

## Application: ULC Civic Makers Lab Grant

### Library and Staff Information

**1. Library System**

Fort Bend County Libraries

**2. City or County**

Fort Bend County

**3. State**

Texas

**4. Primary Staff Lead: Full Name**

John Harold

**5. Primary Staff Lead: Title**

Special Projects Manager

**6. Primary Staff Lead: Email**

[john.harold@fortbendcountytexas.gov](mailto:john.harold@fortbendcountytexas.gov)

**7. Primary Staff Lead: Phone Number**

281-633-4744

### Staff Capacity & Motivation

**8. Why is your library interested in joining the Civic Makers Lab?**

**Statement of Interest: Fort Bend County Libraries & ULC's Civic Makers Lab**

Fort Bend County Libraries (FBCL) is deeply committed to advancing civic literacy, equitable access to information, and meaningful community engagement across one of the most diverse and rapidly growing counties in the nation. Participation in ULC's Civic Makers Lab aligns directly with FBCL's mission to strengthen informed, connected, and empowered communities.

Fort Bend County is home to a richly diverse population representing a wide range of cultural backgrounds, languages, ages, and socioeconomic experiences. As a trusted, nonpartisan public institution, FBCL is uniquely positioned to serve as a convening space where residents can explore civic issues, develop critical thinking skills, and engage constructively in dialogue about local priorities. ULC's Civic Makers Lab would provide the framework, training, and peer network necessary to deepen and expand this work.

Through the Civic Makers Lab, FBCL would strengthen staff capacity to facilitate civic learning experiences—particularly for young adults—who are developing their civic identities and leadership skills. The structured support and funding would enable FBCL to:

- Conduct community listening sessions to identify priority civic issues.
- Co-design civic learning programs in partnership with local organizations, educators, and youth leaders.
- Pilot hands-on civic engagement initiatives that encourage informed participation in local decision-making.
- Build sustainable models for ongoing civic education programming.

Fort Bend County's rapid growth presents both opportunity and challenge. New residents often seek trusted institutions that can help them understand local governance, public services, and avenues for participation. Civic Makers Lab participation would enhance FBCL's role as a gateway to civic knowledge and engagement—supporting residents in becoming active, informed contributors to their communities.

Additionally, FBCL has a strong history of innovative programming, digital literacy initiatives, and community partnerships. The Civic Makers Lab would complement existing efforts by integrating civic learning into established service models, ensuring that civic engagement becomes an embedded, sustainable component of library services rather than a standalone initiative.

By joining ULC's Civic Makers Lab, Fort Bend County Libraries would strengthen its capacity to foster civic belonging, encourage respectful dialogue, and equip residents—especially youth—with the tools needed to navigate and shape their civic landscape. This opportunity represents a strategic investment in the long-term civic health of Fort Bend County.

### **9. Who will lead this work, and what is their experience with young adults and/or civic engagement programming?**

The ULC Civic Makers Lab Grant project at **Fort Bend County Libraries** will be led by the Library System's Youth Services Leadership Team under the direction of the Manager of Outreach, Partnership, and Programming. This leadership structure ensures that the project is guided by professionals with extensive experience in serving young adults, developing innovative learning environments, and facilitating community-centered programming across multiple branch locations.

FBCL's Manager of Outreach, Partnership, and Programming brings more than a decade of experience in public library programming, with a specialized focus on young-adult engagement. Their portfolio includes the development of STEAM initiatives, maker-based learning labs, digital-literacy workshops, and college- and career-readiness series tailored to middle school and high school students. They have overseen system-wide summer learning programs reaching thousands of youths annually, incorporating hands-on, inquiry-based learning models that align closely with the Civic Makers Lab framework.

Supporting the project will be branch Youth Services Librarians who collectively represent decades of experience working directly with young adults in diverse suburban and semi-rural communities throughout Fort Bend County. These librarians have successfully facilitated teen/adult advisory boards, youth volunteer programs, and leadership councils that empower young people to shape library services and community initiatives. Through these programs, staff have cultivated strong relationships with teens, young adults, schools, and community-based organizations, ensuring that programming reflects the interests and lived experiences of local youth.

In addition to youth-development expertise, the leadership team has implemented civic-engagement programming designed to foster informed and active participation. Past initiatives have included voter-education workshops (nonpartisan and informational in nature), community-dialogue series, service-learning partnerships, and programs centered on media literacy, local government structure, and community problem-solving. Staff members are trained facilitators in leading respectful, youth-driven discussions on community issues and in creating inclusive spaces where diverse perspectives are welcomed.

