

# 25 UNUSUAL AND AWESOME THINGS HAPPENING IN LIBRARIES

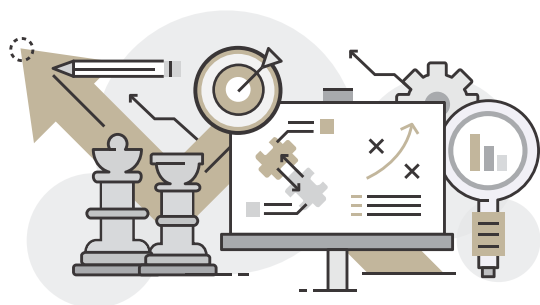
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Sanley Friendship Library

bâton | global



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# INTRODUCTION

Libraries of today are so much more than repositories of information. They are beacons of knowledge and entertainment, decked out with the latest technologies to meet the evolving needs of the communities they serve. They are “libraries of things,” lending nontraditional objects to inspire curiosity and connect people with ideas. They are spaces to interact and mix learning with leisure. Libraries have shown that they are constantly evolving their processes and services to better serve our community. Check out the list below to learn about some of the unusual and awesome things happening in libraries around the world.

## 25 THINGS

1. Record a Song, Podcast, or Video
  - a. Many libraries house recording studios, providing the tools and software to help you create, edit, and publish audio and video projects. The Studio at the Chattanooga Public Library in Tennessee provides library cardholders access to a state-of-the-art recording studio and educational facility with industry-standard equipment and resources to help inspire, educate, and spark creativity.
2. Read to a Therapy Dog
  - a. A growing number of libraries across the country are offering programs inviting therapy dogs to sit and listen as young patrons practice their reading skills without feeling any pressure or embarrassment. The dogs offer a unique form of social support for children that puts them at ease and enhances self-esteem.
3. Color and Socialize
  - a. An activity often reserved for children, adult coloring has surged in popularity over the last decade. Public libraries have responded to the trend by offering monthly coloring programs or have even hosted coloring clubs. These programs serve as a great way for libraries to connect community members and promote socialization.
4. Free Family Fun
  - a. Adventure Pass programs provide library cardholders with free access to local area attractions. With the Des Moines Public Library’s Iowa Adventure Pass, library card owners from local libraries across the state can check out passes and spend the day at the local zoo, botanical gardens, ice skating rink, science center, or a number of other attractions across the state – for free!

## 5. Borrow a GoPro

- a. Lights, Camera, Action! Record your adventures and share them with others by borrowing a GoPro. GoPros are fun, easy to use, and very versatile. GoPro kits can be checked out at public libraries for users to create short films, record yourself in action, make underwater videos, or take high-quality vacation photos.

## 6. Robot Co-Workers

- a. Robots are becoming co-workers with librarians around the world. In Singapore, the robot librarian AuRoSS is helping to automate shelf reading. The robot uses RFID to scan the shelves to help locate books that have been put in the wrong place. Librarians can then find the errant books and reshelve them.

## 7. Cut the Cord

- a. Many people are interested in eliminating their cable subscription in favor of Internet-based streaming services, such as Netflix and Hulu. The Guilderland Public Library in upstate New York teaches “cut the cord” lessons to go with its “try before you buy” assortment of cable TV alternatives: Amazon Fire TV Sticks, Apple TV boxes, HDTV antennas, and Roku streaming devices.

## 8. Find the Perfect Gown

- a. Prom season can be expensive for families, but the Dallas Public Library in Texas created a program to help. Fairy Tale Closet helps cut the cost by offering free, new, and gently used donated formal wear to high school students. The closet includes hundreds of gowns, as well as suits and jackets for those who prefer pants.

## 9. Get Fit

- a. Did you know you don't need a gym membership to get into shape? As libraries have become increasingly digital with less designated space for books, open floor space has left more room for fitness classes. Ypsilanti District Library in Michigan has offered its youth parkour, hip hop, breakdancing, and Brazilian capoeira classes. Macon Branch Library in Brooklyn, New York has a wildly popular Xbox bowling league for seniors where teams even wear matching bowling shirts.

