

LoT Co-lab Session 4: Volunteers Video

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0:00:00.0 Speaker 1: Everyone for sharing.

0:00:05.3 Tom Llewellyn: All right. Well, welcome everybody. My name is Tom Llewellyn. I'm the Interim Executive Director at Shareable, which is convening this Library of Things Co-Lab. And just want to let everybody know that we will be recording this session. So if you don't want to have your face on video at any point in time, now is a good time to not come on. If you do want to show everybody else who you are, please do feel free. This session will be posted to Canvas, to our learning management system in the next couple of days. And we will also be putting out the transcript, the slide deck, as well as any other resources that are shared will all get posted to Canvas. And if anybody has any trouble accessing that, please do contact candice@shareable.net who can help you get access to that information.

0:01:05.4 Tom Llewellyn: Today, we've got an exciting presentation. We will be walking through discussing volunteers. And so in just a moment, we'll be passing it off to Josh Epstein and to Jessa Wais who will be leading this session. And then after their presentation, we'll have plenty of time for questions. And as we mentioned last week, while the session actually ends right at the hour, we're gonna be leaving the room open for another 15 minutes. If there's any additional discussion or questions for us, issues that anybody's having with the Co-Lab with access that needs support. We'll leave that space to be able to provide that. And so without further ado, I'm gonna pass it off to Josh and Jessa.

0:02:01.1 Josh Epstein: All right. Hello everybody. So we're talking about volunteer engagement at Libraries of Things. We are titling our presentation sharing purpose because that's really what we feel like we're doing. My name is Josh Epstein. I am the executive director for Seattle REconomy. I'm the manager at Northeast Seattle and Shoreline Tool Library. I do a little bit of everything there. Mostly I'm thinking big picture doing a lot of volunteer management and volunteer engagement and I've been working with volunteers and volunteering myself for 15 years plus and I'm looking pretty orange today. Like I think there's some fun lighting in my area. So I'm not like actually in Asana, but I just want to address that and it's good to see I see a bunch of familiar names. Vivek, good to see you. Darren. Hey, happy you're all here and I'll pass it over to Jessa.

0:03:00.8 Jessa Wais: Hi everyone. My name is Jessa Wais. I use they/them pronouns and I'm born and raised in Baltimore. I'm one of the co-directors here in Baltimore City at the Station North Tool Library and yeah, I do a lot of volunteer management in my role. So I manage our 30 plus librarians, 15 plus tool fixers, and I'm just so excited about the Co-Lab and the work that's happening for more and more tool libraries to pop up.

0:03:24.8 Jessa Wais: Hopefully people have the pizza emoji.

0:03:28.4 Jessa Wais: So yeah, it's good to be here. All right. So if you take away anything from our presentation today, we wanted to, not bury the lead and just be really clear that volunteers are a huge huge resource. You can and you probably should be building volunteer power, maybe more than you already are. And we're gonna really touch on best practices around recruiting, utilizing, and then keeping volunteers. So yeah, we've broken the presentation up into six primary buckets. We're gonna talk about the why. We're gonna talk a little bit about the why not. So we don't want to paint too beautiful of a picture.

0:04:13.1 Jessa Wais: We also want to really be clear about issues that can come up with volunteer management. We're gonna talk about how to have really strong recruitment. So you hopefully minimize the issues. We're gonna harp your heel over and over again around the value and the importance of clear and strong communication. We're gonna hit on purpose. Why do people even want to volunteer? And then we'll end with building community, because what is a tool library if not a community resource?

0:04:44.8 Josh Epstein: So before I get to the why, I want to do a little tone setting. So first of all, if you have questions, please feel free to put them in the chat. We'll try to address them as we go if we can if it's pertinent to what we're talking about. Also, we had a fun question if you want to throw it in the chat, say your name or your organization and then also maybe put in a volunteer experience that you loved. Why you love that? Maybe a little hint towards because we all I think most of us have done at least some volunteering and maybe what worked about that volunteer experience. So with that, why should we use volunteers? So for us, we have found that we can increase our impact. We can save money. We found that there are things that they can do better than us. Hard to admit it, but so often true.

0:05:38.0 Josh Epstein: And then finally, well for this slide, volunteers want to volunteer. We're gonna get into that more later, but I think that's a real big takeaway is that sometimes people have a hard time asking people to volunteer when in fact, it's a gift we can give. We can increase engagement from folks who want to be part of the project. There's built-in users. So if we have volunteers, they know our programs better than maybe just a normal member and then we can get valuable feedback from these volunteers who intimately know what we're trying to do and what's working and what's not working.

0:06:11.8 Josh Epstein: We're also being able to share power which then shares ownership, decision-making, risk, responsibility, and people want to volunteer. For instance, we're volunteering right now as we speak, proof in the pudding. So a lot of it just comes down to then asking the right people because they already want to do this. There's so much that they can get out of it, so much we can get. So we'll get into that in a little bit too. Now there are a myriad of ways that folks can volunteer with us. We really try to make it fit for as many people as we can and Jessa is gonna talk more about when it doesn't fit, but these are just some of the areas that we have folks volunteering in and think about it for yourselves.

0:06:54.7 Josh Epstein: I know we probably have a pretty big array of folks in this meeting of maybe just starting tool library, just thinking about starting tool library or maybe already have a pretty established tool library. And so think where you're at, what are some roles at this point that you can have volunteers do? Just what we call a tool librarian checking in, checking out tools, the instructors, shop storage, really forward-facing stuff. We have a lot of internal things, fixers, the building maintenance, software stuff, and then we have all the way up to leadership. So both Jessa and I have, we've boards, volunteer boards that are actually having legal power over us and over the organization and over the real true decision-making that's happening. And that can be scary for folks, but ultimately we can have such greater impact if you're able to have this progression of roles.

