given an alternative option such as sledding. This creates a social inequality among children, hurting those with the least resources,” says Cynthia Reynolds, coordinator of the Circular Oslo initiative.

“If schools have access to libraries of things, where you could borrow sports equipment, parents would not have to invest in equipment that their children will outgrow in a season, and no children would be excluded from participating,” she continues.

[Circular Oslo](#) is a best-practices project which demonstrates how sharing economy initiatives can benefit from government support.

“There are some brilliant initiatives within the circular economy that are also sharing economy solutions, many of these initiatives are flying under the radar. Circular Oslo and the methodology behind it is designed to identify these as well as other Circular Economy initiatives bridging top-down and bottom-up solutions at all stakeholder levels. We map them to identify which of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals they support, as well as the social, economic and environmental impact. This data will help decision-makers develop policy and funding mechanisms to help scale the impact,” Reynolds says.

One of the first mapped projects was Tingenes Bibliotek, a library of things that aims to become financially sustainable by encouraging local companies and government agencies to buy memberships for their staff as a perk.

“This way they would support the sustainability of the organization and enable their workers access to a vast array of products while at the same time lowering the environmental footprint of the whole community,” Reynolds says. “Surprisingly, people didn’t want only stuff like gardening equipment and tools but instead, they also wanted wine glasses, utensils and other stuff for parties.”

Tool library a ‘keystone species’ in Edinburgh community

Chris Hellowell started the [Edinburgh Tool Library](#) (ETL) out of an [old police box](#) on the main street near his house. Every Saturday for a year, he sat outside, talked to people and signed them up as members but he soon realized people wanted to be more involved.

“We started to get people offering to run the lending side on a Saturday, and so I spent more time looking for further funding and ways to develop the ETL. Others helped me, and eventually, we began employing staff, set up a workshop space to use, and [were] able to generate a significant income, meaning we are much less reliant on grants for our long-term sustainability,” Hellowell says.

After nearly seven years, the library now lends more than 1,000 tools for DIY, gardening, decorating and machine repair. The average UK household spends £110 a year on tools, while annual membership to the tool library costs £30. With the average power drill used for a total of 13 minutes in its lifetime, the library says it is clear most of us do not need to own one. It also runs workshops on woodworking, tool maintenance and bike repair.

“We see ourselves as a keystone species in our community ecosystem and collaborate a lot with other groups who are also doing great work. We aim to bring people who are supported by other charities into our community by introducing them to our spaces..., before giving them the opportunity to be a member or volunteer, like anyone else,” Hellowell says.

Collective buying the secret to 40 years of lending success

The [Berkeley Public Tool Lending Library](#) has been in the business of supporting DIY projects in the Bay Area for more than 40 years. Supervising librarian Dan Beringhele said the secret to its success was that it was responsive to community needs.

“All of our tools are used dozens or hundreds of times and repaired to keep them in service. Sharing eliminates waste and all the environmental effects of manufacturing and shipping goods that may only be used once or twice a year. It allows apartment or alternative-dwelling residents the opportunity to use tools without having to store them. And sharing provides access to high-quality, well-maintained tools to all Berkeley residents, whatever their socioeconomic status may be,” Beringhele says.

The library began as a way to make home repair accessible to people with low incomes and is now housed in the Tarea Hall Pittman South Branch Library, which lends books.

“Both libraries utilize communal purchasing power to enrich the lives of our community members,” Beringhele says.

It also hosts DIY, gardening and home-maintenance classes. This spring, it will add a culinary tool collection.

“Providing culinary tools benefits so many in our community: those who cannot afford expensive culinary tools, those who wish to explore a new tool and/or test out new equipment before making a large purchase, those who live in small and/or shared spaces without room for storing culinary tools and those who would use

a particular item only once or twice a year so would not purchase it on their own accord,” Beringhele says.

The library’s staff have helped establish other tool libraries in the US, Europe and Mexico.

“We are excited this special Berkeley Public Library institution has inspired others around the world,” Beringhele says.



Image credit: Beccy Strong

World's first mobile library of things travels around southwest England

by Mirella Ferraz

Share Shed is a Library of Things in Totnes, in the southwest of England, where over 350 items are available for members of the project to borrow at a nominal fee.