## 10. Survive the Zombie Apocalypse



- a. Zombies have become a fun theme for libraries to educate and entertain their audiences. Teens at Mancos Public Library in Colorado practiced emergency preparedness and survival skills during a two-day “zombie apocalypse.” The first day of training focused on preparation and subsistence, as teens create emergency plans and paracord bracelets, discussed fitness, made a zeer pot (a nonelectrical refrigerator), and learned about water filtration and distillation. On the second day, participants focused on wilderness survival, navigation, compasses, and battery usage.

#### 11. Check Out Discovery Kits

- a. Discovery or learning kits are another staple at libraries. The kits usually include books, games, suggested activities, or equipment related to the subject. Examples include music kits with instruments, dinosaur kits with toy figures, and even memory kits to help spark conversations and memories with loved ones who are experiencing memory loss. The Santa Clara County Library District in California loans out Bi-Folkal Kits that provide activities and materials with the goal of allowing older adults to reminisce and connect with others. Each kit is centered on a different theme such as school days, automobiles, county fairs, etc.

#### 12. Go Green

- a. Whether through curriculum development, collections, exhibits, events, advocacy, communication, or library building and space design, libraries are supporting sustainability efforts. The revamped Choa Chu Kang Library in Singapore is the first in the country to be built around the concept of sustainability. Visitors will be treated to an indoor garden, a hydroponics room, and new digital learning tools such as live streams of nature and updates from the World Wildlife Fund Singapore.

#### 13. Connect to Social Services

- a. Because libraries tend to be centrally located within neighborhoods, they are ideal places to aid in connecting residents to services such as housing, unemployment, childcare assistance; substance abuse and mental health services; and more. The recently opened Westchester Library Health and Wellness Information Center, part of the Miami-Dade Public Library System in Florida is the first custom-built, stand-alone library branch specifically focused on community health. In addition to access to social services, the new branch has everything from a mobile kitchen, to fitness equipment that can be used at the branch or in the adjacent “Francisco” Human Rights Park, to an auditorium for seminars, workshops, presentations, and exercise classes.

#### 14. Get Delivery

- a. Mobile library units offer connections with more dispersed populations that may not have the means to regularly access the physical branch locations. In the heart of rural Colombia Luis Soriano Bohorquez has made it his mission to educate and empower children with books. For the past 25 years, Luis has been traveling with his two donkeys delivering books to children and communities in rural Colombia. This donkey-powered mobile library service – the Biblioburro – has grown from 70 books to a collection of more than 4,000.
15. Grow a Garden
- a. The LibraryFarm program is an organic community garden on one-half acre of land owned by Northern Onondaga Public Library in Cicero, New York. Any library cardholder can check out a plot of the land for free. The goal of the program is to teach and learn ‘Food literacy’ as well as provide fresh produce to local food pantries.
16. Cheer on Contestants
- a. Worm races are exciting for kids who cheer on their worm across the finish line. At Ella Johnson Memorial Library in Illinois, there are three different rounds held during the day with 36 children in each race. The children drop their worms onto the middle of the race track and can “encourage” their worms to move with a squirt of water. The first worm to stretch across the finish line wins.
17. Redbox-Style Library Kiosks
- a. Libraries around the country have begun installing automated book dispensing machines that can be operated 24/7 with the swipe of a library card and typically hold between 200 and 500 books and DVDs available for checkout. Some libraries have also installed kiosks that allow patrons to check out and return laptops.
18. Community Hot Spots
- a. Many library institutions are expanding beyond a single-use building, bringing library services out into the community. The Free Library of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania sponsors hot spots that are hosted in schools, churches, and non-profit community organizations. Each hotspot has computers, a printer, WIFI access, and all necessary internet equipment as well as library materials.
19. Welcome Newcomers
- a. Today, as non-native English speakers comprise an increasingly diverse part of the population, libraries are often a first point of access to information and services. They offer things like English language learning programs, citizenship exam preparation, and financial literacy classes. Hartford Public Library in Connecticut recently announced the launch of a new program

that expands banking access for members of immigrant communities. Participants who deposit \$50 a month for five months into a bank savings account will receive \$250. Participants who maintain an account balance of \$250 or more for the next five months will earn an additional \$250. The program will also include meetings every other week to discuss financial literacy and provide networking opportunities for participants.