0:07:55.5 Jessa Wais: Yeah, really anywhere that there's a need at the organization and there's someone who wants to do it, that is potentially a match. So it's interesting, there's kind of the more classic volunteer roles Josh mentioned, but there's also all sorts of little things like, someone is excited about an event and they ask if they can take the first crack at a flyer. It's really all about

matching the skills of a person with the needs of the organization. So yeah, lots of ways. We have lots of ways folks do volunteer. So yeah, in terms of the why not starting with like the story that you might tell yourself when you think about onboarding new volunteers, you might think that you don't have the time, maybe feel a little uncomfortable asking, maybe there's a trust element of the whole, if you want it done right, you have to do it yourself and sharing ownership is hard.

0:08:48.6 Jessa Wais: So like these, might be stories that you tell yourself as you think about tackling the world that is volunteer engagement, And there might be a situation where you're right and I do want to be real about like there can be a need that it ends up becoming more work than reward to have a volunteer do that, and we want to kind of help guide you all to really make sure that we are using volunteers in a way that makes sense because maybe a volunteer isn't the best role. So moving on to what to look out for when you do have volunteers, be aware of when it is more work than reward. So one example of that might be there's a high-demand tool that breaks and you're trying to kind of get a tool fixer to come in and fix it, and then maybe that fixer something comes up, they can't come.

0:09:42.5 Jessa Wais: You go and you reach out to another person and you just end up spending all this time and energy communicating with others when maybe you could have even fixed it yourself in an hour and saved yourself that time. So yeah, maybe that's an example. It's a high-demand tool you prioritize and get it done yourself. But when you have 100 broken tools, maybe it actually is your best use of time to have a team of volunteers that can come in and tackle that. It's also important to think about risk representation member experience is so so important at a tool library. And when you bring more and more folks into positions of power, because yes, being a librarian is a position of power, right? That could be increased risk.

0:10:26.6 Jessa Wais: So we're really intentional here around things like, mansplaining. We're really sensitive that if someone comes in and had a negative experience with a volunteer, it could actually keep them from borrowing tools in the future and that is like really, really huge for us. So we have different ways we can talk more about to make sure that our volunteers are representing us really well. And then reliability is big. So does the volunteer actually have capacity to show up in the way they want to? And also who's holding the bottom line? Is it you as staff if a volunteer gets sick and they tell you 30 minutes before their shift? Really being real about your role as staff and if you're the one holding the bottom line is important.

0:11:15.4 Jessa Wais: And then the last thing I wanted to make a note of is around boundaries because, it's a community project. Some of my best friends are librarians, it's really like a tight-knit community here. And I think that's common at a lot of tool libraries, but you want to be intentional. Do you want volunteers to be able to text you at any hour of the day? Probably not. So being intentional about your own boundaries when folks have access to you, how you kind of show up in that communal setting is also really important when building volunteer power. So, how are we gonna kind of set you up so that you're recruiting folks that are really good fit for the organization?

0:12:02.8 Josh Epstein: Jessa can I jump in for a second. I just want to add about that. The way I think of the managing volunteers can be more work than reward, is just another perspective on that is that it's like we're really thinking about this balance all the time of does it make sense to go slow to go fast? Do you want to take that time or are you gonna go slow just to go slower? So I just want to add that one other kind of flavor of that. Thanks.

0:12:28.5 Jessa Wais: Yes, and I love Steve's point to want to go fast go alone want to go far go with others. Is very similar message. So yeah, and the goal is, as you invest in the right people the labor and the work you are putting in on the forefront is really gonna pay off down the line. Yeah, that's definitely an important point. So recruitment finding the right people. Tool libraries, they're obviously, the physical tools are very important, but it really is a people project. So yeah, some things to consider when you're looking for volunteers, at the Station North Tool Library, we're really excited. We launched more formal finalized value statements, which maybe one of my, I think two of my co-directors are in the chat, so maybe one of them can drop our values link.

0:13:18.3 Jessa Wais: But yeah, everything starts with the values. So, volunteers to a degree have to be aligned on that front for the other, good stuff to follow. Communication is so, so pivotal. And it's not just one way, obviously, it's not just are they a good talker, but even more importantly, are they a good listener? Do they interrupt? Are they able to like hear a member talk about their needs and help them find the best tool? Are they open to feedback if something happened on shifts that maybe could have been handled better? So communication is just like, I think one of the biggest themes of this presentation, both from you to the volunteer, but also being sensitive about volunteer's ability to communicate with you.

0:14:01.9 Jessa Wais: Thirdly, again, it's a community project. So is the volunteer themselves rooted in community? This can go such a long way, especially when you're starting out to have folks that live in the neighborhood that are connected with other projects that are doing good work. A lot of folks, it's kind of a foreign concept sometimes, but right when you hear that someone you actually know went and got the tool they needed and it helped them with their project, that's gonna increase the odds of more folks coming into the library by lots. So yeah, rooted in community is big. And then capacity, can they actually commit to the time, maybe they love the project, a lot of people will love the project, but do they have the time to really follow through on their commitments?

0:14:48.2 Jessa Wais: And then lastly, skills. So do the skills they have align with the needs of the organization? This can be tool knowledge fixing, maybe they have community organizing experience. Maybe you're navigating the process of becoming an independent 501C3 and they have nonprofit management experience. Photography, maybe they have a nice camera, right? There's so many different skills that could be tangible. They could be social skills that you wanna keep an eye out and have strong communication around so you have an understanding of different folks' skills and how to use them. Anything to add there, Josh, on what to consider?