The library's collection is versatile and includes such things as camping and gardening equipment, tools, musical instruments, household appliances, bicycles, sewing machines and items for when a baby comes to visit, to name but a few. After watching

many people coming in from nearby villages and towns to borrow equipment they didn't require regularly, Share Shed coordinators began to think about creating a mobile version of the project.

They were presented with the opportunity to apply for [The People's Projects Fund](#) provided by [The National Lottery Community Fund](#) in partnership with the TV channel [ITV](#), to fund the world's first mobile library of things, which would travel to these communities, making it easier and more accessible for all.

Share Shed manager Mark Jefferys says, "Everybody we meet seems to understand the concept of 'borrow, don't buy', and it's a great feeling when we can help somebody out with the things they need to complete a task, be it putting up a shelf, or getting a house ready for a sale. Expanding this possibility to other villages, and facilitating even more sharing seems like a great and exciting next step for us."

With the support from their parent organization, the nonprofit [Network of Wellbeing](#), Share Shed decided to start the application process by creating a proposal with a budget of £48,599 (US\$63,539). If successful, as well as continue to serve Totnes, the project would also work with three neighbouring towns: Ashburton, Buckfastleigh and South Brent, which have a combined population of 25,000 people.

Pam Barrett, former Mayor of Buckfastleigh, says, "As soon as I heard of the Share Shed, I wanted to bring it to Buckfastleigh. We're a small town and lack many facilities. Our inhabitants are often isolated or on low incomes. Sharing tools and other equipment is a natural response to empower people and to build

connections, and I'm keen to support the Share Shed in any way I can."

Sue Ifould from [Sustainable South Brent](#) adds, "We've thought for some time about how we could set up a library of things in a small community like South Brent. The Mobile Share Shed is the answer. By working with towns and villages around, we could develop a service that meets all our needs, and build connections between our communities."

After three phases of the grant process requiring detailed information about the project's journey up to that point, budgets, marketing strategy, and further aspirations, Share Shed was shortlisted to the final phase of the competition: A 15-day public campaign to get as many votes for the project as possible. The projects with the most votes would be the winners, and be granted their asked-for amount, with the outcome being broadcast live on ITV.

Being one of five finalists for a particular geographical area the fund provider works with — and not being allowed to invest in paid advertising of any kind — required a great deal of creativity from the Share Shed team, as well as focus to spread the word about the venture, while converting the interest into votes. Jefferys came up with a song explaining how the project had been developed and the ambitious plans for the future. With support from the project's volunteers, [a video was made](#) and shared on social media, which became a great asset in the campaign.

The Share Shed team and supporters were pleased to receive the news, [live on ITV](#), that the project was indeed awarded the grant. Since then, Share Shed staff have been working to develop

this audacious initiative, hoping to inspire and further support a much-needed change; one that is based on sharing and collaboration.