FBCL's administrative leadership will provide fiscal oversight, evaluation support, and strategic alignment with countywide goals for community engagement and workforce readiness. Together, this experienced team combines strong project-management capacity, proven success in serving young adults, and a demonstrated commitment to civic learning. Their leadership ensures that the Civic

Makers Lab will be thoughtfully implemented, sustainable beyond the grant period, and responsive to the evolving needs of young people in Fort Bend County.

**10. How would you rate your library's capacity to build/strengthen relationships with young adults?**

(Scale 1 = very limited | 5 = strong) \*

5

**11. How would you rate your library's capacity to facilitate group discussions?**

(Scale 1 = very limited | 5 = strong) \*

5

**12. How would you rate your library's capacity to co-create programming with young adults?**

(Scale 1 = very limited | 5 = strong) \*

5

**13. How would you rate your library's capacity to engage external partners?**

(Scale 1 = very limited | 5 = strong) \*

5

**14. How would you rate your library's capacity to launch new or experimental programs?**

(Scale 1 = very limited | 5 = strong) \*

5

**15. What do you hope the young adults in your community will gain from this experience?**

Intended Outcomes for Young Adults in Fort Bend County Through ULC's Civic Makers Lab  
Participation in the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) Civic Makers Lab will empower young adults in Fort Bend County to gain essential civic capacities that support both individual growth and community

wellbeing. The Civic Makers Lab is designed to build civic learning skills and dispositions that strengthen local democratic engagement and prepare the next generation for active participation in community life.

### **Skills for Civic Engagement and Leadership**

Young adults will develop core civic competencies such as critical thinking, public problem-solving, and collaborative decision-making—skills that are foundational to effective participation in civic life. The Lab’s learning framework emphasizes hands-on, community-centered programming that enables participants to identify local challenges, engage in dialogue with peers and stakeholders, and co-create solutions.

### **Knowledge of Civic Structures and Local Issues**

Participants will gain a deeper understanding of how local government, community organizations, and civic processes function in Fort Bend County. By exploring community needs and civic structures through locally relevant projects and facilitated experiences, young adults will be better equipped to navigate and contribute meaningfully to civic affairs in their region.

### **Confidence and Agency in Civic Participation**

The Civic Makers Lab supports development of self-efficacy and voice, helping young adults see themselves as stakeholders in their community’s future. This includes increased confidence in speaking in public settings, organizing or facilitating conversations, and engaging in respectful deliberation on challenging topics—capacities that strengthen both personal agency and civic culture.

### **Collaborative and Inclusive Problem Solving**

Lab participants will practice co-creation and teamwork across differences, learning how to collaborate with peers from diverse backgrounds to design responses to real community needs. These collaborative experiences reinforce respect for multiple perspectives and prepare young adults to be constructive contributors to inclusive community problem-solving.

### **Pathways to Ongoing Civic Engagement and Career Exploration**

Through sustained engagement with civic learning projects, young adults will be better positioned to pursue future civic, educational, and career opportunities. Whether through volunteerism, public service roles, community organizing, or leadership positions, the Lab experience can help young people envision tangible pathways for continued involvement in civic life.

## 16. What additional supports would help team succeed?

### **Additional Supports to Ensure Success in ULC's Civic Makers Lab**

To maximize the impact of Fort Bend County Libraries' participation in ULC's Civic Makers Lab, targeted investments in capacity-building, technology, staffing, and community engagement will be essential. The following supports will strengthen implementation, sustainability, and measurable outcomes.

Dedicated Staff Capacity and Professional Development

**Need: Successful execution of civic innovation initiatives requires staff time, facilitation expertise, and project management capacity.**

#### **Support Requested:**

Funding for a part-time Civic Engagement Coordinator or stipend support for designated staff leads Professional development in civic design, facilitation strategies, and community-centered engagement

### **Access to peer mentoring and technical coaching through ULC's national network**

**Impact:** Ensures consistent leadership, high-quality community facilitation, and sustained momentum beyond the Lab period.

### **Community Engagement and Outreach Resources**

**Need:** Fort Bend County's diverse and rapidly growing population requires intentional outreach to ensure inclusive participation.