0:15:33.4 Josh Epstein: Nope, you nailed it.

0:15:34.7 Jessa Wais: Sweet. So then where to look? The number one place, if you do already have members, if you're at that place, they're gonna be like the number one pool to look for. Obviously, there are people that to some degree believe in the project, they have experience as a member. At the Station North Tool Library, we actually require folks to be a member we say for three months before they become a volunteer so that we can see how they interact with the space and kind of again, make sure it's a good fit. So yeah, I would just add in addition to looking at your member base is being really intentional about like, who is your dream volunteer and why. I know I've seen someone return a tool and they cleaned it, they replaced the blade, they wrapped the cord neatly and put it on the shelf.

0:16:22.4 Jessa Wais: And my eyes are just like, oh my God, you would be an amazing volunteer.

Like, you get it, you didn't get any training, but you get it. So that's just one example of like, I'm gonna pull them specifically, maybe not the member whose tools are always late, et cetera, et cetera. So pulling from your membership is huge. Obviously, social media, your newsletter, kind of those more traditional forms can also be helpful. But I think we found at the Station North Tool Library that, personalized asks are gonna go a really long way. So even looking, if your library isn't established yet, looking at community groups that you're a big fan of, maybe you're a member there, maybe they're affiliated in terms of values, a maker space, a sustainability related organization, those can also be great avenues to find volunteers.

0:17:20.1 Josh Epstein: Alright, so we're gonna talk about communication. I would say one of the two most important aspects of a volunteer experience. When I think about volunteer experiences that I didn't enjoy, it was usually because communication was lacking. And I didn't know where to be and when to be there. Or maybe I got there, but it wasn't communicated what I should do. And it was one of those moments where I was sitting around feeling like maybe I'd waste my time a little bit. So early and often communication, it's hard to over communicate I feel like with volunteers. We've broken this down such an important aspect. We think of volunteering, we've broken this down. We're gonna talk about the ask onboarding, and the first shift and then ongoing and a little bit about the progression, that if you need to evolve somebody's needs.

0:18:10.8 Josh Epstein: So with the ask, we're gonna be talking about a clear ask, the clear expectations with onboarding, how do we set them up for success? What kind of training resources do they need? Again, with first shift, it's about expectations and directions. Ongoing consistent updates. Maybe there's ongoing training that needs to happen. And then with that progression is about, as people's involvement changes, either stepping back their involvement or often progressing them towards, maybe more ownership and leadership. So with the ask, be direct. I think this is, can be hard for some people, but stating your need and don't be ashamed of it. This, again, is something that you do need to succeed and people believe in your project. I hope you believe in your project and you want more people to be involved in this.

0:19:05.7 Josh Epstein: But you are offering an opportunity to be part of something. So, be clear with what you're saying, what your actual need is, but also be clear with what they get out of it. And that can be things like a t-shirt or a free membership, but it's more about being actually part of the program and moving your mission forward. Then be okay with no, rejection is part of the volunteer game. And, I hear no on a weekly basis and it's totally fine. I try to know my volunteers really well and my members so that I can ask the right person in the right way. But sometimes it's not right and I want people to feel safe saying no. So we don't get the wrong person in the wrong role. And then, I want them to be able to help identify what is the thing that... Do they wanna be involved in a different way? If not, maybe there's a different kind of volunteering they wanna do. Maybe they just don't wanna volunteer at this point. Totally fine.

0:20:06.1 Josh Epstein: We are really big on a easy entry point, so this means we've come up with a role that takes very little to get involved in and most folks can do it. And this allows people to get in early, get a sense of the good feeling they get from volunteering. The sooner we can get them, if we find it's the right person, the right fit, and they have the right onboarding, get them actually getting tools to people or getting tools back so they can feel that glow that comes with, well run tool library. And we find that if we can get them going soon and they feel that they're more likely to come back and stay involved. And then finally, just ask in multiple ways, we ask person to person, like Jessa was saying, you see that person that brings back the cord and all wrapped up or they come

in with just that enthusiasm of they get it. That's a great person to ask. We also have signage all over our tool libraries. We do it through emails, social media. I don't think you can ask in too many ways. Jessa, is there anything you want to add on that one?

0:21:17.9 Jessa Wais: No, looking good.

0:21:19.0 Josh Epstein: Okay.

0:21:21.0 Jessa Wais: Yeah. And then, once you've made this beautiful direct ask and you've received a strong yes. Then comes the work, the work doesn't stop there, of onboarding folks, right? Yeah, I think I was looking through some of the examples you all put about, positive volunteer experiences. And one quick theme I saw was just feeling set up for success, right? Like, you knew what to expect, you felt like you had what you needed to do a good job. So yeah, that's really an important part of it is setting people up for success. And we do that out through a lot of ways, but I think training resources, how do we compile resources so that folks can answer their own questions. They're not fully dependent on asking staff for every little thing.

0:22:09.0 Jessa Wais: That can go a long way. Having those clear expectations is really important. And I like to reiterate it. So before I even, I do like an intro with a new volunteer, so they're interested in volunteering, even before the ask. I do like a one-on-one, and I'm really clear about the expectations of like, here training is six hours, and then we expect you to pick up three shifts a month every month for at least six months. That's what is worthwhile for us. And we're just really clear and transparent about that. And we want folks to be transparent with us about if capacity changes. So, again, with the multiple ways we talk about the expectations, but we also write them down of like, this is what it means to be an active librarian at our tool library.

