

## [A 4-Step Plan for Building a Music Instrument Lending Library at the Free Library of Philadelphia](#)

In the tradition of equal and open access to all, the Free Library is proposing a musical instrument lending library for cardholders. In a similar fashion to how we already lend out other special materials, like tablets and e-readers, patrons would borrow musical instruments from the Central Music Department. The Free Library of Philadelphia believes this would heighten musical information literacy, and enrich the lives of our patrons in the arts, engaging them further with the city's booming cultural community.

### **A. Knowledge Gathering**

Survey other public and academic libraries that have instrument lending  
Survey other groups doing the same thing or like minded (DIY PHL)

1. To ask: how'd you get started?

- patron/ musician requests?
- announcing? press release?

risks/ things to watch out for  
how to catalog/ loan

2. Public (or Academic) Libraries which already lend instruments- responses.

- Maine Public (ukeles) [e-mailed 6/27]  
<http://www.hplib.org/ukuleles>

We keep the instruments locked up in a cabinet in the Film & Music Services room. We have a barcoded placard on display for each available instrument. The patron takes a placard to the self-check or to the membership services desk for checkout and then brings the receipt to our department to collect the instrument. The ukuleles are returned to us at the end of the loan period. Each instrument comes with a guidebook. So far, we have not had to do any maintenance and the whole loan process has been very straightforward.

- Ann Arbor District Library (guitar pedals! moog synths! stylophones!) [e-mailed 6/27]  
<http://www.aadl.org/musictools>

response:

-- Library Response --

Hello there, Perry, thanks for your interest!

1. How did the music tool library get started? That is, how did you go about acquiring your instruments and equipment? Did you get them new, or second hand?

Almost all the equipment is purchased new, with the exceptions of a few specialty items that are no longer manufactured (out of print =). We approach those very strategically because we don't like to be unable to replace items. Most of the items come from Amazon, Sweetwater Sound, or B&H Photo Video, with a few specialty vendors like Ward's scientific, local Telescope / Microscope shops, or independent makers like Critter & Guitari or Pittsburgh Modular.

2. Who made the decisions about which instruments to collect? Were your music tools shaped by any musician / patron requests or was it mostly picked by librarians and staff?

While most of the selection is done by a Librarian who specializes in the tool collection and a tools team that works with him, the direction of the collection is heavily influenced by suggestions and requests from local musicians and creators. If they say we should have something, we usually try to obtain it!

3. What methods does your library use to maintain your instruments? Do you find yourselves constantly restringing, repairing, or rewiring any of them?

Well, for restringing, we have mostly avoided strung instruments so far. There is some repair involved, and we have some staff who can do simple repairs, or we work with the manufacturers when possible. However, overall, the amount of damage to the collection has been shockingly low.

4. I see you have a catalog. If you do in-house cataloging, were there any barriers to getting instruments represented in the catalog?

We do catalog them in-house. The librarian (Jody Harnish) who develops the collection creates the catalog records.

5. Tell us about how you announced your program!

Well, it was very much a soft launch so we could ramp up slowly, although it built on the success of the telescope collection that we launched with a star party and our Art Print collection we've been doing for 40 years. But word of mouth is a powerful thing... and the items are displayed in the lobby of the downtown library so they're hard to miss for library users! We've recently completed a small campaign including banners on the buildings, billboards, bookmarks, and print ads in what's left of our print media. That's the KNOW MOOG GET MOOG banner you see at the top of the tools page at <http://aadl.org/tools> .

6. Any other advice or anything else you'd like to share about your library? Any hang-ups or issues to getting started? Any current problems?

Well, we've had to move processing of the returned items out of the circulation department because it's just too far outside their regular experience, but other than that, it is going very well. One thing we decided early on is that we would charge for loss, but not for damage, unless it's clearly intentional. If they lose it, it's on them... even for a \$1000 item... but if it's damaged, well it's on us for circulating something so crazy. Let me know if you have any other questions, we'd be happy to discuss this further with you, and good luck with your project!

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- Joe's Musical Instrument Lending Library (Ontario, Canada) [e-mailed 8/3/2015]  
Instruments are available to adult patrons and children in sixth grade or above and can be kept for three weeks.  
<http://www.kingstonist.com/2010/12/29/top-10-of-2010-joes-musical-instrument-lending-library/>

---Library Response---

1. How did the music instrument library get started? That is, how did you go about acquiring your instruments and equipment? Did you get them new, or second hand?

[It started with an awareness & fundraising music festival, funds from which went to purchase a core inventory of brand instruments. Once the word was out, many more used items were donated.](#)

2. Who made the decisions about which instruments to collect? Were your music tools shaped by any musician / patron requests or was it mostly picked by staff?

[The initial items were the 'usual' suspects' - acoustic, electric & bass guitars, keyboards & drums. As our client database has grown we have tried to cater for their](#)

needs & requests, especially in the areas of 'band' (horns & woodwinds) instruments needed for kids in school music programs.

3. What methods does your library use to maintain your instruments? Do you find yourselves constantly restringing, repairing, or rewiring any of them?

Instruments by their nature are in constant need of attention, which is why we limit our loan period to four weeks at a time. Most damage can be prevented by keeping an eye on potential issues & catching/preventing problems before they occur.

We are able to do a lot of the basic service & maintenance on site, & we are blessed to have a cadre of local experts who we can turn to for specialized work.