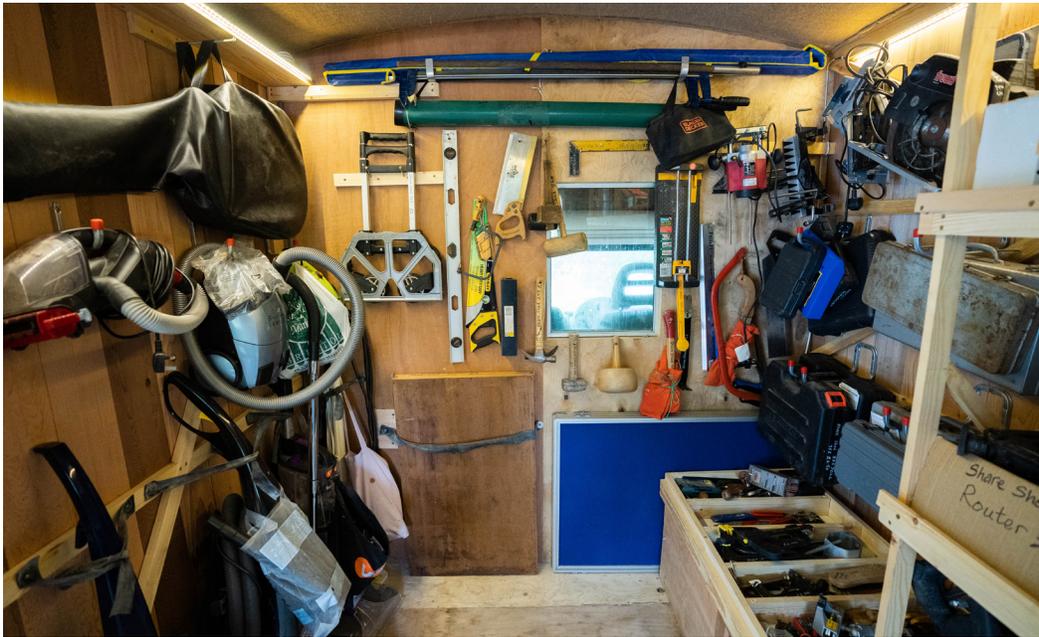


Image credit: Beccy Strong

The team has [converted a vehicle](#) and supported nearby villages since July 2, 2020. There has already been a great amount of interest from similar projects worldwide on how this venture is evolving, and hopefully this model will be replicated globally, fulfilling the needs of those who want access to, rather than to own, things. Such a shift is supporting people and communities to become much more resourceful and sustainable.

If you're interested in setting up a similar initiative in your community, you can find some helpful resources [here](#). For further information about the Share Shed, visit www.shareshed.org.uk.



Image provided by the Sacramento Public Library

How to start a Library of Things inside an existing library

by Alessandra Bautze

If you're working as a librarian and would like to expand your library's collection to include physical objects, there are many resources out there to help you start a Library of Things.

Libraries of Things lend predominantly expensive household items to people who otherwise could not afford them or would underuse them, but require a robust logistical framework — something libraries have already. That is why some pioneers of the [Libraries of Things movement](#) are setting up within the

infrastructure already established by book-lending libraries, and librarians have a crucial role to play within this facet of the LoT movement.

The [Sacramento Public Library](#) has built up one of the largest and most respected Libraries of Things in the nation. At two locations and expanding into a third, its Library of Things [catalog](#) lists 120 items including handheld metal detectors, an air compressor, projectors, button-making machines, games, musical equipment, digital cameras, pressure washers, sewing machines, telescopes and even a post hole digger.

Across the country in Illinois, the Kankakee Public Library has just started a Library of Things with 17 items – including a ukulele. One challenge they face is that organizers don't currently have a place to display the items, so they rely on a binder to advertise the library's existence.

What does it really take to start a Library of Things within an existing library? While every librarian or community member might have a different perspective, it is important to identify community needs and obtain objects that will serve those needs. Libraries must be open to feedback and adapt to member needs. Passion is important but so are logistics – that's why building a Library of Things within the strong infrastructure of a public library can lead to a very successful LoT.

Five steps to start a library of things within a library:

1. Gather a multidisciplinary team and build resources

When first developing a library-based Library of Things, it's important to have clear goals. "We thought the idea of the Library of Things would [be] fun, useful, and helpful. On one hand we thought of purchasing items that you use only once a year and therefore don't need to invest money into. Instead of going to the store or borrowing from a neighbor you can come straight to our library. On the other hand we also thought it would be a great way to try a product before purchasing it," says Vicky Forquer of the Kankakee Public Library in Illinois. Once you have clear goals, it's important to gather a team that can support the achievement of those goals.

While the idea for a Library of Things might come from one librarian, no one should embark on this endeavor without a support system. Think about what you might need to get the project off the ground, like legal advice and a marketing plan, and clearly define roles for each member. These roles might already exist within the library, but tackling a new project will require renewed commitment from all involved.

Next, seek out the resources you will need to get off the ground, remembering that you don't have to start from scratch. [Share Starter](#) has published [documents](#) with advice on everything from bylaw wording to marketing strategies. Learn from pioneers like [Gene Homicki](#), the cofounder and CEO of [MyTurn](#), a software

program used by over 400 Libraries of Things to catalog and organize their items.