## 20. Step into Virtual Worlds

- a. Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality (VR/AR) is now finding a place in library programming and services, sparking everything from senior-focused programs to virtual travel experiences to tween and teen STEAM programs. Grandview Heights Public Library in Ohio offers children's nonfiction books featuring integrated virtual reality and augmented reality content. Readers can borrow a virtual reality headset and scan the QR codes included with the books that lead to virtual experiences viewed through a free smartphone app.

## 21. Use a Family Friendly Workstation

- a. Using public computers while accompanied by a small child is no easy task. Fairfield Area Library—part of Henrico County (Va.) Public Library — recently went viral when pictures of their new workstations emerged. These work-and-play stations feature an enclosed play area for babies and small children attached to an adult-sized computer desk. The play enclosure has rounded edges and a padded, vinyl-covered base that can be easily wiped down and interactive, and interchangeable wooden panels mounted on the inside of the play space, with mirrors inset low on the walls to encourage tummy time for infants.

## 22. Discover the Power of Storytelling in ASL

- a. The American Library Association (ALA) supports the efforts of libraries to provide “equitable access for all through inclusive collections, resources, services, and programs.” In 2019, Milwaukee Public Library (MPL) in Wisconsin hosted its first Deaf StorySlam. Participants were coached in identifying, crafting, and telling their narratives over the course of three workshops by local community members. More than 150 community members attended the slam to hear the untold stories of the deaf community. Since then, the Dear StorySlam has become an annual event.

## 23. Enjoy a Storywalk

- a. Sometimes it can be a challenge for kids to sit still and read. That's where storywalks come in. A story walk is an interactive experience where the pages of books are displayed along trails and sidewalks so families can enjoy a nature walk and a great story at the same time. StoryWalks can be found across the country and have become a librarian favorite.

#### 24. Expand Your Palate with a Book Tasting

- a. Book tastings are a way to introduce any age audience to a wide array of books. Participants are seated at a “restaurant” table where the librarian-waiter “serves” a tray of books. The “customers” are invited to “sample” a few pages from each book. After about five minutes or so, the librarian-waiter switches the tray of books so that everyone is looking at a new stack of books.

#### 25. Play to Learn

- a. Williamsburg Regional Library in Virginia has transformed its children’s area into a “children’s style museum” to keep little hands and minds busy. There are several big installations including an air tub machine, a giant illuminated pixel peg wall, an interactive floor projection play area, a LEGO wall, a moveable magnetic gear wall, and a ball wall that allows for exploration of advanced concepts including kinetic energy, friction, and inertia. Many features of the space were chosen for their appeal to children on the autism spectrum, and activities available support a wide range of learning styles.

Libraries of today are no longer collection centered repositories of information but vibrant community hubs, offering innovative collections, partnerships, programs, services, and spaces. They are constantly evolving their business model based on emerging trends and the needs of their communities. As libraries look to the future and continue to find ways to educate, entertain, and inspire, they will remain a vital community resource for lifelong learning.



## ADDITIONAL STRATEGY RESOURCES

- How to Write North Star Statements: 250 Purpose, Mission, Vision, and Values Examples to Guide You Through the Process ([Link](#))
- Strategy on a Page: Communication Your Strategy Effectively (includes examples) ([Link](#))
- Free Strategic Planning Template (includes a public library example) ([Link](#))
- Meeting Facilitation Reference Guide ([Link](#))
- Developing Strategic Objectives and Focus Areas ([Link](#))
- Introduction to PESTLE Analysis: Why a Systemic Approach is Best ([Link](#))



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