

# RELEASE: Six Public Libraries Recognized as ‘Top Innovators’ Across All of North America by Urban Libraries Council

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## Annual award program honors the most innovative projects from city libraries in the U.S. and Canada

Washington, DC — The Urban Libraries Council (ULC), North America’s leading nonprofit and membership organization for urban libraries, has named six public libraries as “Top Innovators” for 2024 as part of its annual Innovations Initiative. The Denver Public Library (CO), Gwinnett County Public Library (GA), Miami-Dade Public Library System (FL), San Francisco Public Library (CA), Toronto Public Library (Ontario), and Virginia Beach Public Library (VA) receive the “Top Innovator” award for the originality of their work, demonstrative and measurable outcomes, and the potential for other libraries to replicate and implement these most innovative of programs.

“This year’s Innovation Initiative honorees exemplify the evolving role of libraries as dynamic public institutions that are integral to the fabric of our urban communities,” said ULC President and CEO Brooks Rainwater. “The innovative projects highlighted this year demonstrate the power of libraries to not only adapt but to actively shape the future of our cities, ensuring that all community members have the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.”

### About the 2024 Top Innovators and Honorable Mentions

From campaigns that promote civic engagement and intellectual freedom to programs that enhance digital connectivity and economic mobility, more than 230 library projects in six categories were submitted by ULC members from across the United States and Canada to be considered for the top awards. There is one top innovator and one honorable mention for each award category.

<b>AWARD CATEGORY</b>	<b>TOP INNOVATORS</b>	<b>HONORABLE MENTIONS</b>
Advocacy and Awareness	San Francisco Public Library (CA)	Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh (PA)
Education: Children and Adults	Virginia Beach Public Library (VA)	New York Public Library (NY)
Equity and Inclusion	Miami-Dade Public Library System (FL)	Broward County Library (FL)

Health and Wellness	Denver Public Library (CO)	San Mateo County Libraries (CA)
Library Operations and Management	Toronto Public Library (ON)	Pioneer Library System (OK)
Workforce and Economic Development	Gwinnett County Public Library (GA)	Memphis Public Libraries (TN)

***Advocacy and Awareness***

- [Bay Beats from the San Francisco Public Library](#) is a free local music streaming platform that champions the exciting musical talent in the Bay Area. Since launching in 2023, the library has developed a robust network with local music schools, influencers and the legendary music store Amoeba Music to bring together people who make music and people who love music
- [Get the Guide from the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh](#) is a regular publication about programs, events, library hours, and branch services that reaches the mailboxes of people throughout the city. This direct mail campaign has contributed to more than an 80% increase in library event attendance and more than 84,000 new library cards issued, as well as more than 30,000 lapsed cardholders are re-engaged with the library.

***Education: Children and Adults***

- [Virginia Beach Public Library’s \(VBPL\) Environmental STEM: Play and Learn](#) initiative provides STEM learning opportunities for preschool children ages 3-5. In Spring 2024, VBPL served 900 preschoolers across 60 classrooms through programming, activity kits and increased access to high-quality books about STEM for young learners.
- [The New York Public Library's Teen Civics Ambassadors](#) is a paid internship program for high schoolers in which teens gain civic and voting knowledge, and then engage their peers in learning about these issues and making a difference in their communities. Participants have advocated on topics like inclusive spaces, climate change and affordable housing and noted how it helped their critical thinking, self-esteem and career potential.

***Equity and Inclusion***

- [The Miami-Dade Public Library System has created autism friendly spaces](#) at all libraries and offers a wide range of sensory-friendly programs and events designed for families and children with special needs and neurodiverse individuals. By being designated as an Autism-Friendly Partner by the University of Miami-Nova Southeastern University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (UM-NSU CARD), library staff received valuable training on how to better understand the perspectives of neurodivergent individuals and their families, and how to accommodate and welcome them into our libraries and programs.
- [The Broward County Library's Black History Project Saturday School](#) is a free class series for teens and young adults that supplements and enriches the current Black History curricula taught in Florida public schools. Over 400 students have participated since last

year and learned from a comprehensive curriculum designed by Black scholars spanning from pre-colonial Africa through today.

### ***Health and Wellness***

- [The Denver Public Library \(DPL\) has enhanced food access](#) in partnership with The GrowHaus, a local, community-led nonprofit, to establish a grant-supported food box program at 14 branch library locations. Since officially partnering in 2022, over 30,000 fresh food boxes have been distributed and 633,000 meals provided, improving food access in neighborhoods disproportionately affected by a lack of healthy, fresh food.
- [At San Mateo County Libraries, preventing domestic violence](#) is the foundation of a partnership with the local nonprofit Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse. The partnership supports underserved families with young children and leverages library resources through a community-centric, inclusive initiative that addresses domestic violence through proactive engagement and collaboration.

### ***Library Operations and Management***

- This top innovation recognizes the measures initiated by the [Toronto Public Library to mitigate impacts from a cybersecurity incident](#) in October 2023. During the recovery period, all 100 library branches remained open with access to staff expertise, collections including staff assisted borrowing and returns, study space, programming, and Wi-Fi.
- This honorable mention recognizes the actions taken by the [Pioneer Library System](#) following a sudden closure of its Central Library due to mold in Fall 2023. Through a new library service model and more knowledgeable and connected staff, the library was able to meet a record number of engaged customers.

### ***Workforce and Economic Development***

- [At Gwinnett County Public Library, the New Start Entrepreneurship Incubator](#) supports a growing but largely overlooked subset of aspirational entrepreneurs: the formerly incarcerated. The program provides business education through in-person classes, online coursework, a robust network of mentors, and a pitch event at the end of the program offers participants the chance to win funding for their business ideas.
- [The Memphis Public Libraries Innovator-In-Residence program](#) connects working creative professionals in a myriad of fields with library patrons to teach marketable skills, build business savvy, create strategic support networks, and channel passion into a new profession. The first innovator in residence helped design a podcasting studio at the library, mentored over 40 emerging podcasters, and initiated the PODBOX Memphis Podcast Festival, which attracted over 100 participants and led to the creation of at least 20 new podcasts.

Information about the winning projects, honorable mentions and all submissions from libraries is available on the ULC website at [www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations](http://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations). Video footage and photos are available for the Top Innovators.

*The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and impact tank of North America's leading public library systems. ULC drives cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions. Across the U.S. and Canada, more than 180 member libraries rely on ULC to identify significant challenges facing today's communities and provide new tools and techniques to help libraries achieve stronger outcomes in education, digital equity, workforce and economic development, and race and social equity. Learn more at [urbanlibraries.org](http://urbanlibraries.org).*

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