4. Is there a way for folks to see all the instruments available to borrow?

Our inventory changes almost daily, thanks to the constant influx of donated items, so it's a major task to even list the hundreds of instruments available! As our new website develops we hope to post info & pics of interesting, unique or unusual items, eg the Oud, the Bowed Psaltery, & the Charango which have been donated recently...

5. Tell us about how you announced your program! That's great you're getting so much press for this!

Being such a unique concept we have, over the years, enjoyed attention from the media locally to nationally. The recent transfer of operations to join other arts organizations in a redeveloped 1840 waterfront brewery building understandably brought us much more.

6. Any other advice or anything else you'd like to share about your library? Any hang-ups or issues to getting started? Any current problems?

Your venture, like ours, will I'm sure take it's own shape as it develops. If you have an accessible space & reliable staff your main issues are pretty much covered.

There's lots more info to be found on our brand-new website - give it a look....

If there are other questions come to mind please don't hesitate to ask.

cheers

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PS: so when can we expect to see you up here to have a look at Joe's M.I.L.L....?

- Forbes Library (Northampton)

[http://bark.cwmars.org/eg/opac/results?query=musical%20equipment;qtype=keyword;locg=247;\\_adv=1;facet=subject%7Ctopic%5BMusical%20instruments%5D](http://bark.cwmars.org/eg/opac/results?query=musical%20equipment;qtype=keyword;locg=247;_adv=1;facet=subject%7Ctopic%5BMusical%20instruments%5D)

<http://forbeslibrary.org/help/borrow-a-musical-instrument/>

- Lopez Island Library (We circulate guitars, violins, ukuleles, recorders, electronic keyboards, a cello, a banjo and other instruments such as the French Horn and Flugelhorn.)

<http://lopezlibrary.org/music/>

### 3. Survey other institutions which lend musical instruments:

- DIY PHL (West Philly - PA Share)  
<http://www.diyphl.com/content/pa-share>

1. How did the PA Share get started? That is, how did you go about acquiring the equipment? Did you get everything new, or second hand?

*We threw a big event called First Time's The Charm which featured brand new musicians/bands, and the money taken in at the door of that show was used to purchase the PA. We raised approx.. \$1800 and used the entire amount on the system we bought. Most of it was bought new, some was second hand from websites (Musician's Friend, Guitar Center).*

2. Who made the decisions about which brand to buy? Was the PA shaped by any musician requests or was it mostly picked by DIY PHL staff?

We asked the advice from a local live sound engineer (BJ Howze at Red Planet) who helped with sound at First Time's The Charm. He had a lot of good advice about gear that would be loud/professional, but intuitive, simple and durable since our system would be transported a lot and used by some beginners. We chose the gear within the collective (3-4 of us, some of us musicians, some show/event bookers) and just tried to include as much as we could that it would stand alone as a whole system (including power strips/extension cords).

3. What methods does DIY PHL use to maintain your equipment? Do you find yourselves constantly repairing, or rewiring?

We have had surprisingly few repairs. A horn has blown a few times, and once an amp blew and we needed to buy a new speaker – but aside from that, it's been all normal wear and tear. The mic stands and cables need the most replacement but our membership fees generate just enough money to cover those repairs (and not much else!). We do need to clean things much more than we anticipated. Basements/parties are dirty and cords come back covered in dirt and beer sometimes. To preserve the system we have to wipe everything down piece by piece once a month or so.

4. I can't seem to find your instruments in the catalog. If you do in-house cataloging, were there any barriers to getting instruments represented in the catalog? (Not quite DIY PHL's thing I know, haha. In fact you're the only non-library I've contacted so far. I'm just wondering about digital representation of your holdings – I know you utilize the Google calendar – how's that working out?)

We have a list of our gear on our website and occasionally get email inquiries about what exact gear we have or what is compatible with it. As the main person who operates the PA Share, I actually had the least gear knowledge and have had to do a lot of googling. It's been a learning curve

and I've learned a lot just from running the share. We use a public google calendar to show when the PA is free and use a google form that people can fill out to request a date. When we receive their request, we respond with an email confirmation and save the date for them on the public calendar so the date is blocked out. We have a pretty extensive spreadsheet/google doc operation to keep track of everything.

5. Tell us about how you announced your program! That's great you got so much press for this!

At the show that we used to raise money for the system, we had flyers to hand out letting people know where their money was going. We had a website built ahead of time that people could access for information about when the Share would be available. From there, it was all social media and physical flyers hung up around the city. We also have stickers printed with our logo and address.

6. Any other advice or anything else you'd like to share about the PA Share? Any hang-ups or issues to getting started? Any current problems?

Most of our issues have to do with things unique to our program – like that it's lent from our house rather than a public space with public hours – it is reliant on our personal schedules and participation which can be taxing.

#### **B. Instrument Acquisition**

- Buying new or second hand
- Fundraising for our Library? see also:  
<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/build-halifax-an-instrument-library#/story>
- Collection Drive/ Instrument Roundup - donate your unused instrument, you're able to get a tax receipt

#### **C. Cataloging and MetaData**

- Share our info with cataloging
- Educate librarians

#### **D. Opening!**

- Press release
- Event?
- Concert with Donated Instruments?
- Showcase of musical instruments



Photo: Davis County Public Library - Instrument Lending Service - Source: <http://owensboroliving.com/the-buzz/dcpl-stay-tuned-the-story-behind-the-music/>