While a committed team is essential, make sure that the program is bigger than any one person. If a program leader quits, will the Library of Things be thrown into a tailspin? More than one Library of Things has fallen apart following the sudden departure of a core team member. Distribute tasks and set up a system of checks and balances to ensure that power is decentralized.

2. Develop a budget

Even within an existing library system, the Library of Things still depends on funding, so develop a clear and realistic budget. How much should be invested in the project at the beginning? Set up a realistic and sustainable system for fees, returns, and fines to make sure that items are returned on time and in good condition. Many public library-based LoTs are totally free, but others may charge a small fee to use big-ticket items like lawnmowers or expensive power tools. It may be possible to tap into the library's existing budget to fund a new Library of Things or leverage its nonprofit or government status to apply for grants. Molly Milazzo, Youth Services Librarian at the Sacramento Public Library's Arcade Branch, says their Library of Things began as a grant-funded initiative but has since been absorbed into the library's general budget.

Along with a budget, don't forget about insurance. Public libraries may need to get an additional rider on their insurance policy when starting a Library of Things, but they may also be fully covered under their municipality. Either way, read the small print before stocking potentially dangerous items like chainsaws.

3. Do market research in your community.

Every community is different, so no two Libraries of Things are exactly alike. To ensure that your LoT fulfills a purpose, librarians must be attuned to the needs of the community—both immediate and long-term. Vicky Forquer of the Kankakee Public Library in Illinois said geography was a factor: “I would suggest starting small. Also, what works for one library won’t work for another. For example, we heard of a library checking out fishing poles. We didn’t think this would be popular in our community.” Fishing poles may not be popular in Kankakee but in Mesa, Arizona, a hiking kit or telescope (both available at the [Stuffbrary](#)) might fly off the shelves. In an urban food desert, gardening equipment could fill a need, while board games would be a welcome addition to a community with many young families.

Milazzo encourages librarians to “reach out to individual community members and local organizations for feedback; some of their suggestions may surprise you and will make for a richer collection.” Once you’ve identified community needs, consider posting a wish list if you are soliciting donated items. Doing basic local market research will ensure that the Library of Things makes an impact.

4. Plan storage and organization.

Many physical objects at LoTs can be bulky, which creates the challenge of how to store and display the items. Milazzo says, “Think as deeply as possible about the possibility of expansion (adding new items to the collection), maintenance, and storage of the collection. How large or small of a collection can your site conceivably support?” Storage is one challenge that the Kankakee Public Library system is facing right now. Forquer says, “As of right now, we don’t have a display case to show the items. We

have a binder with all the items, which works for now but we want the items to shine!”



Image provided by Kankakee Public Library

You also need to catalog the items and set up a system for lending them. Some libraries have incorporated the items into their existing catalog systems, while others use MyTurn, including the Sacramento library. One advantage of donated items is that the entire community often feels a sense of ownership and responsibility regarding the items, making it more likely that the items are returned on time and in good condition.

5. Keep an open mind.

Starting and running a library-based Library of Things is not without its challenges, which is why it requires an open mind. Learning about the objects is a significant aspect of ensuring that

the community benefits from them but it can be time-consuming. If librarians embrace it as part of their daily life, the community will benefit. The librarians who oversee the Sacramento Public Library's Library of Things have taken a hands-on approach from day one. They polled the community and, once the items were acquired, they used them themselves to make sure they knew how to show members how to use them. Milazzo said that having staff handle the items themselves — taking a GoPro on vacation, using a sewing machine, and testing a hedge trimmer and leaf blower — helped them anticipate potential complications and buy additional supplies like needles and thread." As with any area of the library, such experimentation has allowed us to speak with greater authority about this collection and the different ways our patrons can use it."

Sometimes change means downsizing or expansion. The Sacramento Public Library is considering expanding its Library of Things to South Sacramento. Milazzo explains, "We're considering both the individual needs of South Sacramento communities and using data accumulated from the Library of Things on the most/least popular items, as well as which items require more attention than others (i.e. a lot of accessories that we've had to keep track of). Ultimately, this will likely manifest in an online poll and in-person feedback from patrons, since those methods have served us well in the past."