#### **Support Requested:**

#### **Multilingual outreach materials and translation services**

Marketing and communications support (digital, print, and social media campaigns)

Stipends or incentives for community participants, especially those from historically underrepresented groups

**Impact:** Broadens participation, builds trust, and ensures civic initiatives reflect the voices of diverse residents across the county.

### **Technology and Makerspace Enhancements**

**Need:** Civic innovation work often requires access to collaborative tools, digital platforms, and creative technologies.

#### **Support Requested:**

Upgraded collaborative technology (portable AV equipment, hybrid meeting tools, interactive displays)

Civic-tech software or digital engagement platforms

Makerspace materials and prototyping tools for community solution-building

**Impact:** Enables hands-on civic problem solving and expands access to participatory design experiences across library branches.

#### **Data Collection and Evaluation Support**

**Need:** Measuring civic engagement outcomes requires structured evaluation tools and data analysis capacity.

#### **Support Requested:**

Evaluation framework development aligned with ULC Civic Makers Lab goals

Survey tools and impact measurement resources

Data analysis consultation to document outcomes and community impact

**Impact:** Strengthens reporting, demonstrates return on investment, and supports long-term funding sustainability.

#### **Partnership Development and Cross-Sector Collaboration**

**Need:** Civic initiatives thrive through collaboration with local government, schools, nonprofits, and community leaders. Support Requested:

Convening funds for stakeholder roundtables and public forums

Facilitation support for cross-sector planning sessions

Small seed grants for pilot civic innovation projects

**Impact:** Builds durable partnerships, aligns community priorities, and positions FBCL as a trusted civic convener.

#### **Sustainability and Scaling Strategy**

**Need:** Civic innovation efforts should extend beyond the grant period.

#### **Support Requested:**

Strategic planning support for long-term civic programming integration

Development of a sustainability roadmap

Funding to pilot scalable models at multiple branch locations

**Impact:** Ensures Civic Makers Lab participation results in lasting institutional capacity and expanded countywide impact.

In summary, with targeted investments in staffing, technology, outreach, evaluation, partnerships, and sustainability planning, Fort Bend County Libraries will be well-positioned to leverage ULC's Civic Makers Lab as a transformative opportunity. These supports will strengthen the library system's role as a civic

hub, empower residents to co-create solutions, and advance equitable community engagement across Fort Bend County.

**17. What does your library’s current reach with young adults look like? What opportunities or barriers do you see?**

Fort Bend County Libraries (FBCL) offers a wide range of programs, services, and resources for all ages. While adult programming is open to anyone 18 and older, FBCL does not currently offer initiatives specifically designed for the 18–24 demographic as a distinct audience. Young adults do engage with the library — particularly through study space use, select events, volunteer opportunities, and community-wide initiatives — but they are not yet a consistently retained or intentionally cultivated audience.

**Barriers**

- **Life Stage Transitions:** Many young adults in the community are attending college or entering the workforce, which limits their availability and energy for traditional programming formats.
- **Perception of the Library:** The library may be viewed primarily as a space for young children or older adults rather than as a hub for emerging adults navigating college, careers, and civic identity.
- **Limited Targeted Programming:** While FBCL offers some programs relevant to career development and community engagement, these offerings are not consistently tailored to the interests, schedules, or civic priorities of the 18–24 age group.

**Opportunities**

- **Strong Community Convening Power:** FBCL has successfully brought diverse audiences together through initiatives such as the Volunteer Fair, Book Fest, Fort Bend Fandom, Summer Reading Challenge, and library open houses. These large-scale programs demonstrate the library’s ability to attract broad participation and create community-centered experiences.
- **Established Partnerships:** FBCL maintains meaningful relationships with organizations such as the Fort Bend Literacy Council, League of Women Voters, Fort Bend Youth Employment Program, Workforce Solutions, and other community partners, creating a foundation for expanded civic collaboration.
- **Youth Leadership Foundation:** The Teen Advisory Board (grades 9–12) provides a strong model for youth voice and could be expanded to include young adult leadership pathways.
- **Flexible Programming Growth:** Recent expansion of evening and weekend programming has resulted in encouraging attendance trends, indicating that schedule adjustments can improve accessibility.

