LoT Co-Lab 18 Earned Revenue Transcript

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0:00:04.3 Leanna Frick: Is it recording? Let everyone in...

0:00:27.6 Emily Fritz: Hi everyone.

0:00:29.7 Darren Cotton: Hey guys, how's it going?

0:00:32.1 Leanna Frick: Not bad. Hey, so fun to put a face to your name so quickly. That's awesome. Glad you could join us.

0:00:39.6 Emily Fritz: I am thrilled to be here. I actually just received a really fantastic email just moments ago from a local foundation that we got approval for funding. So I'm like elated.

0:00:55.4 Leanna Frick: That's so great.

0:00:58.9 Darren Cotton: Oh, and now you'll get to learn how you can just generate your own revenue and not depend on foundations in the future.

0:01:05.1 Emily Fritz: That's the goal. We want to be financially sustainable long-term, and think 10 years down the pipeline.

0:01:15.6 Darren Cotton: Absolutely.

0:01:17.2 Leanna Frick: You're Lancaster, Pennsylvania? Yeah,

0:01:20.0 Emily Fritz: Yeah. Lancaster. Yeah.

0:01:20.3 Leanna Frick: Okay. Cool, cool, cool.

0:01:24.5 Emily Fritz: One of my good friends, and actually a totally great volunteer here in Baltimore, is from Lancaster, so I'll have to mention that to him.

0:01:31.0 Leanna Frick: Oh, yay. Awesome. Well, I'd love to plan a visit to Baltimore. Baltimore is just a great place to visit anyway, and it's so close, but I want to come tour your space for sure.

0:01:44.8 Leanna Frick: Totally. And I mentioned Carlisle, totally right, Jeff Adams is here.

0:01:50.0 Emily Fritz: Oh, there's Jeff. Hi, Jeff. Hi.

0:01:53.6 Leanna Frick: Probably your closest neighbour.

0:01:54.9 Emily Fritz: He invited me to this call today.

0:01:59.2 Leanna Frick: Cool.

0:01:59.4 Emily Fritz: Thank you.

0:02:00.8 Darren Cotton: No problem. Friends, I think we'll probably have a few more people joining us, but feel free to just kind of briefly introduce yourself in the chat. So name, pronoun,

what organization, where you're coming from, and maybe just what you hope to get out of today or what brought you to today's presentation. And I will do a quick intro of myself. So I'm Darren Cotton. I'm the executive director at the Tool Library based in Buffalo, New York. So I started the Tool Library back in 2011 as a grad student at UB. So it's been really exciting to kind of see that grow and evolve and really excited to see the Tool Library Alliance really take off. And one of the things that the Tool Library Alliance is hoping to do in partnership with our friends at Shareable is provide these sorts of learning opportunities, collaborative conversations. I think we all are masters of a lot of really fantastic knowledge and skills. And so just providing avenues to share those with. If you are not familiar with Shareable, I will link to their toolkit into the chat, a really great resource to check out.

0:03:27.1 Darren Cotton: They did a 12-session series that are all available online. And if you're not familiar with the Tool Library, that is just a national consortium of tool libraries doing their thing around the country and trying to get together to support one another as well as new tool libraries. But we're here today to chat about earned revenue streams. So I think we all probably have an experience of tool libraries are funded in a lot of different ways and a lot of different models. So philanthropic dollars, donations, fundraising, earned revenue is one of the best ways I think organizations can become more self-sufficient. So really excited to dive into what that can look like. We got some really great examples, different ways that a Tool Library can potentially earn revenue and some really great speakers lined up for you. So without further ado, I'll pass it over to our first speaker from the Shoreline Tool Library, Ava.

0:04:36.1 Ava Lim: All right. Hi, guys. I'm so excited to be here and thank you for having me. My name is Ava Lim. I'm one of the Shoreline Tool Library coordinators and also the materials manager. So we can go to the next slide. Okay, so the reuse materials store is half of our building in Shoreline, the Shoreline Tool Library. So it's around a thousand square feet and we have four shipping containers in the back where we can use to store additional items. But for the most part, the entire store is within that side of the building. So when people come into the door, they can either go to the library side or the store side and the store is what I manage. So, the first big question is how do we get these things to sell? And everything that we sell is a donation. Most of our donations are dropped off straight to us. I don't know if I can remember a day where we had a shift and I didn't get something donated to us. It is a pretty constant stream of things coming to us. We also do occasionally do pickups, which we are now much more able to do with our new van, which you can see here. So with that van, we are able to go to people's houses who may not be able to bring the items to the Tool Library themselves or have a very large amount of items. And we don't do any fees for the pickups, but we do request that the donation itself is over $100 so that we are able to have a good use of our staff time picking it up. We do have some donations come from other businesses or government agencies, and these are typically things that are large quantities of items that need to go somewhere else.

