

## CASE STUDIES: REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES OF HOW LIBRARIES ARE RE-ENVISIONING TEEN SERVICES

# A New Vision for a New Teen Space

Jessi Snow

*Boston Public Library (MA)*

### What Did You Want to Achieve?

To create a space, now called Teen Central, that reflects the interests and needs of teens in the community. We worked to create a space with a focus on HOMAGO; for hanging out (lots of chairs and couches), messing around (a gaming lounge with three gaming systems for teens to access and consume games/media, programs to participate in, and to mess around with) and geeking out (the Lab, a digital makerspace for teens to create, learn, and collaborate).

### Overview of the Program/Project

A year before the new space opened, we worked to outline the vision of the space. We started by building a survey that teens completed as a way to help us shape programming.

The survey was given to teens a year before the new space opened, and they were asked how, why, and when they use the Central Library. We also asked them to rank in order of importance and interest the type of programs they were interested in participating in, including the following: college readiness, job readiness (résumé workshops, interview skills), music creation, technology (3-D creation, engineering, music creation, coding, etc.), craft programs, and teen leadership programs. The programs that were ranked the highest were job readiness, college preparedness, and technology programming.

The space opened in February 2015, and since its opening, teen engagement at the Central Library has skyrocketed.

### What Challenges Did You Face and How Did You Overcome Them?

None of this happened overnight or even in just a year. It's taken time and continues to take time. One of the big challenges has been in defining the Lab (digital makerspace) and really having teens understand the intent of the space and then use it as intended. We focus programs in the Lab based on the research from the Futures Report and from direct input from teens. We identified some innovative programs that teens have expressed interest in, developed a curriculum of programs based on the Futures Report, and continue to bring in outside organizations of professionals and organizations that specialize in coding,



music creation, graphic design, 3-D design and making; however, we haven't really been reaching those teens who need and want this type of program. We are really trying to connect with outside organizations and schools that work with underserved teens to try to identify their needs for technology programs and then develop a curriculum that works to support those needs. We are looking at different ways to try to serve those who need it, whether it's in the library or outside the walls of the library.



## What Did You Learn?

We completely rethought how we present our programs and now think about them in ways so that they address introducing teens to twenty-first-century digital literacy skills, provide them with exposure to possible careers, and introduce them to actual careers. We are working more closely with community partners in order to achieve this. And we make sure to talk with teens about ways in which skills learned are transferable and the ways they can include them in their résumés and in job interviews.

## How Does This Work Connect to YALSA's Futures Report and Vision?

All of the staff in Teen Central were asked to read the YALSA Futures Report on their own and then met as a team to discuss areas of importance and pieces to focus on for Teen Central. As a result, we now focus on these Futures-related areas:

- Programming based on input from teens and a connected-learning focus.
- Outreach that is consistent, deliberate, and purposeful.
- Programs that focus on career readiness.

“We are really trying to connect with outside organizations and schools that work with underserved teens to try to identify their needs for technology programs and then develop a curriculum that works to support those needs. We are looking at different ways to try to serve those who need it, whether it's in the library or outside the walls of the library.”