- **Diversified Programming:** FBCL offers a range of social clubs (book clubs, chess, etc.), technology literacy classes, job readiness support, and volunteer pathways that could serve as natural entry points for civic-focused programming integration.
- **Emerging Postsecondary Growth:** Fort Bend County saw a significant expansion of higher education infrastructure in 2025, including the University of Houston Cullen College of Engineering–Technology Division’s \$65 million, 75,000-square-foot expansion in Sugar Land and Texas State Technical College’s \$35 million, 100,000-square-foot Transportation Technology Center in Rosenberg. These investments signal substantial growth in the 18–24 population and present timely opportunities for FBCL to intentionally engage college-aged young adults through civic learning initiatives and targeted partnerships.

The Civic Makers Lab presents a strategic opportunity to intentionally build on these strengths while addressing identified gaps. Through focused civic learning initiatives and more intentional engagement strategies, FBCL aims to cultivate sustained young adult participation, strengthen leadership pathways, and position the library as a relevant and empowering space for emerging adults in the community.

**18. Please list young adult-serving organizations your library currently works (including the name and any examples of recent collaboration)**

**Fort Bend Partnership for Youth**

- *Volunteer Fair (January 13, 2025)*  
Participated in FBCL’s community-focused Volunteer Fair at George Memorial Library, connecting young adults with local service opportunities and civic engagement pathways.

**International Transformation Foundation**

- *Volunteer Fair (January 13, 2025)*  
Engaged with community members during the Volunteer Fair to share volunteer and service initiatives available to young adults in Fort Bend County.

**Unite & Inspire**

- *Multicultural Festival (May 10, 2025)*  
Collaborated on FBCL’s annual Multicultural Festival celebrating the diverse cultures of Fort Bend County. Provided volunteer instructors for FBCL’s **teen art workshop series (“Color Our World”)**, engaging high school students in global art and cultural exploration.
- Supports Civic Makers Lab priorities by integrating **creative expression, cultural awareness, and storytelling** as forms of civic participation.

- *Art Series: Summer 2025 – “Color Our World: Journey Through Global Art Forms”*  
Partnered with multiple FBCL branches (George Memorial, University Branch, Cinco Ranch, and Sienna) to deliver a summer art series for teens and young adults, promoting cultural awareness, creative expression, and cross-cultural engagement.

### **Fort Bend County Libraries Teen Advisory Groups (TAG)**

**Focus:** Youth leadership, civic participation, and co-creation of services

#### **Example of Collaboration:**

- Teens participate in **Young Adult Advisory Councils**, contributing ideas, organizing programs, and shaping library services.
- Participants earn volunteer hours and engage in **decision-making processes**, representing a core Civic Makers Lab model of **participatory governance and youth voice**.
- TAG initiatives can be expanded into **civic design labs, youth-led research, and community engagement campaigns**.

### **Garage Arts Project**

- *Volunteer Fair (January 13, 2025)*
- *Multicultural Festival (May 10, 2025)*  
Collaborated in community-centered arts and cultural programming that engaged teens and young adults in creative civic expression.

### **Houston Community College, Sam Houston State University, Texas A&M University, University of Houston, and Rider University**

- *College Fair (June 30, 2025 – Sienna Branch Library)*  
Participated in a college fair connecting young adults with higher education opportunities and academic planning resources.

### **Wharton County Junior College**

- *Health Fair (Spring 2026 – upcoming)*  
FBCL will participate in this event to connect with current college students and expand outreach to young adults.
- Ongoing informal outreach and campus engagement.

### **College Community Career**

- *Ongoing Academic & College Readiness Programming*  
Executive Director Kathy Rose regularly collaborates with FBCL to provide workshops on financial

aid, college admissions, and academic planning, supporting young adults in educational transitions.

University Branch Library (Wharton County Junior College & University of Houston Sugar Land Campus)  
Our University Branch Library operates on the shared campus of Wharton County Junior College and University of Houston Sugar Land. The branch provides library orientations for university students and participates in campus events such as Cougar First Impressions. An FBCL Academic Liaison is designated to support campus engagement and student needs.

19. If selected, can your library support your commitment to **attending monthly cohort calls?** \*

**Yes**

20. If selected, can your library support your commitment to **attending two 1.5-day convenings?** \*

**Yes**

21. If selected, can your library support your commitment to **launching a young adult civic learning program including a micro-pilot and at least one larger program?** \*

**Yes**

22. If selected, can your library support your commitment to **participating in evaluation and reporting activities?** \*

**Yes**

23. My library CEO/Director and/or direct supervisor is aware and supports that I am submitting this application.

**Agree**