0:06:28.5 Ava Lim: And this is also easier for businesses and governments to do this because we are a non-profit and it helps us out, helps them out. So some of those organizations have been Samson Rope, a bunch of rope cut ends basically from their business. King County Solid Waste, and Puget Sound Energy have given us some other items and other smaller donations from other businesses and government agencies. Okay, what kind of things do we sell? So the name officially is the Reused Materials Store, but we don't just sell building materials. We sell things like garden equipment, but also consumables, things like nails, sandpaper, all of that miscellaneous stuff. Sometimes there's miscellaneous items just like a random chair or we have some dehumidifiers and air conditioning units. Those are what we would call household items. So as you can see, tool sales are the largest category by far, and that's typically because the tools that come in are the highest

value items. So even though we might have also the largest amount of tools in our store, but those items, the tools that sell have the highest value. So we make more income selling one tool worth $200 than we can selling a bunch of $1 sandpaper or nails, even if we sold 100 of those things. So the other categories here... Oh sorry, go.

0:08:08.9 Ava Lim: Yeah, the other categories here, household is again like miscellaneous things, and then woodworking, painting, electrical lumber. One thing I would like to note on this is that we do have categories such as plumbing and electrical and those other niches of building, and those tend to not sell very well. And our hypothesis behind this is that people who come in and need a plumbing fitting or a specific switch for their electrical work, they need something very specific. And because we are entirely donation based, we don't have the full spectrum of those items. So people, if they need that specific thing, they're more likely just to go to their local hardware store than check here first. So we're trying to either figure out a way to make people come here first or make it so we have a larger selection of things so that they feel like they can find what they need here. Okay, so how do we sell these items? Alongside selling things in the store, we're open six days a week now, which is really exciting, we sell things on online marketplaces. So this is one of the big things that I started when I was hired was putting on this entire online marketplace program. So we post to four main places, Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, our website, and OfferUp if the item is a household item. It does well on OfferUp. So we see the most success on Facebook Marketplace by far and away. We get the most clicks, views, messages on Facebook Marketplace. But we do see that there are some items that don't do well on Facebook Marketplace but do do well on Craigslist. So sometimes like older tools or even more expensive tools will do well on Craigslist where they won't get like any clicks on Facebook Marketplace.

0:10:02.6 Ava Lim: And then we post things on our website just because most of the people that are looking at our online marketplace are not members. So we wanted a way for our members to see these products in a place where they already regularly go, which is our website. So since December 21st, which is the day that I posted our first item online, I've posted 122 things and sold 48. The number is probably a little higher now. And our total income from online sales alone is almost $6,000. So there is a large amount of income selling from online. And this is mostly because we put big things online. So again, it's how tools that are worth more money make us more money than selling a bunch of things that are worth less money. So yeah, big ticket items online, getting the image to the right people helps us get that income. Okay, some of our challenges. So you can see this picture down here with my little pricing gun. This pricing gun was actually an integral part of our process. Before we tried to do a system where we had a different colored pen for each month, and the color of the price would tell us when the item was put on the shelf. But now with this pricing gun, we're able to see exactly when the item was priced and put on the shelf, because one of the biggest limitations is amount of space we have in the store. So if something has been on the shelf for a long time, previously we wouldn't really be able to tell unless somebody had just remembered that. So with this label gun, we're able to see when things were priced and be able to make a decision on if it should go into one of our storage containers, should we put aside for our tool sale, or if the price should be lowered, because that real estate is so valuable to us, where things are and if they can be seen.

0:11:56.0 Ava Lim: Another thing is dealing with online marketplace. I bet a lot of you are familiar with selling online. There's just some hurdles that come with that. Dealing with messages that come in, people that may or may not be interested, people that message and then never come in. One way we work around that is that I never do holds for anything posted online, and I do not take money online for anything. So that way, if somebody says, I'll give you $20 to hold this item, I'll come pick it up this evening, we're not going to do that in case that person was to flake and not actually pick

up the item. We don't want to lose that sale from somebody who might come in and say, can I buy this? And I would have to say, oh, actually, no, I'm waiting for somebody else to come pick it up. So not doing a hold system helps us avoid that problem. Here's our income statistics. So Shoreline Tool Library opened in January of 2024. So you can see our entire history of income here with our material sales. And this gray line here is our trend line, which is kind of cool to see. But you can see that there's some months that perform better. This could be because of the seasons. Also, it could be when tool sales happen, when were more people coming in the door. This does not include income from our tool sale, but it just could be a reason why we had more customers. And then you can see January '25. We had a crazy good month. And there's two reasons why this happened. One is because we just had a lot of really good donations come in the door that sold for a lot of money. Obviously, I can't control what things are coming in.

0:13:43.4 Ava Lim: But when good things come in, it's easier to get those out the door and sold, especially using those online marketplaces. The second reason is that we were able to do B2B selling of some of the, we got these showerheads donated from one of the other government agencies, and we were able to sell those to another business locally that are going to sell them themselves. So that was almost $2,000, we were able to make from that. And then February, just last month, we were looking around $3,000, and we're on track to do about that again this month. Okay, now we're going to pass it on to Colin.

