



Network of Experts

How to find local skill mediators,
circular collaborators and community talents
for your make-a-thek project

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Who Makes the Make-a-thek? Finding Your Network of Experts

Setting up the physical space of a library makerspace is only half the journey. The real magic happens when people start sharing what they know. But where do you find the right people to lead a workshop, mentor a teenager, or help fix a broken machine?

Building a **Network of Experts** isn't about hiring expensive consultants; it's about discovering the talent already living in your neighborhood and connecting with those who believe in circularity and shared knowledge.

1. Shift Your Perspective: From "Experts" to "Mediators"

In a traditional setting, an expert is someone who stands at the front of the room and lectures. In a **make-a-thek**, we look for **Skill Mediators**.

A Skill Mediator is someone who not only knows their craft (like electronics, sewing, or woodworking) but also knows how to guide others through the process of discovery. They don't just "fix it for you"—they show you how to participate in the repair.

Where to look:

- **Local Repair Cafés:** These are goldmines for enthusiasts who love troubleshooting.
- **Retirement Communities:** You'll often find retired artisans with decades of "material intelligence" looking for ways to pass on their skills.
- **Hobbyist Groups:** Check local social media for knitting circles, woodturning clubs, or upcycling enthusiasts.

2. Identifying Circular Collaborators

When looking for partners, look for those who align with circular values. You want collaborators who see "waste" as a resource and "broken" as an opportunity.

- **Small Businesses:** A local tailor might be interested in hosting a "mending" workshop using their fabric scraps.
- **Artisans & Makers:** Look for local creators who already use sustainable materials. They can provide high-level inspiration for what is possible with reused resources.
- **Technical Schools:** Students often need real-world projects or community service hours. They can bring fresh energy and digital skills to your space.

3. Practical Advice: How to Start the Conversation

Approaching a potential collaborator for the first time? Keep it simple and focused on the shared community benefit.

- **Offer Value Back:** It's not just about what they can do for the library. Can you offer them a space to showcase their work? Access to machines they don't have at home? Visibility in your newsletter?
- **Start with a "Pilot":** Don't ask for a six-month commitment right away. Invite them to run a single "Trial Session" or a "Show and Tell" to see how they vibe with the library community.
- **The "Material Hook":** If you've mapped your materials, use them as a conversation starter: *"We have all this surplus denim from a local shop—would you like to help us design a workshop around it?"*

4. The Expert Database: Keeping it Local and Accessible

Once you start finding these people, don't let the connections fade. Create a simple "Community Skill Map."

- **The Digital Version:** A simple spreadsheet where you track names, skills, and contact info.
- **The Physical Version:** A board in the makerspace where regular collaborators can pin their business cards or a photo of a project they helped with. This makes the "experts" visible and approachable to everyone.

Quick Tips for Finding Your First Facilitator

1. **Look Inward:** Does a member of the library staff have a secret hobby? (Maybe your head librarian is a master of crochet!)
2. **Ask Your Users:** Put up a sign: *"What do you know how to fix? What do you want to learn?"* The answers will tell you exactly which experts you need to find.
3. **Host a "Meet the Makers" Night:** Invite 3-4 local creators for a casual coffee. It's the easiest way to see who is interested in a longer-term partnership.

Conclusion: It Takes a Village to Make a Thek

The strongest makerspaces are those where the boundary between "teacher" and "student" is thin. By building a network of local Skill Mediators and Circular Collaborators, you ensure your library isn't just a room full of machines—it's a living, breathing hub of community resilience and shared labor.

What's your experience? Have you found a "hidden" expert in your neighborhood? Share your story with the **make-a-thek** community!