When libraries decide to start a Library of Things, they leverage their reputation as a well-known, trusted community resource to meet a community need. With a clear plan, flexibility, and a dedication to patrons, Libraries of Things have the potential to change members' lives for the better.



Image by Rabie Madaci via Unsplash

What to consider when starting a Library of Things

by Aaron Fernando

Shareable has published a [number of articles on Libraries of Things \(LoTs\)](#) since they're such a core component of the real sharing economy. But if you're considering starting your own LoT, there are a few operational concerns you might want to think about.

Should your LoT be an investor-funded, for-profit enterprise so it has the funds to build a network of users quickly and stock its shelves with new items? Should it be nonprofit and volunteer-run

so that there are no pressures to generate income that will be pulled out of your community? Should it have a visible, physical location that's likely to be noticed by new users? Or should it be an app, which might have lower maintenance costs?

For-Profit vs. Volunteer-Run vs. Public LoTs

A classic example of a LoT is a tool library, and [The Buffalo Tool Library](#) is one instance of a volunteer-run, nonprofit LoT. Started in 2011, it is now a 501(c)3 and not only offers tool rentals to its more than 500 members, but also runs other programs like neighborhood improvement and beautification projects.

It is also possible to [rent tools from The Home Depot](#), which could be considered a for-profit tool library. Renting a power drill from The Home Depot is \$100 per week plus a \$50 deposit, yet at the Buffalo Tool Library, a similar rental is only \$20 for an annual membership allowing five simultaneous rentals. So, for the user, the volunteer-run model seems significantly more affordable.

Starting a LoT of this sort does not necessarily require a lot of money or space, as they are sometimes the [size of a small bedroom or large closet](#). “The biggest asset that you would need is a committed volunteer base, unless you have some awesome source of funding,” explained Marty Seeger, chair for the operations committee of the Buffalo Tool Library. “Essentially, you’re going to find that it’s enough work to be a full-time job,” Seeger explained, citing the demands of maintaining a high quality of service, tool maintenance, organization, storage and other administrative tasks. “So if you’re not spreading that out among a bunch of committed, loyal volunteers [then] you’re just going to be swamped.”

Yet maintaining a LoT like the one in Buffalo, even on a volunteer-run basis, still requires tens of thousands of dollars in operations costs, according to their [2018 Annual Report](#), for rent, utilities, insurance and an asset-tracking software called [MyTurn](#) used by many LoTs. As such, the Buffalo LoT had a diverse range of income sources to maintain its storefront and many other projects, including “membership dues, late fees, fundraising, private grants and corporate support.”

Additionally [public libraries lend more than just books](#) and offer access to surprising things like [professional clothing for interviews](#), [GoPros](#), [PS4s](#), and even [Netflix-style streaming services](#). My local librarian told me that three of the five most frequently checked out items in 2019 were LoT items: tote bags, phone chargers and Empire Passes, which grant access to all New York State Parks and normally would cost \$80. In fact, there are many passes available — from educational venues to an independent theater.

“One of our foremost missions is helping patrons access information and become connected to the community,” said Asia Bonacci, who manages Tompkins County Public Library’s Ithaca branch LoT. “The kinds of things we’re thinking about lending are more passes or wifi hotspots like other libraries do.” Bonacci explained.

Digital, Decentralized LoTs

Another approach is to operate a digital-only platform that effectively facilitates the creation of sharing networks: a decentralized Libraries of Things. An advantage to this approach is that they can replicate quickly, as communities in different areas can easily start sharing things with each other without having to find accessible physical storage and pick-up points. Instead, users of these

platforms can simply drop off and pick up things where they live or work.

One example of this approach is tech startup [Peerby](#), an Amsterdam-based platform originally [funded](#) by a number of investment firms and startup accelerators. According to Joshua van Wijgerden, community and insight manager at Peerby, it has about 25,000 active users who share items with each other, mostly in Amsterdam, Utrecht and Rotterdam.

There are many items listed in these areas, and users mostly charge fees for lending out their items. Peerby now requires either a subscription fee or an insurance fee when items are borrowed, which, “not everybody is happy with,” according to van Wijgerden. “But it creates transparency and a feeling of safety and security [that] we feel is important in a sharing platform.” The introduction of these fees could lead to users feeling more comfortable sharing higher-value items, a common hurdle for many LoTs.