0:14:29.3 Colin McElroy: Hello, everybody. Yeah, as Ava said, I work with Ava at the Shoreline Tool Library. I'm one of three coordinators that work there, as well as managing the Bike Shack. You can go to the next slide. So yeah, what is the bike shack? The bike shack is a community bike space, as well as a resource for Tool Library members. It's a standalone service that is part of your membership. It's roughly 200 square feet of our total space. It's one corner of the Tool Library. It includes a work area with a bike stand and then a sales area where we can hold roughly 15 bikes at a time. We have additional storage down in one of the storage containers, similar to what Ava said for the material sales. And yeah, this is a workspace for members to come in and use the bike stand. We have volunteers that can... Yeah, you can go to the next page. We have knowledgeable volunteers that can either help people work on their bikes, they can show them what tools they need to use. I typically give people the spiel that there's sort of three ways they can use the space. One is we can be hands-off, the volunteers and ourselves can be hands-off, they can come in, they can use the tools any way they want. We can teach them how to use it or we can just do that for them. A lot of times the idea here is to teach people how to work on their bikes themselves, but for whatever circumstances, sometimes people just want us to do it for them. They might be in a rush, they might not be just really needing to learn how to work on their bike, but they want to use the tools and use the space. We have a suggested $20 an hour stand time.

0:16:19.1 Colin McElroy: So that's on top of whatever fee it costs to be a member. And then, and as always, that's pay what you can. So we don't turn anybody away if they can't afford that. Same goes for our new and used parts. We have a basic inventory of tubes, tires, cables, housing, We also have a bunch of smaller takeoff items that we get from donated bikes that were either too far gone to salvage and resell, but we can pull parts off of them and use them to fix other bikes. And so that's part of those used parts as well. And then, as I mentioned before, we have a used bike sales area. So we get a lot of donations of used bikes. We fix those up and resell them. And then on top of all this, we offer bike maintenance classes. And those are part of the overall Tool Library classes that we offer, as well as bike-specific classes for bike check volunteers. You can go to the next slide. So how do we get our items? As Ava said, most of our items come from donations. Actually, when I say most of the items, pretty much everything comes from donations. All of our donations are taken in person from the Tool Library. Similar to Ava as well, we get some of our donations from other

organizations and local businesses. We recently worked with the Cascade Bicycle Club and got roughly 70 bikes donated from their fleet of bikes that they use to teach people how to ride their bike. They did an after-school program for kids, and they'd had bikes sitting since pre-pandemic, I want to say 2018, in a storage container. They had recently upgraded their fleet. And they were able to donate it to us.

0:18:16.1 Colin McElroy: And so we were able to utilize our new storage container and house all those bikes. You can go to the next slide. So bike shack income categories. So bike shack time, 12%. Obviously, looking at this, bike sales being 80% is the largest category for income. I'll touch on this later when I get to statistics, or not statistics, but some of our challenges. But one of the challenges is working with volunteers and making sure they understand and are clear with members that come in that using the bike stand and using the tools that are associated with the bike shack is an additional fee or donation on top of the bike shack itself, or excuse me, the Tool Library itself. So that's something that we're constantly working on, constantly trying to educate and reinforce with our volunteers that it's an additional cost on top of the membership. You can go to the next slide. All right. And then as you can see, the bike shack, we started in April of '24. And sorry, I've got my thing over this and I can't see it, but there we go. And so this, again, this is all of our income for through February '25. And again, trend line showing everything's going up. I'm not exactly sure why in January of '25... I started with the Tool Library in February of '25. And so I'm not exactly sure, again, why January, February have been such great months. We did start posting things on Facebook, similar to the material sales. But again, I know that in those couple of months, we got some pretty decent bike donations from people that we were able to resell for a significant amount. And so that's probably what my guess would be is why those months tend to be better.

0:20:24.6 Colin McElroy: We also have started receiving a lot more bike donations just in general. We've been posting on Facebook, other social media outlets saying that we're taking donations and that we're also selling them. So just word of mouth getting it out there that we're a source for bikes. You can go to the next slide. Yep. Challenges and limitations. Keeping the online marketplace up to date is probably one of the biggest challenges that I have. We have a constant rotation of inventory of donated bikes. And with a bunch of volunteers coming in and working on bikes, there's always new things that need to get posted. And it's a constant challenge keeping those up to date. It's not difficult. It's just time consuming. So something to keep an eye on. Working with our volunteers, trying to determine where to draw the line as far as what we repair and what we scrap is a decent limitation that we have. Just sort of setting guidelines. We have a full breakdown of what we want our volunteers to work on and how far we want them to dig into bikes. But just going into an individual basis and teaching people how to tune up the bikes, what our standards are and that sort of stuff is another challenge. As well as attracting skilled volunteers. When I came on, we had a core group of maybe four or five volunteers that work specifically in the shoreline bike shack. And there was a decent amount of burnout in those volunteers. And so when I came on, we put out a big call to draw new bike shack volunteers to come in. And since I've come on, we've had a lot more volunteers, but it's still something that we're struggling with to meet the hours that the Tool Library is open.

