

Lead Applicant Organization: Old Dominion University Research Foundation on behalf of Old Dominion University

Title: Accessibility in Making: Perspectives from Disability Self-Advocates

Co-PIs: Dr. Amelia Anderson and Dr. Abigail Phillips

Collaborating Organization: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Statement of Broad Need

This exploratory project seeks to discover approaches to support more inclusive and equitable maker programs and makerspaces within public libraries. Although the maker movement has grown and become a learning experience environment (Halverson & Sheridan, 2014), there has been little research into the barriers and inequitable practices individuals with disabilities experience making (Jennings, Coley, Boklage, & Kellam, 2019; Seo, 2019). Public librarians must take the needs of all users into consideration when designing spaces, and activities within spaces, for making. To ensure that library patrons with disabilities, both those that are visible and those that may be hidden, do not have barriers for accessing makerspaces, it is important to first understand what those barriers might be. This study will explore the broad concepts of makerspaces in public libraries with disability self-advocates; findings will be shared with library practitioners such that makerspaces and maker activities can be constructed and conducted to ensure equitable access and inclusive practices.

Project Design

Co-PIs Anderson and Phillips will conduct a series of five focus groups, with up to eight participants each, to collect data from disability self-advocates and stakeholders in the makerspace movement. Conferences identified for focus groups are: TASH, an international disability advocacy organization; ASAN, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network; and The Arc, a group for advocacy and innovation for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Focus groups for librarians with disabilities and librarians involved in maker activities will be held at the ALA Annual Conference. The semi-structured questions of the focus group will provide opportunities for participants to voice their experiences and opinions while reflecting upon those of others. The goals of this project are: to better understand how libraries can improve current making practices and makerspace design; to engage diverse participant viewpoints who will provide constructive feedback to support a more inclusive library; to establish next steps for broadening disability visibility within public library makerspaces.

Focus groups will be conducted to address the following research questions:

RQ1: How do librarians describe practices that relate to, hinder, or support disability inclusion in maker activities?

RQ2: How do disability self-advocates and stakeholders describe practices that relate to, hinder, or support disability inclusion in maker activities?

Diversity Plan

Broad demographic representation will be sought for focus group participation. Disability is intersectional. By holding a series of focus groups with multiple disability stakeholder groups, the researchers will work to ensure that no one person is being asked to speak for the disability community as a whole. By providing funding for conference participation, the researchers are ensuring no one is barred from participation due to financial disadvantages.

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Makerspaces are commonplace in libraries, supported by a growing body of literature to support their implementation. While inclusion is a value held within librarianship, how can we be sure that we are using inclusive practices in makerspaces without hearing from users who may experience barriers themselves? A common saying in disability self-advocacy is “nothing about us without us.” This study will work to ensure that members of the disability community have a voice in shaping the future of inclusive making and makerspaces in libraries.

National Impact

The focus groups in this project will offer the researcher profound insights into what may prevent patrons from participating in making, affordances of makerspaces in libraries that are possible, and how libraries can enhance efforts to be inclusive of all members of their communities. By involving stakeholders as part of the discussion, educational resources and training materials will be developed that can be shared nationally that will help raise awareness about accessibility as a concern for libraries.

Stakeholders from a national audience will be involved in this study as focus group participants and advisory board members. Advisory board members who have agreed to provide consulting support include disability self-advocates, librarians, and makerspace researchers (Heather Moorefield-Lang, PhD., assistant professor at UNC-Greensboro; Zachary Tumlin, librarian and disability self-advocate; Bryce Kozla, youth services librarian and disability self-advocate; and Victor Lee, PhD., associate professor at Stanford University). Anderson and Phillips will share findings through scholarly publications and presentations at national and international conferences, reaching both library practitioners, educators, and researchers. This study is the first step in a broader project; Anderson and Phillips will build upon the findings in this study to apply for future IMLS funding to develop training and education for librarians to improve makerspace accessibility.

References

- Halverson, E. R., & Sheridan, K. (2014). The Maker Movement in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(4), 495–504.
- Jennings, M., Coley, B., Boklage, A., & Kellam, N. (2019, January). Listening to makers: Exploring engineering students’ recommendations for creating a better makerspace experience. *2019 ASEE Annual Conference & Exposition*.
- Seo, J. (2019). Is the Maker Movement inclusive of ANYONE?: Three accessibility considerations to invite blind makers to the making world. *TechTrends*, 1-7.

Budget

The \$95,511 requested for this project will be used largely to ensure equal opportunity for disability self-advocates. Expenses are: conference attendance for focus group participation by disability self-advocates (\$33,320); materials and assistive technologies, including sign language interpreters, to support focus groups and ensure that all meetings are accessible (\$15,000); conference attendance for focus group participation by the researchers (\$10,450); travel for dissemination of research findings (\$1,650); and advisory board member stipends (\$1,200). The ONR negotiated IDC agreement allows 55% of the modified total direct costs (\$33,891).