Chapter 8

Funding a Makerspace:
Making It Up as You Go Along

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ABSTRACT

The current methods for procuring funding for makerspaces are varied and haphazard. This chapter discusses what those in the field are doing to get makerspaces funded and their plans for continued funding.

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INTRODUCTION

Nearly all libraries now have at least some recognition of what a makerspace is and how it could be used in library programing. The last few years have seen an opening of the floodgates as libraries host maker faires as well as devote space and resources to programming centered around the creation of physical projects running the gamut from sewing to electronics and everything in between. Projects once thought impossible due to expense are now done as a matter of course. An average 3D printer costs no more in initial outlay and materials than an average networked paper printer. Even fab labs, once the rarified purview of MIT and other Ivy leagues has come down in price so that one can be set up for around $100,000. (Digital Reality, 2016).

This is not to imply that the average library can set up a fab lab but it is certainly within reach of a consortia or an academic library with a strong commitment to STEM programs. Which brings up the focus of this article, the funding of makerspaces in libraries.

There is not a lot written on this subject since it is so new but after reaching out to colleagues who are actually doing it I received some good information. The questions I asked on the code4lib mailing list and the MakerSpaces and the Participatory Library Facebook group. I asked:

- How did you come up with the idea for a Makerspace?
- How did you pay for initial costs?
- How do you pay for ongoing costs?
- How do you decide what to purchase?
- Do you recover costs? (charge for printing etc...)

This was an informal correspondence more than a true survey but the responses given were very helpful in confirming a generally held assumption that the funding of makerspaces is quite varied. Perhaps a concrete example at this point would be helpful and the author’s own experience may be helpful. In the Summer of 2012 the Maker movement was in full swing. The LITA Forum call for proposals for 2013 included “Maker spaces/Maker Movement” among the suggested topics. (Library Information Technology Association, 2013). At the time I had been arguing for a Makerspace for some time especially after the success of Westport Public library’s extensive program nearby. One day the library Director came by and asked if I had a one time expense for end of year money that cost more than $1,000. Immediately I suggested a 3D printer along with a service contract and supplies enough to run a year. Note that this estimate was just a guess with no research on my part. Additionally,