0:22:11.1 Colin McElroy: We're currently open. We advertise that the bike shack is open two of the six days that the Tool Library itself is open. And so ideally, we would be able to match those hours, but we're just not quite there yet. I mentioned this earlier, but enforcing the suggested stand time donation is a challenge that we have. It's just something that we need to continually reinforce with volunteers, make sure that they understand, and that members themselves understand that that's how it works. Stocking the correct parts, we often, you know, we carry the basic items, tubes, tires, cable housing, patch kits, some chains, that sort of stuff, but in general, our inventory is fairly small. We

want to try to keep our overhead down. So one of the challenges we run into is somebody comes in and something specific is broken on their bike. We just are very clear with them that that's not something that we have, but if they want to go out and purchase that themselves and bring it in, we can help them work on their bike and get it back rolling again. One of the other challenges is the seasonality of bikes in general. The winter months, as far as people coming in to use the bike shack, are pretty slow, and so finding things for our volunteers to work on, as well as just having a drop in sales during that period is something that's sort of a challenge that we've been trying to work on. Obviously, we just got a huge donation of bikes. We're going into the summer, so we'll have lots of things for our volunteers to work on, and I'm hoping we can kind of keep that trend of having bikes available for our volunteers to tune up and sell over the winter, but we'll see sort of how busy the summer is and how much we have at the end of season. The last one here is bike storage and disposal.

0:24:03.3 Colin McElroy: Obviously, bikes are not really the most convenient thing to store, and so having a space to keep all of them is really, really important. We were able to recently build out a whole hanging bike storage solution in one of our storage containers that I haven't, it's not full, so I'm not exactly sure how many we can keep in there, but I would guess probably somewhere in the like 100 to 150 bikes. We currently have 70 in there, and there's a decent amount of space left. So just finding a space for bikes is not always the easiest thing to do, so if it's something that you're going to look into, just make sure that you have space to keep all of them. Disposal of bikes, oh, yep, go ahead. I was just going to say, as far as disposal of bikes, we have a couple of different options for things. Some things can go to the metal scrapyard, some things can go to, we have another community bike space in the area, Bike Works, that which will take basically any type of donation, and they have a way of, you know, they donate them, they ship them off to places that would take those bikes, so we're just dealing with what is not garbage, but not a useful bike. So, yeah, that's all for me. Thanks.

0:25:25.6 Darren Cotton: As I said, I'm Darren from the Tool Library in Buffalo. I'll be touching on a couple of things that we've been doing to try to boost our earned revenue, so programs, stipends, super tools, and merchandise. So our first comes along with our Dare to Repair Cafe, so I know some on the call might already be engaged in repair cafes. It's a really great complimentary program to Tool Library. We started these as a collaborative event with the City of Buffalo Recycling Department, and these are mobile, so we are essentially taking everything we need and setting up in libraries, community centers, schools, other community accessible locations, and really the goal is to bring this service to communities to make repair more accessible. So we maintain a whole separate contact list of volunteers that are running repair cafes, and they will be seated with a community member. They'll sort of work on the item collaboratively, so it's not a drop-your-thing-off, get-it-fixed, pick-it-up. It very much is a learn what's wrong, figure out how to fix it, and then ideally go home with that knowledge that you can then kind of pass on to someone else.

0:26:44.3 Darren Cotton: So, really the goals are to save people money, to teach skills, reduce waste, and build community. We're in an epidemic of loneliness, and I think repair cafes are really a wonderful way to build community. So we started these back in 2017. It was kind of on an ad hoc basis, so whenever we were able to just kind of set some time aside, get enough people who were interested in volunteering, and by 2023 we were trying to organize at least once a month. These were still completely volunteer-led and run, so the Tool Library itself, we didn't add paid staff until 2022. So all of this programming, a lot of this work was just being done by volunteers, and they were becoming super popular. Local media was picking them up. We were getting a lot of interest from different libraries, different community centers, and Buffalo is based in western New York, so

we were getting rural, suburban, urban libraries that really wanted to see this program brought to their local branch. So we just couldn't keep up with the demand, and we didn't want to be kind of the barrier to bringing this kind of program to people.

0:28:03.9 Darren Cotton: So this year we were able to bring on a part-time program coordinator specifically for Dare to Repair. So this was through a statewide grant, but again it was a one-year grant, so we kind of wanted to set ourselves up for how do we make these programs, these events a little bit more sustainable. So that kind of took us into the idea of program stipends. And just to give you a sense kind of of the overall program costs of Dare to Repair to our organization, for 2025, the total estimated program cost is about $45,000. So that includes direct costs, so things like refreshments at events, replacement parts, printing, advertising, indirect costs, so essentially allowing the Tool Library as an enterprise to exist and have a space and be the supportive infrastructure for these programs, and then staff salary and benefits. So that was kind of $45,000 is really what we were working towards to how much of that can we actually cover through earned revenue. So in 2025, we budgeted that we would be able to bring in about $6,000 in program stipends. And the way these are structured is essentially if an organization or a host venue wants to bring a Dare to Repair Cafe to their location, we charge a stipend on a sliding scale.

