

ESTABLISH A COMMUNITY TOOL LIBRARY

City of St. Louis Sustainable Neighborhood Initiative

Boarding up vacant buildings in Old North St. Louis



DESCRIPTION

A community tool library is a volunteer and donation based cooperative that serves neighborhood residents. It operates much like a traditional library, where residents check out tools and return them about a week later. It is a resource for all members of the neighborhood so individuals avoid spending a lot of money on a tool they may only need to use once or twice, for people that are unsure of what tools they may need, and for residents that can't afford to purchase tools. Having access to tools empowers residents to take action on all kinds of projects and it simplifies maintenance, repair, and rehabilitation of homes and yards.

NEIGHBORHOOD BENEFITS

Environmental

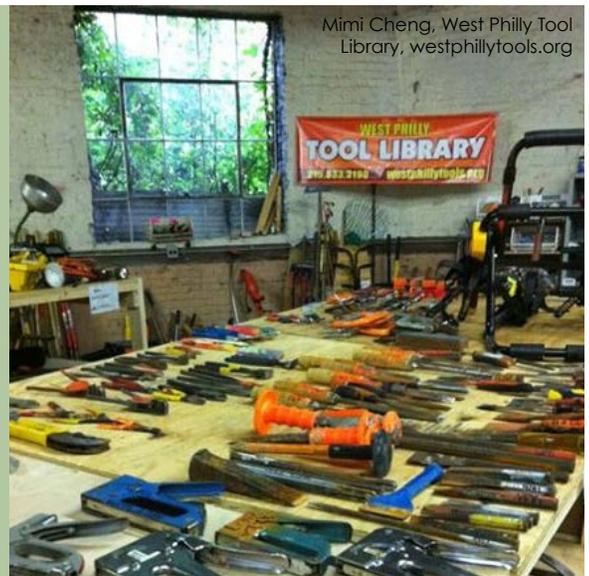
- Reduced travel for getting materials and tools for local projects
- Reduced need for individuals to own a complete tool set, easing environmental costs of purchasing and owning tools

Social

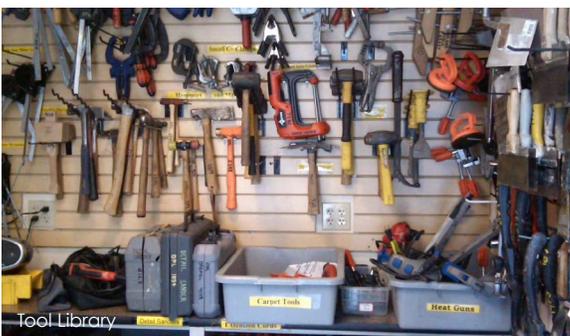
- Reduced financial burden for residents that cannot afford tools
- Empowerment of residents to complete individual and community projects
- Increased interaction with neighbors
- Teaching, learning, and training opportunities for residents, youth, and craftsmen

Economic

- Reduced personal cost for home repair and maintenance
- Opportunity to employ residents, offer training, and promote volunteering
- Individual property improvement, yard maintenance, and beautification that promotes neighborhood image, resilience, and growth



Mimi Cheng, West Philly Tool Library, westphillytools.org



RELATED TOOLS

When paired with other tools, creating a community tool library can contribute to a more empowered and more sustainable neighborhood. Think about volunteering, community improvement, and building and land maintenance. Try combining this strategy with:

- **Create a Cool or White Roofs Program**
- **Create Public Art Installations or Exhibits**
- **Develop Creative New Uses for Vacant Land**
- **Secure Vacant Buildings**
- **Preserve Existing Buildings**

EXAMPLES

University City Tool Library, University City, MO

Not yet in effect, the organizers are working with University City to secure a space for their tool library.

NorthSide Tool Library Proposal, St. Louis, MO

A promising proposal in the Sustainable Land Lab Competition.

West Philly Tool Library, Philadelphia, PA

Run by a volunteer steering committee and 3 part-time employees.



GET STARTED

1. Community tool libraries have been successful in many other cities in the US and are a great opportunity for St. Louisans to gain the resources, knowledge, and capacity to improve their own neighborhoods, homes, gardens, and public spaces.
2. **Find Examples** There are many tool library success stories to learn from. Examples can be mapped and listed on this website: http://localtools.org/find/#map_top. Some standout examples are:
 - [West Seattle Tool Library](#)
 - [Green Lents Community Tool Library](#)
3. **Plan** There are a few very detailed and helpful online guides to starting a tool library that cover the most important considerations, give how to steps, and give example documents about the following:
 - Structure of the Tool Library
 - Funding
 - Staffing, Steering Committee, and Volunteers
 - Insurance
 - Inventory Management
 - The sharing economy
 - Mentorship and Networking
 Links to those guides are:
 - <http://sharestarter.org/tools/>
 - <http://sharestarter.org/files/2012/01/How-To-Start-a-Lending-Library.-Full-Packet.pdf>
4. **Find a Location** When choosing a location for the tool library, consider reusing a vacant building or a vacant lot in your neighborhood. Often, these properties are owned by the [City of St. Louis LRA](#). Visit this [website](#) for a helpful how-to guide on getting the process started for leasing or buying the land or building.
5. **Plan Long Term** Based on the story of existing tool libraries, starting a library is not a short term process. Some of the steps can be more involved and take a longer time to coordinate, so starting early and committing to the project is important. Sharing your story, your goals, and your progress with the community will be important to build support and keep the project moving forward. Have a presence at community events, farmers markets, public meetings, and through regular updates on a website, Facebook page, or blog. Some things that may take a longer time are:
 - Creating a 501c3 or finding a host organization
 - Securing a building or property
 - Raising money for initial construction and establishment costs

OPPORTUNITIES

1. **Program** Perhaps the most important part of the Tool Library is the programming that should accompany the actual tool rental. The tool library should offer books and how-to guides for common home maintenance and construction. Also, programming can be created to give demonstration workshops to teach members about basic home maintenance, new projects, techniques, and basic tool use and safety. Some possible projects include winterization, historic restoration, tree planting, and community improvement projects like seasonal clean-up days. Special consideration should be given to including youth training and mentoring programs partnered with the more experienced volunteers running the Tool Library.



RELATED SUSTAINABILITY PLAN CATEGORIES

This tool supports prosperity, preservation, and empowers residents.

Urban Character, Vitality & Ecology

Strategies B7-Encourage communities to improve their own neighborhood; C1-Design public spaces and neighborhood streets as gathering places for people; F5-Promote the redevelopment of historic homes and commercial properties; H8-Enhance community cleaning and beautification efforts.

Arts, Culture & Innovation

Strategies: G2-Foster collaboration between arts and cultural organizations to share and build capacity.

Empowerment, Diversity & Equity

Strategies: C6-Create opportunities for youth as they enter young adulthood and the workforce; D3-Encourage inter-generational programs that bring together seniors and youth.

Infrastructure, Facilities & Transportation

Strategies: G5-Encourage reuse of materials and divert from landfills.

Prosperity, Opportunity & Employment

Strategies: A2-Offer job training programs at accessible community-based locations; G4-Market City assets to draw visitors to City neighborhoods.

For the most current examples, updated tools, and information, visit the City's Sustainable Neighborhood Initiative website:

SUSTAINABLENEIGHBORHOOD.NET