Bootstrapping a LoT can be tricky, and the startup approach to taking investor funding comes with the risks associated with profit-driven enterprises. [Yerdle](#) was originally formed as a Certified Benefit Corporation (B Corp) in 2012 with the idea of getting people to share or give away items they don’t need. [From archived pages](#), it appears that in 2013 Yerdle was more or less a decentralized Library of Things like Peerby, but after a few iterations struggling to find its footing, and [raising an additional \\$20 million](#), it appears to have abandoned its original purpose as a LoT. Though it is still a B Corp, and brands itself as a “circular economy powerhouse,” Yerdle now operates as a for-profit reseller of clothing brands.

A Hybrid Model

Canada-based organization [The Thingery](#) has a business model that offers the potential to replicate in communities quickly, while still retaining the community-led foundation which allows LoTs to thrive. The Thingery enables communities to deploy a LoT with less upfront difficulty by working communities to find a location and get site approval from local municipalities. The Thingery then sends a modified shipping container which is designed and stocked by the community. Each new Thingery is its own non-profit co-operative that's fully run by the community in which it exists, while The Thingery, Inc. handles customer support, maintenance and software.

When thinking about how to best enable a community to start, manage and use a LoT, there are advantages to each model, and depending on the specific types of things that people will be borrowing. Different models work well in different cases, but the ones that persist seem to have committed individuals on the ground working to make real the idea that everyone can come out ahead by building community capacity and trust while reducing cost and consumption.



Image provided by Andreas Arnold

Tool-sharing innovator post-mortem uncovers systemic issues in our convenience economy

by Andreas Arnold

Expensive, hard to transport and long-lived compared with other consumer goods, tools are a good model for the sharing economy. But how do you keep tools functioning in an era of built-in obsolescence, and how can you keep a lid on staff and storage costs when the library model depends heavily on both?

Shareable connected with a Berlin-based sharing project that aims to get affordable tools into the hands of renters, who generally could not afford to buy them.

Leihbar (“shareable” in German), a [Berlin item-sharing project](#), began in the 2012 [peer-to-peer sharing platform](#) boom as a way for people with underused items to loan them to those who needed them but soon iterated multiple times, looking for a sustainable business model.

At the start, the goal seemed simple for Leihbar: People already have a lot of things and most of them are underused. So it’s just a matter of reallocation, right? But conversations with existing p2p lending players and users revealed two structural weaknesses: Supply and demand do not match, and the lending process takes time that busy people do not have.

Suppliers mostly offer low-priced items or things they don’t use anymore, like books and DVDs instead of high-value products like projectors, video equipment and tents. Even if you find the item you’re looking for, its quality, usability, or the rental window often won’t suit your needs.

The biggest obstacle to p2p lending, however, is time. Unless you are willing to spend the time to search, pick up and return items to the same place, it is much more convenient to buy the item instead. P2p platforms discovered that for their schemes to work, access should not cost more than a few minutes and should be easily integrated into the busy lives of all participants.

The next approach for Leihbar was a b2c-approach, operating a store in a downtown coworking space. Users could rent high-quality consumer electronics, outdoor gear and tools. For its nine months of operation, customer response remained sluggish but it did show a trend: The closer people lived to the shop, the more likely they were to rent. Ultimately, the store folded due to the high costs of staff, marketing and rent.

Another iteration of the project was to create that hyper-local market with lower overheads, so Leihbar turned to an automated lending-locker. But a one-year prototype with an automated lending-locker in a student accommodation with 700 students showed small demand and it seemed like the company had built the infrastructure for a massive p2p and b2c sharing scheme without considering individual user journeys. Engineering had blocked their view from anthropocentric design.

So the final iteration was to strip the business back to a b2c booking website in cooperation with convenience stores, which doubled as exchange locations 24/7. The stores got a cut of the transaction fees, and the staff was able to pivot easily to distributing loaned goods because they were used to handling parcels.

