



tpl:innovation strategy

how do you think?



**Together,
we can make
great things
happen.**

WHY IS INNOVATION IMPORTANT? The library needs to innovate in order to adapt, change and grow. Successful organizations harness the creativity, skills and diverse perspectives of their staff. We want to provide opportunities for everyone to brainstorm and develop ideas that can help transform the library and improve our customers' experiences.

You are TPL's greatest resource. And your participation is front and centre of our Innovation Strategy. **WE WANT TO EMPOWER STAFF AT ALL LEVELS WITH OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT TO INITIATE, PARTICIPATE IN AND DEVELOP INNOVATIVE IDEAS.** These ideas can range from large-scale transformations to small, but significant, improvements to existing programs, services and processes.

Staff from the TPL Incubator, a team that facilitates and supports innovation at TPL, looked at best practices of forward-thinking organizations. They reviewed literature related to fostering organizational innovation. The team spoke with our staff from all parts of the city and at all levels – from pages to the City Librarian.

We heard that many staff want to participate in innovative work and that they have ideas for how to improve our customers' experiences. Highlighted in this publication are examples of successful projects from our previous Staff Innovation Program, all created and executed by our talented staff. We hope your team is inspired to work together to identify some of TPL's next innovation initiatives.

We're looking forward to how your ideas and innovations can activate something great at Toronto Public Library!



Pam Ryan

Director, Service Development & Innovation
Toronto Public Library

We envision a culture of experimentation with an open, collaborative and engaged workforce.

We want all staff – those in public service and those in support departments – to continue to be inspired to experiment and create innovative programs and services. This helps create excellent customer experiences and enriched staff experiences across the organization.



What does innovation mean?

- › Creating something new or making improvements to something that already exists.
- › Large-scale transformations or incremental improvements.
- › It's not just about technology. Innovation applies to all areas of our work.

What do we hope to achieve through innovation?

- › Increase the library's responsiveness and ability to adapt to change.
- › Foster a culture of experimentation and collaboration.
- › Enable continuous improvements at TPL.
- › Empower staff to drive improvements in their respective roles, locations and area of influence.
- › Support staff with idea generation and problem solving skills and resources.
- › Create channels and opportunities for staff to communicate their ideas to decision makers and influencers.

What's the TPL Incubator?

The TPL Incubator is a staff team that facilitates and supports innovation at TPL. They act as champions, internal resources for projects and inquiries, and also connect with external organizations to further innovation through partnerships.

Access the TPL Incubator page on ShareTPL at share.tpl.ca/incubator

PARTICIPATION

Three vital active ingredients for staff innovation:

Ingredient #1: Participation

There are lots of ways all staff can participate in innovation at TPL. Here are just two:

THE CITY LIBRARIAN'S INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Each year, the City Librarian issues an innovation challenge to staff. The theme of the challenge is based on a specific item highlighted in the Strategic Plan. Staff submit ideas for pilot projects to the TPL Incubator, who will narrow down the submissions in consultation with a work group and relevant internal stakeholders. Using a pre-set criteria, including creativity, feasibility and scalability, up to five projects are approved by Directors.

Staff with approved projects receive:

- **TIME** dedicated to work on their project.
- **BUDGET** for resources, such as equipment. A maximum budget per project will be set by the TPL Incubator and indicated in the call for submissions.
- **MENTORSHIP** from a member of the TPL Incubator and a manager in their area of focus.
- **RECOGNITION** of their ideas and hard work, including an annual celebratory luncheon.

THE IDEA BOX

Staff can submit ideas year-round through the Idea Box on the TPL Incubator page on ShareTPL. Unlike the City Librarian's Innovation Challenge, Idea Box proposals do not have to be implemented by the staff who submit the idea.

The Idea Box provides a convenient way for the TPL Incubator to review and help to refine and develop staff ideas. Ideas that align with the Strategic Plan and exhibit potential are forwarded to directors and managers for review. The outcome of each idea – whether it proceeds or not – is documented and shared on the TPL Incubator page.



GUIDANCE

Ingredient #2: Guidance

To further staff innovation, the library provides tools, processes and training that help support the development of new ideas and innovative thinking.

STAFF TRAINING

The TPL Incubator offers year-round training and learning opportunities related to innovation and creativity, including:

- ▶ **DESIGN THINKING** training sessions with a focus on developing ideas, assessing their viability, prototyping, and conducting user research.
- ▶ **FACILITATION** of collaborative brainstorming and design thinking exercises to help staff teams and committees identify creative ideas to a specific challenge they are trying to solve.
- ▶ **ANNUAL INNOVATION FAIR** that provides an opportunity for staff to learn from external leaders in innovation and to showcase ongoing innovative projects within TPL.

TOOLS AND PROCESSES

The TPL Incubator provides tools that can help staff generate ideas, solve challenges and develop user-centered programs and services. These tools are available on the TPL Incubator page, including links to relevant external resources to motivate, inspire and support our staff.



Ingredient #3: Sharing

Building communities where our staff and our partners can share and collaborate on ideas and communicate openly is vital for innovation.

INNOVATION COMMUNITIES

Here are some of the ways staff can share ideas and successes internally and also externally with other organizations:

- **TPL INCUBATOR YAMMER GROUP** shares ideas, updates, details on innovative activities at TPL and external resources and articles.
- **TPL'S INNOVATION COUNCIL** plays an important advisory role to TPL by providing feedback and collaboration in shaping service development. Staff teams can request, through their manager, to be added to a council meeting agenda by contacting the Manager, Innovation.
- **MEETUPS WITH OTHER LIBRARY INNOVATION TEAMS** occur throughout the year. These MeetUps are information sessions for sharing knowledge, lessons and best practices.