0:29:42.1 Darren Cotton: So smaller organizations with budgets less than $250,000, the cost would be $500. For organizations with budgets larger than that, it would be $1,000. So the $1,000 figure is really based on what are the hard tangible costs associated with that one-day event, like essentially putting on that event and not necessarily the planning, the logistics, sort of the back-end work. So that is sort of where we started with that figure. And then again, our goal really is to be as equitable as possible, and we want repair to be accessible. So kind of making it available on a sliding scale depending on the size of the organization. And how are stipends funded? So a couple different ways that we've seen as far as this year how our hosts have been able to fund those stipends. So the first is we have a really great relationship with the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library System. So they typically have funding specifically set aside for programming at each branch. So they are able to pay that stipend sort of as the overreaching organization for these smaller branches. They're able to offer those stipends to us.

0:31:03.4 Darren Cotton: We've had businesses who are interested in bringing their repair either to their location or engaging their employees as fixers. So this could be like engineering firms, this could be actual repair companies, that sort of thing. So right now we haven't done any on-site Dare to Repair cafes with businesses, but we have been able to at least engage employees and encourage them to come to our events. And then the last one is support from the government, and this is where we've really seen the most success. So again, we tend to work with lots of different community centers, lots of different nonprofit organizations, and a lot of times even $500 for them, they don't have that in their budget. So this provides an opportunity for us to sort of work collaboratively with them to advocate to whoever their local elected official is. So in our case, it tends to be city council members where we will have this organization advocating on our behalf that this is a service that we value, we want to make this available to community members, and then being typically able to sponsor those events through description of the funding.

0:32:23.2 Darren Cotton: We've also seen, at least in New York State, there is a statewide initiative called Climate Smart Communities where municipalities will actually get funding for making different sort of upgrades, investments in renewables, and it's based on a points system, and repair cafes actually get municipalities points towards this climate funding through the state. And so they're able to tap into funding that they have set aside to essentially bring a repair cafe to the community. So challenges with program stipends. They're helpful, obviously, but $6,000 is not

$45,000, so we still have a pretty large gap in how we make these programs more self-sufficient. Again, we are still heavily dependent on grants to sort of backfill those costs. But if we, right now we're hosting two events a month, so one on a weekend, one during the week. So if we had every venue essentially paying the $1,000, that would be $24,000, so that would be a big sort of an operating budget for those events. Obviously, there is still a gap to fill there, but we do hope to get at least 50% of the way with earned revenue to make these more sustainable.

0:33:48.0 Darren Cotton: The other challenge, again, the idea of we want repair services to be equitable and accessible, so there may be organizations that can't afford the stipend, and then we don't really have luck advocating to an elected official or a sponsor. And again, we don't typically let that get in the way. If we have a host or an organization that's super gung-ho about bringing during a repair to the community, we're going to do it. But it's just helpful as the executive director and the person who has to manage all the budgets, it's nice to see when there is earned revenue coming in. But we don't have that be sort of an end-all be-all barrier to bringing those events to people. And then just sort of, you know, once you start charging for things, it can kind of change the relationship that you might have with organizations. So for a long time, there was no cost to bringing these events to locations. And it's really just a matter of having a conversation, working on the relationships that you have with organizations to let them know that there are costs associated with these.

0:35:00.0 Darren Cotton: And unfortunately, the Tool Library is largely, most of our budget is unfortunately grant funding. And so the more money we can generate just by sake of the services and products that we offer, you know, the easier it is for us to sustain the organization. Okay, on to super tools. Super lame name, but we tried our best. It's a bird, it's a plane, it's a super tool. But these were introduced as a way to generate some additional income to support the maintenance of existing tools and also help us kind of create a dedicated revenue line to purchase new tools. So again, not a super hard and fast rule, but super tools are typically $500 plus for our organization to acquire. And what we do is we just make them available on a per day borrowing fee. So it's $20 for the day, $40 for an extended weekend, which means if you're taking it out on a Friday or Saturday, the next day open is a Wednesday. So you essentially get that item from either a Friday to Wednesday or Saturday to a Wednesday. It's not a huge moneymaker.

0:36:16.5 Darren Cotton: In 2024, we generated about $2,800. But again, that went right back into the tool libraries inventory to help both with repair and then purchasing some bigger ticket items. So right now, we only have about 10 super tools in the inventory of about 4,500 items. So we do, again, we want to make sure that like inventory is still super accessible. But some of the different super tools we have available are an infrared paint stripper. So that's what you saw in that first slide. Pavement breaker, a jackhammer, thermal imaging camera, benchtop planer, full-sized carpet cleaner, and battery-powered generator. And challenges, again, it's kind of a slippery slope of the thing that distinguishes tool libraries from tool rentals is that it's about accessibility and equity. And so once you begin to introduce an extra fee to borrow something, it can get a little tricky. We've never run into issues where people have been like, hey, I really want to borrow this, but I can't afford the $20 a day, but I have to imagine there are going to be instances like that. So for us to kind of develop what that process would look like.

0:37:37.7 Darren Cotton: And are we excluding people from being able to access these higher-cost items? And then also just determining what qualifies as a super tool. So we have five HepaVax in our inventory right now that cost $800 for us to acquire, but they're part of Lead-Safe tool borrowing program that is largely grant-funded. So those are available free of charge to folks that go through a Lead-Safe work practices training. So again, the idea of not every tool that costs

more than $500 is designated as a super tool and we're charging for. So that can get kind of a little tricky as long as there are no hard and fast rules. It's just sort of like, okay, we've purchased this item from our own money. It was $600. It makes sense to have it as a super tool. And that's something that we tend to just kind of work on and discuss as a staff and with volunteers to get a sense of what we think seems right. And last but not least, so in my spare time, I'm also a freelance graphic designer, so I really love merchandise.

