

## Collaborators in Construction

Undertaking the construction and remodeling of physical space seems particularly daunting on a minimal budget. Library staff are not likely to have the skills needed to layout the design, demolish and rebuild, or install carpet, lighting and furnishings. However, individuals in most communities do possess these skills. You might be surprised how many of them are willing to donate their labor to help make the library an even more vibrant hub of their community. It doesn't hurt to ask.

When partners, community members, and volunteers actively participate in helping to design and construct active learning space, they are more invested in and committed to positive outcomes for the library. This fan base has a ripple effect as these library champions spread their enthusiasm through their networks.

Refer to [Find community collaborators and partners](#) to guide your collaboration efforts.

We'll look at two examples of community design/construction crews who co-created space for active learning.

### 1. Everson Branch of Whatcom County Library System, WA

The story here is all about volunteerism. Soon after the decision was made to focus the new space on Nooksack Valley heritage, Branch Manager Eileen Shaw convened a meeting of 12–15 interested community members to discuss the possibilities and solicit their thoughts. Among those who showed up was Friends of the Library board member Reg Wilford, a new resident who had bought and begun to restore a century-old house in Everson. He brought to the project a budding passion for the local history and valuable expertise from his day job with a company that designs interactive exhibits for museums. His pro bono contributions were pivotal in directing design decisions and selecting fixtures and equipment. "He became the real visionary for the project."

Once the plans were formed and equipment ordered, volunteers came out of the community woodwork to implement the construction phase. A patron, who overheard Shaw and staff talking about the project, offered his drafting skills. Another patron, a local contractor, agreed to help with the construction. An electrician showed up to work with the crew. Local businesses donated building materials. Two local professional photographers provided historical photographs and helped to create banners. The Everson Lions Club paid for a year's subscription to Ancestry.com and a former school librarian offered to teach monthly classes on its use. "I think we had just the right amount of help," said Shaw.



Photo: This crew of carpenters, electricians, community historians, set designers and entrepreneurs formed a committee that steered the project from action planning to completion.

## 2. Cornwall Public Library, NY

For the Cornwall Public Library in Cornwall, New York, the enthusiasm of their advocates to jump in and do the “heavy lifting” was a core part of their success. Their project was to create a space for teens, a place they could feel they belonged and would stimulate them to connect and collaborate.

Once the library identified the underused reference desk area for a conversion, an impressive number of community members stepped up to contribute skills and energy—all pro bono. A local design firm planned the layout and chose the furnishings. An electrician wired the electronics and lights. Two talented teenagers painted a vivid, organic mural on the walls. A carpet layer made a 3-hour round-trip commute on a Sunday (his one day off) to install the carpet because “... libraries have been good to me in my life.”

Take away: don’t be reluctant to ask for help! Your fans will step up. In the words of the library’s former director, Mary Lou Carolan, “The community helped [the space] come alive; they fanned the flames.”



Photos: Left – the old teen space; Right – the reimaged teen space at Cornwall Public Library (NY)

**Who are your potential partners and volunteers?**

You may find that your community is full of individuals, organizations and businesses who would love to work with you to revitalize the library. Whether it's a full-fledged partnership, a pro-bono contributor or local handypersons ready to hammer and wire, this form will help you track what you need and who can deliver it.

Skill Set Needed	Individuals/Organizations/Businesses to Approach	Contact Information	When Needed