



How to Map Your Users

A simple method to identify and understand
your current and potential user base

21.01.26

Written by Felipe Fonseca (Global Innovation Gathering)

From Passive Readers to Active Makers and Menders

In the context of the make-a-thek project, the library shifts from being a repository of finished products (books) to a site for community-led production and the creative reuse of resources. Mapping your users is not about finding "customers".

Instead, it is about identifying the diverse skills, needs, and existing community practices already present in your neighborhood. This mapping serves as the foundation for a transition from passive consumption to active, collective participation in circular systems.

Step 0: The Ecosystem Audit

Before looking at individuals, we must look at the social and material landscape the library inhabits.

1. **Identify Local Skill Mediators:** Who are the practitioners of traditional crafts (sewing, carpentry, electronics repair) nearby? These are often people whose expertise is undervalued or happens in private shops or households, yet they act as vital nodes for community learning.
2. **Locate Resource Partners:** Which local businesses or households produce "surplus" (leftovers) that could be repurposed? (e.g., upholstery shops, textile schools, repair cafes). This is about identifying a network of shared resources in your vicinity.
3. **Recognize Barriers to Participation:** What stops people from coming in? Is it the technical look of the machines? Is it the opening hours? Identifying these frictions is the first step toward building a truly inclusive space.

Step 1: Mapping Users: a Practical Template

The User-Resource Journey

Objective: **Map how a community member moves from having a practical problem (like a broken item) to finding a social solution in the library.**

Stage	Question to Ask	Example
The Trigger	Why did the user come here?	"I have a bag with a broken zipper."
The Barrier	What stops them?	"I don't know how to sew; I'm afraid of the machine."
The Interaction	How does the library facilitate peer-learning?	A Skill Mediator shows the Learner how to fix the zipper using a 3D-printed slider.
The Outcome	What leaves the library?	A fixed bag, a more confident person, and a new social connection.

Step 2: The Deep Listening Approach

Standard surveys often fail to capture the nuances of how people interact with tools. Instead, use observation and dialogue to map existing community expertise.

- **Skill Mapping:** Ask community members not just what they do for a living, but what they know how to fix, maintain, or create. This reveals a wealth of untapped, local knowledge.
- **Friction Analysis:** Observe how different groups approach the space. Do they see the makerspace as a specialized lab for experts or a community workshop for everyday creative repair?
- **Object Biographies:** Invite people to bring in objects they own. Discussing an object's history - where it came from, how it was made, and how it might be mended - maps the user's awareness of design, production, and waste.

Why it works: By documenting these contributions in public forms - like murals, weblogs, or "skill maps" displayed in the library - you turn individual knowledge into a shared community asset.

Step 3: Relational Archetypes (Who is your community?)

Instead of using static demographics (age, income), categorize your potential users by their relationship to the circular cycle:

- **The Skill Mediator:** Individuals experienced in traditional or technical skills. They act as the relational backbone of the space, helping to share techniques and guide others.
- **The Repair Catalyst:** Individuals who already fix things for their family or neighbors. They represent the informal networks of maintenance that keep a community running.
- **The Material Contributor:** People or businesses with access to surplus materials who are looking for a collective way to redistribute or rework them.
- **The Curious Learner:** Those interested in sustainability and making but who lack the space, tools, or social confidence to practice it.

Checklist for Librarians

- ☐ **Community Mapping:** Have we identified at least three local "Skill Mediators" who could lead a session?
- ☐ **Resource Networking:** Have we contacted one local business about their surplus materials?
- ☐ **Visual Documentation:** Is there a place in the library where users can see a "map" of the skills available in the community?
- ☐ **Accessibility Check:** Are the machines and tools labeled in a way that feels inviting and easy to understand?

Conclusion: Governance and Inclusion

Mapping is a continuous process. As the makerspace evolves, the users should eventually turn from participants into **co-managers**. The data gathered here should be shared with the community to ensure that the space remains a site of community-driven initiative rather than a top-down institutional offering.