0:22:56.9 Jessa Wais: And then the momentum is huge. That's been a learning for me the past four years. I found that when training drags out, something happens, they didn't do the full six hours quickly. They forgot everything from the first session and it's just like not gonna be ideal. So keeping momentum's really important both in streamlining your training process. So now I say that training has to be done in a two week span, and then at the end of training, I'm having folks sign up for their at least three shifts on the spot. And I tell them that beforehand so they can be a little bit prepared. But then they're leaving training knowing the next day that they're stepping through our doors to put that training into play. So yeah, that first shift is just like so crucial. It obviously sets the tone.

0:23:48.6 Jessa Wais: So I like to like personally overlap with someone for their first shift, and then I'll match them with a more experienced librarian for their first couple of shifts. So, yeah. And then after onboarding, just to make a note on the fact that communication is ongoing, right? Yeah, you're good Josh. So there might be opportunities for continued training. We have librarian meetings, so we might talk about, today we're gonna talk about spring tools and how to string at trimmer or whatever. Continued training's great because volunteers get to develop and then we get more consistency. Also a culture of feedback. So just another note on the way that communication works both ways. It's important that a librarian feels like they can give us feedback or give us follow up, and know and feel confident that we're gonna handle it.

0:24:42.5 Jessa Wais: So yeah, that culture of feedback is really important. And then how are you communicating? So communication channels at the Station North Tool Library, we primarily use

Google Group. So we have one Google group with everyone, teachers, volunteers, board members, people are putting social things there. We're putting big updates in there, but then we also have more personalized Google groups. So we have one just for tool fixers, one just for teachers, et cetera. So you can put more role specific communications in that channel. And our hope is that it increases the odds that everyone reads their emails, which I also should have put that in a pitfall of volunteer management is people not reading emails. But, yeah, so just creating a structure where folks know how they're being communicated to, when do they email, when do they call, all of that stuff is really important.

0:25:42.0 Jessa Wais: And then adaptation. So, how are you sustaining a relationship with volunteers so that as capacity's changing skill sets are changing, they have paths to change as well. And some of that might be we all have the volunteers that maybe aren't, maybe we don't all have them. We have them and Josh has them, that maybe aren't super tech savvy. Maybe they aren't good at email. And I know like, if I need Larry to know something, I'm going to personally message him this. So just being adaptive to different volunteers, communication preferences is also important.

0:26:25.0 Josh Epstein: Alright. I wanna talk about purpose. So I would say with communication, this is the other thing that we've really focused on for our volunteer engagement. We want everybody to be communicated with consistently early, but we really want to share this sense of purpose. There's a true human need that we are serving here, and we will take that responsibility very seriously. So, why might folks want to volunteer? A lot of it has to do with purpose. Like I said before, maybe there's the free t-shirt, there's the free membership, or opportunity for classes. We find that more often than not, it's people believing in the mission. They like to feel a sense of purpose. They might be looking to learn more about the tools or the sharing economy, and they're also looking to make friends or build community.

0:27:20.0 Josh Epstein: But with this purpose idea, it's a real offering that we're giving and it's actually in our society, it's valued. There's like dollar amounts. I'm not sure, I can't pull it up on my head immediately. Maybe somebody knows there the government actually says, if you use a volunteer, it's worth this amount of dollars, like \$35 an hour, something like that. And you can use that for matching. So, for instance, Microsoft, if you have a Microsoft employee that volunteers with you, Microsoft will actually pay you because they actually value volunteerism in that way. So just saying to consider, again, going back to that ask idea, how can you give that sense of purpose because this is a gift that you're sharing as well as getting from them.

0:28:08.9 Jessa Wais: Definitely. And if folks have different reasons for wanting to volunteer, it might impact, how they show up when they show up it probably will. So yeah, when Josh and I were planning for this presentation and just brainstorming all the different ways and places we could go, this was a theme. And I love that we both use the same language, Josh, of the choose your own adventure model. So yeah, I think that really speaks to having a certain sense of flexibility pathways for volunteers where they can continue developing and growing. So yeah, I think the choose your own adventure model is a huge part of why at least at our tool library here in Baltimore, we have some volunteers that have been here for 10 years, they've been here longer than me.

0:28:55.0 Jessa Wais: And we're really proud of like the volunteer retention that we do have. And I think folks being able to choose how they plug in is a really important part of that. So yeah, one example I was thinking of is one of our volunteers, came to us like, COVID hit and we

experimented with curbside tool lending. So folks would put in their tool order and we would like bag the tools, bring it out to their cars, so they didn't even have to come into the space. If anyone's curious to hear how that went, it was logistically challenging to say the least. But we wanted to adapt and maintain be, it worked well for that time period. And I had a volunteer named Shelby who lived in the neighborhood, kind of saw what we were doing and wanted to help package the tools and give them to folks.

0:29:46.5 Jessa Wais: And that was their first entry point at the library. But then they quickly became a regular librarian, as it started becoming more safe for folks to socialize, they were really excited about bringing back more of a like social environment at the library. So, they would plan bike rides for the community, which is obviously a great, COVID social, biking around together. So Shelby took on some of that labor of planning socials, and then fast forward, and they actually are one of our founding board members. So they're co-chair of our board now. And that's just one example of like, Shelby has not had a stagnant path here. They've filled many different roles, worn many hats. But I think it also a testament to our ability to allow for that flexibility. So yeah, just like one example of many. And yeah, I'll pass on you Josh.

0:30:42.0 Josh Epstein: Yeah. I'll just add another story, just to give a sense of this choose your own adventure model. And I'll be clear, we actually use that language with our volunteers. We'll say, we think of choose our volunteering here as a choose your own adventure, which I think gives them the freedom to voice what they wanna be doing and often funnels them into an area that they're gonna be more successful. Both because maybe they have the skills, but also they have the interest and that's gonna keep them, give them the longevity to stay with us for that much longer. So, I'm debating, there's so many different volunteers that have done different things, but one that was coming to my mind was, a guy named Herb who recently joined our Shoreline Tool Library where we've started selling reused building materials as well.