The business tackled the time-poor problem by creating an amiable fee structure and locating in stores that were already close to customers' homes. It was easy for users to integrate pick-up and drop-off visits into their busy lives. Over six months, revenues and usage rose to cover the cost of best-sellers like projectors and steam cleaners, which paid for themselves over three to six months. However, overcoming those challenges uncovered others. What the company thought were logistical problems turned

out to be a marketing challenge. Despite marketing their full product portfolio, return customers would only rent a single item.



Image provided by Andreas Arnold

Ultimately, this model also failed. The proliferation of items in nearly every home creates a multitude of sharing-micro-markets instead of one sharing macro-market. People are still too accustomed to owning things of their own. Leihbar didn't succeed in solving the key marketing questions: How to promote the idea of using instead of owning items of everyday use in the most cost-effective way? How to get recurring customers and create a portfolio effect?

Leihbar's vision was clear from the beginning: To create an ecosystem that would change the way things were produced. The ultimate goal was delivering a blueprint for a circular economy for items of daily use. The impact of p2p sharing platforms turned

out to be fostering social contact between strangers, Leihbar looked for ways to incentivize producers to shift the supply side towards a circular model. Leihbar cooperated with tool manufacturer Bosch, and Dyson, a vacuum cleaner maker. They wanted to prove the case that it is more economically viable to amortize the products by renting them over the course of a couple of months instead of selling them once every two years. It was hoped that manufacturers would understand the value and shift to modular, repairable and long-lasting products. But the response was instead to use the sharing economy as a marketing tool for increased sales. A model of durable, repairable and producer-recycled items seems incompatible with the prevailing growth-centered company culture.

So, what is the path forward? One option is to create a co-op of users, tool producers and local administrations, where borrowers pay a subscription fee that is heavily subsidized by local governments to fulfill environmental goals and create cleaner cities. The co-ops can act as laboratories for producers to design durable, repairable, maintainable and recyclable products. If producers refuse to shift or expand their business model, local manufacturing cooperatives would need to start producing new items.

The other future is an extension of our present, with producers creating direct relationships with customers and flooding cities with products in an uncoordinated way — much like the bicycle or scooter sharing systems that are choking our cities. Customers already accustomed to receiving a constant stream of Amazon packages to their homes would embrace online ordering and swift delivery for rental items too. As the drone delivery bots darken the skies, we would have traded out a shareable, sustainable, environmentally responsible future — for convenience.



Image of The Thingery in Kitsilano, Vancouver, Canada by Stephen Rees via Flickr

Lending and community building at The Thingery

by Casey O'Brien

It turns out, a shipping container can change a community.

That's all Chris Diplock, the co-founder of the [Vancouver Tool Library](#), started with when he created [The Thingery](#), a place for residents of that Canadian city to borrow equipment of all kinds, including high quality camping and backpacking gear. [The project started with one container in 2018](#); by the end of summer 2020, they will have 13 Thingeries spread throughout the city of Vancouver and the lower mainland of British Columbia — all com-

munity-owned and self-serviced.

The Thingery's membership model is designed to be affordable: Members pay a lifetime membership fee of \$10, and a monthly fee of less than \$7. The equipment also requires minimal borrowing fees, but generally The Thingery offers the opportunity for people to use equipment regardless of their ability to afford to purchase and store it.

"We buy a \$600, four-season backpacking tent. That's something you're probably not going to spend \$600 on. It's drawing people in," says Diplock.

For young, urban professionals living in small spaces, with limited disposable income, The Thingery is appealing. "We see a lot of people who live in high density neighborhoods — apartment dwellers. Because space is a real concern for them; they just don't have the room," he said. Many of The Thingery's members are between the ages of 20-40, and are familiar with other forms of sharing, like ridesharing or carsharing.

Diplock sees a distinction between The Thingery and much of the recently monetized sharing economy, however, especially rental services. "The big line in the sand is, is accessibility and inclusivity a key part of the social purpose? Is that present in the business charter?"

The Thingery reaches lower-income communities by providing a more reduced price-point than many renting services, and working with local community centers and other social service providers.