0:38:54.5 Darren Cotton: Again, not a huge moneymaker for us, but I think there are lots of other perks to having merchandise beyond just the money that you're making. So again, some of the benefits associated with selling merchandise, opportunity to diversify your revenue stream. So in 2024, we generated about $5,000 in merchandise sales. This does not take into account actual cost of production, so it was probably closer to $3,500 that we netted in profits. But it is super great low-cost marketing, so especially things like T-shirts, stickers, and tote bags are a great conversation starter. I can't tell you the number of people like I'm wearing one of our Tool Library hoodies right now. And like just going into a grocery store and people being like, the Tool Library, is that like a real thing? Or, you know, what's the deal with that? So it is a great kind of conversation starter, free advertising. And it turns members into ambassadors for the organization and kind of helps them share more about what the Tool Library is and whether or not people are interested in joining and becoming members. They're also super great, thank you gifts.

0:40:09.1 Darren Cotton: So an easy way to acknowledge donors and or volunteers who have gone above and beyond. I love slipping a few stickers into an acknowledgment letter to a donor just as kind of an extra thank you. Merch ideas. Sky is the limit. We've had a lot of luck kind of with a combination of apparel and then just smaller scale things. So things like tote bags, stickers, and then the coasters and keychains were pretty cool. We had a volunteer who had just gotten a laser engraver and he was super into that and just wanted the practice. So he was willing to do that for us. I think that is one of the exciting things about merch. If you have more of like a makerspace workshop where you have some of these things and you can actually make that stuff in house, I think all the better. We just recently got, not recently, but we have a 3D printer in house. So we've been trying to think of like how do we leverage that and also not just produce more like useless plastic junk that the world does not need. So that is one of the challenges of merchandise, right.

0:41:20.9 Darren Cotton: You're not just, you don't want to create stuff just for the sake of creating stuff. Like there has, ideally there's a purpose. But yeah, every year we try to do like a new launch for a piece of merch and we make sure that all of our volunteers get first crack. So that's kind of an end of the year thank you to them. So we did beanies one year. We did sweatshirts another year. And next slide. That's one of the beautiful things too, like merchandise is a great way to appreciate your volunteers. And because they always get first crack, we always ask them to sort of like, hey, take photos, like wearing your beanie. We did joggers this past winter, which were a hit. And so getting like that user generated content that you can then use to promote when you do like a merch drop to your wider audience and to your membership base. Some recommendations for merchandise. Highly recommend pairing it up with events, especially if you have like a big annual fundraiser, a really great time to drop new merchandise. So we have a big garden party every August. And so we made sure that we had like three or four new pieces of merchandise for that event.

0:42:43.7 Darren Cotton: And we were able to sell about a thousand dollars worth of that at the event in August. And then also it's a really great opportunity to kind of find out more about the vendors and the shops that are in your local community. So we primarily work with a shop called Positive Approach, and they're really focused on sourcing ethical materials, t-shirts that are actually

created to last and are not like a five dollar throwaway t-shirt. So it's been really nice to build that relationship. They've had us on their podcast. They've done a lot of promo sort of for us. So there is a nice reciprocal relationship there. And again, I know it can be like when we got our first run of totes printed, we just did like some online discount mugs.com or something. And we really hated the quality. And it's just like, you know, they were probably produced overseas somewhere. And so for this next run, we really want to find like a local vendor we can work with and just source things as locally as we can. And I think that does it. So I saw that there was a flurry of questions in the chat. So give me a second to catch up here. I had a question for Ava. And let me just make sure you didn't respond in the chat. Okay.

0:44:27.5 Ava Lim: I was going to speak on that if I could.

0:44:32.1 Darren Cotton: Yes.

0:44:33.1 Ava Lim: Okay. So the question was, oh my gosh, now I can't scroll up to find it. Here it is. How many staff or volunteer hours a week does it take to manage the retail operation? So it's a little bit complicated. Currently, we don't have any volunteer positions, volunteer sign up slots specifically for the store. But that doesn't mean there's not volunteer work going into it. It's just that people sign up for the slots as like a normal volunteer, which is basically like check in, check out or miscellaneous help around. And a lot of the time that miscellaneous help is helping us sort things out, price things out, and manage our inventory. And for our volunteer work, we're open six days a week. And each day is split into two, two and a half hour shifts. And each of those shifts has two volunteer slots to sign up. So that would be four volunteers in a day times six is 24 volunteers in a week. So again, not all of those are going to the material store. But a lot of the times if there is downtime between checking people in and out, that is something they're helping with. For posting specifically, I don't typically have volunteers help me with the actual posting of the item, but I do have people help me with taking pictures and writing descriptions. But I am the one that will actually go onto Facebook and put the post online. And then I also get help from our social media manager. She does a lot of help with the posting. And for sales tax, those numbers do include sales tax.