0:31:28.0 Josh Epstein: And he isn't the most tech savvy, so he didn't really wanna like sign up on our online signup. He isn't super interested in using our computers to check in and check out. But he's really nice, very enthusiastic, and turns out he has a ton of tool knowledge and retail knowledge and building material knowledge. And so he joined the team that is pricing and organizing all of our building materials. He doesn't really sign up, which is an issue. We really, one of our major expectations that people sign up online and tell us if they're not gonna make it so that we can know that we're gonna have the right people there and we don't need to staff it more. With Herb, we've made an exception. He's so valuable, he's so good hearted, and he's so consistent that we've been able to say, well, okay, we'll just put your name on the list every Wednesday and Friday because we know you've been there every time.

0:32:15.2 Josh Epstein: And he comes and he does his thing and he does it with a smile and it's amazing. And one thing that just came to my mind that I want to put out with this is that Jessa mentioned that they have the expectation that folks will do this six hour training and then do their three shifts, right, per month. And one thing I wanna mention is that we have for better and worse or worse, we have lower expectations. We have folks to just do one shift a month. If they can do more, that's great. And why wanna bring that up with a choose your own adventure is that, it's choose your own adventure with these tool libraries too and how you wanna work with your volunteers. With higher expectations, you'll probably get a tighter knit community. There'll be more consistency. We get a little bit more widespread ownership and more word of mouth, more people feeling involved. So there's pros and cons to that. But either way, we both have embraced this choose your own

adventure model with our specific volunteers.

0:33:29.0 Jessa Wais: And then our last bucket, for the presentation is around building community, right? Tool libraries, the physical tools are important, but at the end of the day, it is a project for people by people. So yeah, the community is what I think really sustains us and it's what keeps people coming back. So yeah, just think about how that fits into your volunteer management strategies in terms of connection and communities, your volunteer base often becomes like a microcosm of the organization. It's this smaller community of folks working to build community. It's a place I know for us where we get to learn a lot about, code of conduct and values. It's like this built in group of folks like Josh talked about earlier, that are there, because they love this place, they wanna make it better.

0:34:23.0 Jessa Wais: We've heard a lot of volunteers, talk about this concept of a third place, right? So there's the home, there's work, what are these third places? How have we lost third places with the privatization of public resources? And that's maybe another presentation. But I think tool libraries really have this powerful potential to be a third place for lots of people. And it's something to think about, we set up a volunteer cubby where they can make themselves tea on shift and get snacks. Like little things like that I think help build this feeling of like, "No, I belong here. This is one of my homes outside of my home." The stronger a volunteer feels connected to the project, the stronger they feel connected to other volunteers to you as a staff member, the higher the odds that they're gonna continue plugging in.

0:35:16.0 Jessa Wais: And then the more folks you have plugging in, the more folks you have that are like, I will do anything to make sure that this place continues to exist. I believe in it that deeply the more sustainable your project is. So yeah, that also relates to the sense of shared ownership. If folks are just like, a warm body doing a transaction, that's gonna be a really different feeling than someone who's like, "Why do we store Dremels here without any of their attachments? Wouldn't it make sense for everything to be stored like this? What do you guys think about that?" And then they make it happen. That's gonna lead to them feeling more connected to the work. And then in addition to connection, gratitude is just like, I think there's just the human element to it.

0:36:06.0 Jessa Wais: When someone does something nice for you or for something you care about, you wanna be grateful and show them that. It goes a long, long way. I think it's something we really recently here at the at the Station North Tool Library has started naming, it is a lot of labor for us to show volunteers, the level of gratitude that we do, the small ways, the big ways. This can be from sending a message after a shift to be like, "Oh my God, the library looks so good. I came in and like, everything's... I could tell you vacuumed and everything looks really nice." That obviously will make a volunteer feel seen and appreciated. But then there's big ways of showing gratitude as well. So just some quick examples for us.

0:36:51.0 Jessa Wais: After you volunteer consistently for six months with us, you actually get a fob and key. You get access physically to the space. You can come in and borrow tools outside of traditional hours. You get storage to, we have a wood shop and classes and open shop as well. So you can store projects here. We would never be able to do that for our 1800 members, but that's something we are thinking of. What are all the ways that we can show volunteers we appreciate them, the tangible and the intangible. So yeah, small and big ways. We listed a theme I think, between me and Josh as well. Josh, I'll let you hit it.

0:37:36.0 Josh Epstein: Talk about snacks.

0:37:38.0 Jessa Wais: Snacks, yes.

[laughter]

0:37:39.0 Josh Epstein: Snacks, snacks, snacks.

0:37:39.9 Jessa Wais: Snack, snacks, snacks.

0:37:42.0 Josh Epstein: Yeah, it's low hanging fruit, so to speak. You gotta have those snacks. I mean, people, it's just like an easy one to do. It's very tangible and I think it gets overlooked. But it's a very easy way to show appreciation and keep people happy on shifts and during volunteer opportunities. So don't forget to snacks.

0:38:02.0 Jessa Wais: Definitely. We actually just got to a point as a team where we're like upping the budget for food, because we're like, "Maybe this actually isn't the place to cut. This is the place we wanna invest more into." Especially, if we have volunteer meetings that we really want folks to be at, to talk about strategic planning or something like that. Then we even try to like up the snacks. Now we're at a place where we're like, "Can we have meals? Can we really feed people and bond over that?" One other thing on gratitude, just to give you an example. I think that different tool libraries have a different culture around how we show love for the volunteers that are making this place run, they're doing a lot of the day-to-Day operations. One thing that is a tradition I inherited coming on a staff is a tool library camping trip.