Education is also a key component of The Thingery's inclusivity work, Diplock explained. The Thingery doesn't just offer equipment; it holds workshops for people to learn how to use the tools, something Diplock has seen a hunger for from members.

"A lot of people are just unfamiliar with the basics of woodworking, outdoor skills, [and] camping. And it's an accessibility issue for everyone," he said. Over this past summer, The Thingery held a series of [repair cafés](#) and workshops, including an introductory workshop on tarps and knots for camping. The workshop sold out three months ahead and had a wait list of 65 people.

As The Thingery continues to expand, Diplock would like to see the project extend past urban and semi-urban areas into rural communities. The Thingery went on tour last summer throughout rural Canada to educate people about the project and gauge interest. Diplock was thrilled to see how interested people were in seeing The Thingery come to their community, even in areas where people have more space to have equipment of their own and may not be as familiar with the sharing economy.

"If you're in a rural community and you're talking about this, we need people who are going to donate their stuff to [the project]. So we want a mix of donors and borrowers. We heard that in rural communities, people would walk up and say, 'I have two garages full of this stuff, why would I borrow from you?' But that wasn't alarming... for me that is an opportunity."

The Thingery also partnered with public libraries on their tour, which helped to break down barriers and make connections with community members.

“In a lot of small towns, with 2,000-10,000 people, the public library is a centerpiece. It is a place where everybody goes... so if we align what we are doing with equipment lending through public libraries, I think it makes perfect sense,” said Diplock.



Image by Ryoji Iwata via Unsplash

Unlocking travel for all as mobility-aid access moves to the Cloud

by Paige Wolf

When Punsri Abeywickrema created his on-line rental marketplace for travelers, he imagined able-bodied people lugging bulky items like camping gear, strollers, cameras and sports equipment. He didn't realize his biggest market would be in mobility aids, catering to one of the fastest-growing segments of the population.

Abeywickrema's company [Cloud of Goods](#) launched in 2016 to deliver rental equipment to vacation destinations. It turns out that

transporting mobility devices is not only complicated and expensive but it can also be impossible. It's free to check a wheelchair with airlines but they are sometimes damaged in the process. Most airlines refuse to accept electronic mobility devices because they have lithium batteries.

"When we launched Cloud of Goods, we didn't think wheelchairs and electric scooters would be our primary vertical but we found this is the main problem we are solving, and we are growing quickly in this niche because of that," Abeywickrema said.

As the last of the Baby Boomers hit retirement age, we are seeing an unprecedented swell in the aging population. The share of households with mobility devices has grown from about six percent in 1990 to eight percent in 2010. By 2025, [13 percent of households are expected to have at least one](#).

Cloud of Goods is giving people with a disability more mobility while traveling, and even the chance to explore places they didn't think possible.

Robin Oglesby-Harris and her best friend wanted to take their mothers from Phoenix to Vegas to celebrate the new year. The pair used Cloud of Goods to rent scooters to help their mothers, 75 and 80, traverse the strip.

"We went up and down that strip and the battery still had life when we got back to our room!" Oglesby-Harris said.

Customers reserve equipment from Cloud for Goods on an online portal and have it delivered to their hotel, airport, or other destination. Gear starts at \$6 a day.

Abeywickrema said a big chunk of business came via travel agents and concierges but others were parents who do not want to transport cumbersome baby gear and campers who want to “try before they buy” all the equipment for a new experience.

Creating the world’s largest pool of shared household goods

This is not Abeywickrema’s first sharing business. In 2008, while borrowing a wheelbarrow from a neighbor, he hit on the idea of a peer-to-peer rental service for household goods. His system allows him to control the supply and cater to consumer needs, which he calls the “access economy.” He is currently working on a model to create the world’s largest pool of shared household goods.

“I believe the Sharing Economy 2.0 is really the underlying need for access, and we are using modern technology to make this easier for people,” he said.

“We get a lot of messages over the holiday season from people who want to rent kitchen equipment and items for large parties, so we are looking into filling that need,” he says.

Cloud of Goods operates in San Francisco, Orlando, Anaheim, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Diego, New York City, and New Orleans with pilots in Atlanta and Washington, DC. The company has just passed 50,000 transactions and plans to expand globally in 2020.