0:46:29.2 Darren Cotton: Okay, thanks, Ava.

0:46:41.7 Ava Lim: I think that also had another question for Colin.

0:46:44.7 Darren Cotton: Yep. So Colin, roughly what percentage of your members add on the bike shack access?

0:46:53.3 Colin McElroy: So maybe I miscommunicated how that works. So it's not a add on per membership. It's not like we have a suggested annual amount for a Tool Library membership, and then it's X amount to add on the bike shack. It's just whenever they come in to use the bike shack, it's a suggested $20 an hour stand time. I don't know. Josh, our executive director is on here as well. He may know the number. I don't know off the top of my head what percentage of our members actually use the bike shack.

0:47:27.4 Josh Epstein: Yeah, I wish I could tell you an exact percentage. It's relatively small. But I also want to just reiterate that it is a suggested donation, just like our membership costs. So we do have folks that come in, unhoused folks and folks that are out of work, whatever, that can just use the space or get help on their bikes for free. I think we've been really trying to make sure that it's the option, that people know that it's an option to pay, but that an option is encouraged because it

continues to allow us to do what we do. But I think even if it's not a huge percentage of our members, it's one of those things like we have a lot of these little, we have a seed library, we have a toy and game library and the materials and some of these things that even if folks aren't always using those things, I think it attracts more members knowing that all that stuff is available to them in one location.

0:48:21.7 Darren Cotton: Colin, a question for you. Do your two libraries also have bike tools to check out and take home? If so, what are some exciting ones?

0:48:31.7 Colin McElroy: We do not loan out any bike specific tools. If we did, we probably wouldn't have the tools in the bike shack to use. We don't have a lot of duplicates of tools, but I mean, we do lend out, you know, we have sets of wrenches and screwdrivers, all the sort of general tools that you use to work on your bike, but no bike specific tools.

0:48:56.4 Josh Epstein: Yeah, I'll jump in again and say we have lent out some bike stands here and there. When we have extras. But I think it's something we would like to do if we could get the inventory for that.

0:49:08.3 Colin McElroy: Yeah.

0:49:11.4 Darren Cotton: And then there was a question about getting a copy of the presentation and just want to let people know that the recording will be on the TLA's website. So you'll be able to download that and thanks to our wonderful friends at Shareable, there will also be a version two of the Library of Things toolkit. So stay tuned for that. Also, just want to part times infinity the foundations with deep pockets who want to rain money down on the repair show and reuse movement. Okay, Jason, you had a question. Approximately how much staff time do you dedicate a month to do repair? So our part time coordinator right now is 10 hours a week. So 40 hours a month total. And then I am also probably putting in between 40 to 50 hours a month. I'm doing more of like the PA getting and then I'm also typically at each event, taking photos and doing that sort of thing.

0:50:35.3 Darren Cotton: Emily had a question. Does anyone offer regular purchase of the Tool Library items like a member could either loan a tool from the library. Outright.

0:50:50.1 Ava Lim: And that's really only if you have like a surplus, like let's say you have a bajillion Phillips head screwdrivers and somebody just wants to take one home.

0:51:02.1 Darren Cotton: So we have never done that at the Tool Library. I will say someone randomly in like another state was trolling our my turn inventory and saw that we had like this very particular bare trowel for doing like drywall work and was like, my dad's like an expert plaster or something and I really want to buy this for him as like a Father's Day present. Is there any way you could like sell these to me. And because it was like such a weird out of the blue thing, we were like, we'll like throw these in for you. But I think that's the only time we've sold something from the inventory like that. But I'll open it up to...

0:51:48.0 Leanna Frick: A lot of libraries do tool sales, which I know has been mentioned by the Shoreline folks here, and actually Josh, the ED of that organization, did a whole section on tool sales in our fall series, so that's all captured in the Library of Things toolkit, along with a recording of that session. Because we had that, we wanted to not focus on tool sales, but that is, I think, probably the number one earned revenue model for libraries of things, is selling excess inventory.

Typically not one-off, but we have done semi-annual yard sales and things like that.

0:52:25.7 Kate Hersey: We have, at our library, a much smaller, it's literally two movable shelves that we sell our excess inventory in, so we don't have storage that would be amazing to do kind of a full reuse retail shop. But that is where we're always including kind of those extra donations and pieces, and we will, when we get newer donations and we swap out items in our inventory, those old items will mark off our item ID number, and those will go up on our shelves at a deep discount. But we've never taken something directly out of inventory to sell or sell from our My Turn. I was wondering, what do you use for your online marketplaces on your website? Are you using a Squarespace site? Just wondering what technology people are using for their online postings.

0:53:32.1 Ava Lim: Yeah, at Shoreline, we use WordPress, is the website that we use. And there is an e-commerce feature on WordPress, but again, we're not actually taking any money through our website. We're just using it to show what items we have and how much they cost. But there's no way on any, or not... We don't have a way set up for people to pay us through any of these online methods because of the problems with holding items.

0:54:06.2 Josh Epstein: And that's something that we've been looking at. We actually have a group from University of Washington that might be looking at that. So we've considered that. So stay tuned if we figure out a good way to actually do online sales. We'll let everybody know.