0:38:51.2 Jessa Wais: So we literally call it camp. We screen print special t-shirts for it. We have maker activities. It's like a multi night weekend where we're carving spoons by the fire. We go tubing, like it's very involved the planning, the food, the activities but it is truly a highlight of the year. And we found that when folks get onboarded and they start volunteering and then they come on the camping trip, their odds of connecting more deeply, being consistent, staying around is higher than someone who couldn't make it to the camping trip. So it's like one very resource intense thing we do, but it's also one of the most fun parts of the year and it's referenced culturally like year round. So that's like, not that you have to do a camping trip, but it's interesting to think of like other ways of showing appreciation.

0:39:48.0 Josh Epstein: Yeah. I'll throw one of our more fun ones that we do that's called trivia training or trainia. And this is a training that's very loosely bailed as a trivia night, but it's really fun. So folks come, or volunteers come and they get split up into groups of four and usually with people they don't know very well and different skill levels, maybe folks that are board members that have been there for the beginning and brand new volunteers. And then we do a trivia night and there's drinks and there's food and it gets pretty silly. But this is not only a community building thing, but it's also a way to put out some of the consistency pieces. There's a lot of these... There's so many details, policies and procedures that we want to make sure are consistent. This is a way we can address those in a fun way. If you want to know more about that feel free to reach out and I can share some of that.

0:40:39.9 Jessa Wais: Nice. Yeah.

0:40:40.3 Josh Epstein: So with that, that is the major tools that we wanted to pass on. We can open it up for, we can go into some questions now. Was there anything in the chat or anybody wanna raise a hand and we can have a little bit more of a discussion.

0:41:01.5 Jessa Wais: And Josh, do you think while people are chewing on their questions, do you think we could go to our, because I just wanna...

0:41:06.9 Josh Epstein: Yeah. Yeah. This?

0:41:08.9 Jessa Wais: Because the stuff that we did not have time and just the scope of this presentation we didn't wanna like do too much. But some things for you to chew on. One that's really big, and it's something that I actually felt the most tension with taking this job is just thinking about how relying on volunteers might relate to your organization's values. We've been thinking a lot about labor at the library. How do we value labor and what does it mean to rely so much on volunteers? So we've been creating more pathways for paid connection to the library. And even just thinking critically about who is able to volunteer, how are there other ways that members or other folks can feel connected to the organization, even if they don't have capacity to be this consistent volunteer. So we just dropped some other like kind of food for thought questions that we didn't quite have time for you all to think about with where you're at in the organization. But yeah, I'm excited to hear any questions you all have about any of this.

0:42:17.3 Josh Epstein: I see Steve has his hands up.

0:42:21.3 Steve: Yeah, thanks. I heard Jessa say I think 30 ish volunteer tool librarians and maybe 16 fixers. It might be good to know quantities of board members, committee members, stuff like that. I feel like we don't have as many people as that for sure here at toolbox project, six board members, one committee with five, another with four, another with four lots of overlap between board members and committee members. 25 ish tool librarians just FYI, but that kind of info would help if not right now in the discussion afterwards. Thanks.

0:42:57.3 Josh Epstein: Yeah. I'll start. I'll just say that our model is really like get 'em all, bring 'em all in. So ours is kind of huge. So I'll give you some numbers and just keep in mind that there's a huge array of involvement. So our board is seven members, then we have two steering committees, one for each of our tool libraries. Those each have 10 and there's a couple board members on each of those. So there's some overlap there. And then we have I think seven other subcommittees that range from two people to 12 people. And those can be things like our bike shack, our workshop stewards, fixers. Again, there is some overlap.

0:43:39.9 Josh Epstein: We have generally, there's at least one staff on each committee. Not always. Sometimes it's more we get reported out to, but we're trying to get at least one staff on all of the subcommittees and committees. And then our actual pool of volunteers, like our email distribution for volunteers is enormous. It's actually 200 but some of those folks are just coming for our big events like our tool sale, which we need about 30 volunteers to make happen. And then some volunteers are coming in on a weekly basis and there's a pretty wide variety there.

0:44:18.9 Jessa Wais: Wow, y'all are selling a lot of tools, Josh.

[laughter]

0:44:21.0 Josh Epstein: Oh yeah. We're selling a lot of tools. If anybody's interested in tool sale, it's become a huge fundraiser for us and community event and probably our most fun day of the year. A last one we made \$12,000 in six hours. So I have a a cool model for it if anybody that's another discussion, but happy to share how we do that. Because I think it's another resource that we can give is recirculating tools in that way as well.

0:44:48.9 Jessa Wais: Yeah. And Liana made a note in the chat, but we have four full-time staff members, nine folks on our board. We do have teachers who are paid to lead classes. It's worth checking out. I think my co-director Jen, is going to, I think lead a session on classes later in the Co-Lab. But we have 30 plus teachers who are paid. We have over 15 monitors. So yeah, a lot of people to manage. And then we also have event hands and things like that. So our biggest group is probably around 150 people of folks who may or may not do something for the organization, but it's a big group.

0:45:33.0 Josh Epstein: I see a good question about any college student volunteers interested in using their volunteer work for academic credit? If yes, how is CIS arrangement managed? Oh, yeah, that's a big thing for us. We've had some, I've also had some high school interns that have been very cool, but we partner with UDub a couple different schools at University of Washington. One of the best ones we've done is the environmental program. Each of their seniors has to do an environmental capstone internship. And so we apply for that. Many organizations can apply for this and we just kind of go through their process. Then we get somebody, they usually do about 10 hours a week, and it's a mix. That specific internship is a mix between actual hands-on tool librarianship and a research project that we help co-design.