SHARING

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS AND STAFF RECOGNITION

The TPL Incubator provides ongoing communication and opportunities for feedback on innovation projects. This is done both to share information and to recognize staff for their contributions. These communications include:

- **NEWS ARTICLES** on ShareTPL.
- **PRESENTATIONS ON PROJECTS** at internal and external meetings.
- **DISCUSSIONS** on Yammer.
- **RESOURCES AND ONGOING UPDATES** on the TPL Incubator page.
- **OFFICE HOURS** to provide support for staff working on innovation projects.



Innovation in action!

Need some inspiration? Check out these innovation projects created by your colleagues.

OUR FIRST STAFF-LED podcast was the brainchild of Christina Wong, Michael Warner, Jason Behzadian and Wendy Banks. It was produced with support from Ted Belke, George Panayotou and Gregory McCormick.

Shelve Under: Podcast



INNOVATION IS...
LIKE GROWING
A GARDEN.

The pilot season launched in December 2018 and monthly episodes can be downloaded from tpl.ca/podcasts. Each episode promotes library services and showcases the unique voices and stories of staff and guests, which have included CBC's Matt Galloway and author Vicki Essex.

The team's project is helping pave the way for future staff-led podcasts at TPL and they say that it's been a great learning experience.

"There was a steep learning curve," says Jason. "Innovating in a large organization means navigating a lot of moving parts. I'm really pleased that we got this far."

Michael is proud that the concept became a reality. "It's like growing a garden for the first time – it's a lot of work, but the carrots are that much sweeter."

"This project gave us the chance to learn audio editing and recording skills we wouldn't have otherwise," says Wendy.

Christina adds, "It's nice that it allows people from different levels of the organization to work together."

WHILE WORKING AS a Digital Design Technician at the Digital Innovation Hub in Fort York Branch, James Topping pitched the idea of Arduino Lending Kits to the Staff Innovation Program. He developed the idea with a team of Arduino enthusiasts: Ted Belke,

Maciek Kaluba, Matthew Giancola and Maria Samurin.

In May 2018, the pilot launched at six Digital Innovation Hubs. It was the first time customers could borrow and take home equipment from the Hubs. These kits provided the opportunity and time

to learn and experiment with the popular open-source microcontroller.

The success of this project has paved the way for other types of lendable kits from the Hubs, including Raspberry Pi and podcasting kits.

Reflecting on his experience, James said, "I feel this project will allow anyone to get into coding and electronics and allow more access for our customers. Who knows, maybe this project will inspire our youth and other customers to be the next designers of new innovative products. I am hopeful that this is just the beginning. The library can create a meaningful impact on Toronto's residents, which is why I was motivated to design and implement this project."

Arduino Lending Kits



INNOVATION IS...
CREATING A
MEANINGFUL
IMPACT.

ALISON HARRIS AND NORINE LEE are avid geocachers – a global community made up of people who go on scavenger hunts to find hidden treasures (geocaches) using GPS capable devices. Together, the duo developed and executed a staff innovation project that encouraged customers to find hidden geocaches while exploring the 40 branches where they were located.



“INNOVATION IS... A WAY TO EXPERIENCE NEW THINGS.”

Between the launch of the project in Summer 2016 – the same time that Pokemon Go hysteria was at its peak – and December 2018, 1,500 individuals visited TPL’s geocaches more than 4,000 times. Additionally five TPL geocoins, which are small trackable objects that can be transferred from one geocache to another, were released. These geocoins

have travelled more than 125,000 kilometres and the global users that find them know that they originated from TPL.

This project was a great way for TPL to engage local and global communities in innovative ways using new tools.

“It was encouraging to see branches come on board and take ownership of their geocache,” says Alison. “The community loves the fact that we got involved and they have shared ideas for

geocaching programs that have been very successful. The coins that were printed are coveted, too.”

Norine says she was thankful for the opportunity. “Public Service Assistants (PSAs) don’t always have the same training or programming opportunities as other staff. I was a PSA when I submitted the proposal, so it allowed me to learn and experience new things. This project provided great insight into the vast TPL system.”

CHRISTINE REIS AND BENJAMIN TANG'S sewing hobby helped shape the sewing programs and services offered at TPL's first Fabrication Studio.

Christine and Benjamin shared a common belief: sewing is an essential skill for youth and everyone should know the basics. Because most schools no longer offer sewing classes, Christine and Benjamin took it upon themselves to create programs to address this gap.

Their initial idea was to create a set of sewing kits that could be loaned to branches to support programs with youth and budding designers. At the same time, TPL was planning its first Fabrication Studio at North York Central Library and was considering sewing machines as part of its offerings.

This serendipitous timing provided Christine and Benjamin an opportunity to further develop their project. The pair provided valuable input on the sewing equipment, supplies, accessories and classes that TPL should offer.

Since the Fabrication Studio opened in 2018, Christine and Benjamin's course materials have been adapted by Studio staff into popular and well-received classes. Benjamin supports this service as a Digital Design Technician in the Studio, working with colleagues to continually evolve the sewing programs and services.

"It's mind-blowing that I could take a hobby, propose it as a library service, and then be offered the chance to grow my idea into a concrete thing," says Christine.

Benjamin adds, "I am very thankful that I could be part of the team that took my ideas and transformed them into classes that many have enjoyed. It's very gratifying to see all the happy faces when people are learning new skills."

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INNOVATION IS...
GROWING IDEAS
INTO CONCRETE
THINGS.

Sewing Classes



Inspired and ready to Activate Something Great?

Visit the TPL Incubator section of ShareTPL:

- Submit your ideas through the City Librarian's Innovation Challenge or the Idea Box
- Find design thinking tools and worksheets
- Sign up for a TPL Incubator-led workshop
- Read about how your colleagues are activating great things at TPL
- And more!