0:54:25.9 Darren Cotton: I think Steve had a question. How many repair techs do you have in your pool? How many show up at a representative event? Do you have anyone that does cell phones, laptops, tech? So we've got a mailing list, I would say, of roughly 100 folks who at some point in time have said, yes, they are interested in volunteering at a Dare to Repair. I would say at any given event, we expect to see between 10 and 15 fixers actually show up. And we're obviously reaching out to that full list ahead of time and getting confirmations. We do have two people that specifically just work on laptops, but it is not. It tends to be more software work. We have had like RAM install, new video cards, that sort of thing, but we don't offer anything like screen repair. It just is really tricky and you need specialized, obviously, screens and tools. So we typically shy away from cell phones, tablets, but we can help with laptops. We don't do TVs, and then we don't do gas-powered items. And then I will dig up our release and waiver, but essentially it is an indemnification. Again, if they go home and plug something in and it starts a fire, releasing us of the liability. And it's also a photo release as well, so we try to cover all of those things in one fell swoop. Okay, let me know if I've missed anyone's questions in the chat, or feel free to jump in now with any leading questions, nuggets of wisdom, things you'd like to share.

0:56:24.3 Kate Hersey: Not in the chat, Darren, but when you're going through sponsored programming, because we're doing a little bit of that, are you using a blanket contract? Are you using more of a traditional marketing sponsorship form like you would as an event with partners? What does that partner contract look like for you?

0:56:48.3 Darren Cotton: So typically it really depends on the host, and we're just using whatever forms that they have, and some will have nothing, and they literally just ask a queue of the resources, the venue, so that is helpful kind of just to lay that out and let them know kind of what our expectations are, but we have kept it pretty informal for the time being.

0:57:32.8 Emily Fritz: I got a quick question. Does everybody, for the most part, use WordPress for your website? Or do you have any recommendations otherwise?

0:57:44.2 Leanna Frick: We use Squarespace. It's fine.

0:57:49.3 Emily Fritz: It's great, right?

0:57:50.8 Leanna Frick: Yeah. It's sort of like the Mac to WordPress's PC. It's more user-friendly, but also more limited.

0:57:56.4 Emily Fritz: And you're able to schedule workshop events and calendared events through Squarespace.

0:58:07.0 Leanna Frick: We use a software called MindBody that was designed for yoga studios and spas that sucks, and I don't recommend it. But I think that is a big gap in the marketplace, actually, is, public class and workshop scheduling software. So I'm always keeping an eye out for it.

0:58:23.8 Emily Fritz: So it's not like an easy plug-in that they provide as an upgrade.

0:58:31.3 Leanna Frick: No, there probably are more options on WordPress for those kinds of plug-ins. Because we have about 7,000 students a year and 35 classes, and it gets really complicated. But if you're just doing a few others, I'm sure there's solutions for any web platform.

0:58:47.6 Emily Fritz: So we're planning to kind of lead on the educational side, so that's kind of the workshop and educational component is the primary focus of our initiative. And then secondarily, it's going to be a maker space, so it's like open time for people to practice and then a Tool Library as well.

0:59:06.0 Leanna Frick: Yeah, I would definitely check out the session in the toolkit on classes and workshops. That was led in part by our library, Station North Tool Library in Baltimore. And yeah, I think, as Jason mentioned, the Tool Library Alliance has been doing some surveying of exactly this question, like what are people using, is it working with software? And we're going to be both sharing that out and doing sort of like a sector survey and needs assessment this summer.

0:59:40.5 Emily Fritz: Sweet.

0:59:43.5 Leanna Frick: Jeff?

0:59:44.5 Jeff Adams: Yeah, I just wanted to ask a question for Colin. So for bike repairs, have you ever been asked to take your bike repair on the road either to like a bike event or anything related?

0:59:58.8 Colin McElroy: Yeah, specifically around like bike everywhere month or bike everywhere day, we've been asked by a couple of different farmers markets or cities to come and do like a class or something similar to that at one of those type events. I've only been here for three months and I haven't actually participated in any of them, so I don't know how valuable they end up being for the Tool Library in general or the bike shack specifically, but it is something that we've been asked to do, yeah.

1:00:39.0 Ava Lim: If I could add one thing about the website conversation, we don't actually post our classes on our website. We use Eventbrite. So on our website, the tab that's classes and events, it just links out directly to our Eventbrite page. So yeah, not sure that I would recommend the WordPress for that purpose, but Eventbrite seems to work well for us.

1:01:10.8 Emily Fritz: And do you have... I'm sorry.

1:01:13.1 Darren Cotton: Nope, go ahead.

1:01:14.3 Emily Fritz: Do you have registration fees associated with that, that Eventbrite can process for you through?

1:01:23.2 Ava Lim: We have, when people sign up for their class, they pay the Eventbrite fee.

1:01:39.7 Darren Cotton: All right, we're officially at 5:00 PM. Any last thoughts or questions? Thank you all so much for joining. I think this was a super productive session, and please join us again next month for a session on partnerships.

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