0:46:22.2 Josh Epstein: There's also a program called UCBI that's at UDub, but I think most schools have these internship programs that you can plug into. You can check in. They have internship departments and job readiness programs. So contact them, tell 'em what you're about. There's a lot of opportunity there. We've actually, we work with the human-centered design and engineering department that has undergrads graduate and PhD students that have done pretty large scale research projects for us. We're working on this big thing called the Reuse Commons with Seattle Public Utilities, which is a whole sustainability mall. And UDub is now becoming a partner with us through that department to co-design what that will actually look like. So I think there's a wealth of opportunity there. Let's see. Other questions that I'm missing in here?

0:47:27.6 Jessa Wais: I think one.

0:47:27.8 Speaker 7: Josh, there's another good question about, to what degree are volunteers and other people in the community or people who are not on your governing board able to direct the operations and activities of your orgs? I know you have a lot of different committees, so what kind of is their role?

0:47:51.0 Josh Epstein: Yeah, it's a great question. We are gatekeepers for better or worse, Jessa was saying there's like power, we have this organization and there's power in that. And so we are trying to share that power a lot. And I think there's levels to that. And so there's the progression of power in decision making and how much it can direct. We do surveys and we get a lot of input. The subcommittees are and our steering committees are technically advisory boards. So volunteers can give suggestions all the time. And we do say no sometimes. We had a volunteer last year that really

wanted to do this food sharing thing, and we just said, that's out of our scope. We don't have that right now. The best we can do is help put something in our newsletter, but we can't really put resources towards that.

0:48:43.8 Josh Epstein: And saying no is very hard for folks in this world I think, but I think it's extremely important. So that's an example of saying, you don't actually have the power to move this forward right now. And I'm sorry, we have to say no for the better of the organization, but as people show their commitment more and show their value alignment, they can move up into those subcommittees, into the steering committee, which even though it's advisory we don't really do much without having that volunteer group say, "Okay, or bring up the idea." And then the board is truly the ones that are making the actual legal decisions. Jessa, I would love to hear your answer on that too. Yeah.

0:49:19.4 Jessa Wais: I think it's a big question that we've been doing a lot of deep thinking at our organization. It's definitely gone into our strategic planning of like, how do we add more structure and transparency to the way in which different folks are able to give input on decision making. So for now, one thing I think we've done a decent job at it could use more clarity is the volunteer community. So we've operated under this, it gets kind of simplified into if it impacts a volunteer, we want them to have a say on it. So in the past we've done some democratic voting, we've tried consensus. Our board of directors actually does formally use consensus. So that could look like doing a digital vote on extending hours.

0:50:14.8 Jessa Wais: Some things around like other practices our volunteers will give feedback on and vote on. I think members thus far has been, we've done member surveys as well. It definitely could use more standardization in terms of how often we're doing those types of surveying. We did in this past year hold our first ever members meeting, so it was a chance for members to come and learn more about the behind the scenes stuff at the library. But it's something that I think we're still figuring out in terms of the formalized decision making power of folks who aren't on the board or volunteers.

0:50:57.7 Jessa Wais: Yeah, I also saw a good question from Sarah. Do you have any tips for sharing volunteer engagement across multiple people? We are all volunteers and don't have a single appointed volunteer engagement manager. I feel like sometimes it negatively affects the seamlessness of our communication and training. Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense that that could be tricky, especially if y'all aren't on the same page and you get one answer from someone and you get a different answer from someone else. So my first inclination is around aligning, around the tangible resources could be helpful. And then separating out the different roles of volunteer engagement into more manageable specific responsibilities.

0:51:44.2 Jessa Wais: So, one example could be one of your volunteers job is to make sure the calendar's filled with shifts. And they are the one, like their specific role is keeping an eyes on the calendar, texting people, getting shifts filled, that's it. And then maybe someone else is the person that answers follow-up questions on shift or whatever it is. However you can take this big job that volunteer management is a lot of work. It's a bulk of what I do here. So I can definitely sympathize with having volunteers manage volunteers. It sounds really tricky, but I think the more you can create specific concrete roles and then have tangible resources that accompany it the better.

0:52:31.7 Josh Epstein: And I'll put a note out there for sort of a vote to try to get paid staff as

soon as you can. I think it depends on your ethos and where you wanna go. I know some very successful, wonderful tool libraries that have been volunteer run forever and that's great. I think I've seen more tool libraries that take a really big step when they're able to find some funding to hire at least part-time staff. And that doesn't necessarily need to be the leader, but it just adds consistency and a communication point.

0:53:14.9 Josh Epstein: Does your volunteer orientation onboarding include any political education? Ours does not. It hasn't really been an issue, at least in Seattle, where we've had folks proselytizing either side of the aisle. I think one beautiful thing about tool libraries is that it is a very bipartisan thing. People wanna save money safe space. Like people get it. Like the library isn't particularly politicized. I mean, sometimes it can be, but we have found, we've been able to avoid that. And when folks we've had the closest we've come to is volunteers saying, yeah, we wanna include everybody, but not those people. Not if they don't care about the environment. And I do wanna include those people. [chuckle] I very much wanna include the people that don't care about the environment, that just wanna save money and save space. That's still important. And even if they're helping the environment reluctantly, that's fine. And I think it's planting a seed and the inclusion is gonna help bridge that gap.

0:54:20.9 Jessa Wais: Yeah. And at the Station North Tool Library some of it is we only have so much time with folks, so I found that like more than two hours of training can be tiring for folks. Like two hours is kind of the sweet spot. And I've found we do three, two hour sessions and we're covering a lot. We don't have formal political education in terms of... Yeah, we don't have, I wouldn't call it political education though I also am like the personal is the political. Our values are very political to me. And I do have every volunteer read through our values and mark up like, what resonated with you the most? Is there any tension with the values? So we're centered in the values that to me are very political.

0:55:11.2 Jessa Wais: But our orientation also centers on physically orienting people to our spaces. What are the policies the first day you're practicing you're doing role playing onboarding with, you're pretending like you're talking with someone who's never heard of a tool library and you're onboarding them. And then there's a lot of software things folks need to know in training. So we have so much to cover that we try to keep it to kind of like the bare bones of what you need before you show up on shift. But yeah, these are all great questions.

0:55:45.3 Josh Epstein: Okay. Going back to that multi sharing, the multiple there's the question about sharing volunteer engagement across multiple people. We do that as well. And I think one of the keys is written volunteer training checklists and other consistencies and making sure that those groups, anybody who's going to be doing that training, there is a training for those people. And there is a written checklist so that you can make sure there's consistency. And so that is also ongoing trainings and training the trainers and having other people shadow. Like if I'm a trainer, I'm gonna go shadow another trainer to make sure that we're doing it consistently. And obviously it's more time, but having those written things that Jessa was talking about is an essential part of that. So you're at least you're getting those real essential pieces.

0:56:36.7 Tom Llewellyn: So about at the hour I have a bonus question that I want to ask that I thought about Jessa when you were speaking earlier about the importance of not only training but vetting your volunteers 'cause the volunteers are front facing, right? And that a negative impact can cause somebody to turn away from the tool library, library of things and not come back. Right? I'm

wondering, have either of you had any issues with volunteers where this has been, there's been some sort of a problem? And if so, how have you worked through that?

0:57:20.0 Josh Epstein: Yeah, I can go. Yeah it's been rare for us. But there have been a couple times where we've either had to change the role. I can only think of really one time where we had to ask somebody to not come. And it wasn't so much an issue I was having. They were kind of monopolizing a lot of time with people. And it was the listening. It was going back to the listening aspect of things. And a different coordinator was realized that it was overall really negatively impacting the community. And it was a direct conversation. It was really well thought out. We tried to do it in a very inclusive way that wasn't like, you're outta here, you're gone. It was, here are some other things that might be helpful that are less forward facing, basically.

0:58:06.4 Josh Epstein: And I think there were some feelings hurt, but that was necessary. I think more often there's just been moments of like Jessa was talking about some like mansplaining or people being a little condescending or frustrated with a member. Members can come with pretty intense emotions. And so we try to say come talk to a staff member. If that's happening that's you don't need to deal with a disgruntled member though. That's pretty rare, because everybody loves the tool library. So there have been moments where we're like, all right why don't you just take a second and I'll deal with this kind of thing. But it's been pretty rare that we've had to ask somebody to just not volunteer.

0:58:49.1 Jessa Wais: Yeah, no it's a great question and I'm very blessed that it's also very rare here. I think it's definitely been softer things of, I've noticed, like we have a co librarian model, so you'll always have another volunteer with you on shift. And I've noticed little things of like, when one person signs up, it feels like harder to get someone else to sign up. And that would kind of make me be like, "Do I need to sign up for this shift and see what this person is like?" We are really trying to build a stronger culture of feedback where folks feel comfortable that they can give feedback directly to one another. But I think there have been times when staff have had to step in a bit to give feedback. We definitely try, and I just dropped our finalized code of conduct.

0:59:35.1 Jessa Wais: Because I think it does a good job showing that, we don't wanna replicate like carceral language or this like punitive system in our tool library. Like I said, it's a microcosm of the world we all want to live in and how we handle harm is really important. So a lot of work went into our code of conduct. That direct feedback is really important. Nothing's been so egregious that it's been like, get out now. But I have had to give feedback of like, I've heard you made a member feel really bad for returning the tool late or something. And that's not the type of energy we're trying to bring. And to me it's also like how does that volunteer handle that feedback? Are they receptive and they're like, "I won't do that again." Or are they like, "I was in the right." And I think luckily when there has been feedback to volunteers, it's been really well received and we've been able to make progress.

1:00:39.2 Josh Epstein: I just put up our contact information. I saw that there was a lot of people interested in the tool sale. Happy to do another presentation about that. Happy to share information but also about volunteerism or whatever, we're really trying to connect to libraries right now and Shareables doing a lot to help with that. And so please do be in touch. We want to move this movement forward as best we can. And it's just very exciting that this is happening and this many people are engaged with this. So thank you all.

1:01:13.1 Jessa Wais: Yeah, no, definitely an honor to be here and to play like one tiny role in this really important project. The more tool libraries the better. And it's just so right to share resources with one another, because that's the whole point. So thank you for having us definitely. And come visit us if you're ever in Baltimore. Come visit us, please.

1:01:32.9 Josh Epstein: Likewise, love to have you here.

1:01:39.3 Tom Llewellyn: Well, thank you so much for that great presentation, Josh and Jessa. Really appreciate it. And I think there was some wonderful nuggets of wisdom in there that are coming from both of your experiences. So next week we're gonna be talking about how to find, acquire, and design a space for your Library of Things. So please join us back here again next Tuesday, same time, same place. And as I mentioned to begin with at the beginning, we're gonna keep the room open. So if anybody has any other thoughts things you'd like to discuss over the next 10 minutes or so please stay in and thank you.

1:02:13.6 Speaker 1: And if you get a quick second before you leave, if you'll do our post assessment and let us know how we're doing that would be greatly appreciated.

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