

Chapter 22

Station North Tool Library

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ABSTRACT

Station North Tool Library is first and foremost a space that provides low-cost access to tools and information to residents in the Station North Arts and Entertainment District of Baltimore, Maryland. Unique in the fact that the tool library has a maker-type workshop space and offers classes and open times for members to make and create. With a staff of four full-time employees and a total square footage of 2,000 ft² (186 m²), the space is not large but has a strong presence in the community and a membership that numbers around 2,300 individuals. Membership is based on a sliding scale at \$1 per \$1000 of income. Learning communities are supported in the space through inclusivity of all members and a management flat-structure where everyone is treated with respect and dignity. This chapter explores the Station North Tool Library.

Every day, somebody comes in and says, “Thank you. I wouldn’t have been able to do this project on my house if it wasn’t for you guys.” - John Shea

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Station North Tool Library (SNTL) or “Station North” is just around the corner from the state-of-the-art Open Works Fabrication and Makerspace building, in the Station North Arts and Entertainment District. Philosophically however, the two are worlds apart in their structure and operations. Open Works Baltimore and SNTL started with funding from the same foundation (Baltimore Arts Realty Corporation: BARCO) but as John Shea, co-founder of SNTL, noted their space is more modest, with around 2,000 ft² (186 m²) of space and four full-time employees and that was done on purpose: to stay nimble and sustain the space. Station North has a relaxed and fun attitude, evidenced by the demeanor of Shea and the fact that not one but two dogs, *Super Dave* the shop dog and *Marty* (the Labrador Retriever), are featured as staff members on the SNTL site’s web page. While dogs in the space are fun John finds they also put people at ease. Shea said it in this way:

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We're dog-friendly, too. And I think that's really important. We try to build a really relaxed environment, and there's three dogs here right now. There's usually like up to five or six. But you know, some places, it's really serious. And I think that that kind of translates into the space. Our most important rule here is be cool and be respectful, but that's kind of wrapped up in just like be cool. We trust people to not take advantage of things and just to [give] respect.

The lending tool library movement started in the mid-1970s with sites in Columbus, Ohio and Berkeley, California as a way to provide local communities with access to tools and information on how to properly use these tools (Berkeley Library Online, n.d.). True to the original mission of the tool lending movement, Station North's purpose is to empower and serve the local community through access to tools and low-cost training and membership. While access to tools is their main emphasis of operation, Station North also acts as a makerspace by having classes and open times for their workshops. Physically, Station North Tool Library (SNTL) is situated amongst row houses and across the street there is a set of brightly colored, newly built houses which shows off the arts ambiance of the neighborhood. The outside of the Station North Tool Library is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The Station North Tool Library Space looking down East Oliver Street



However, it's evident that there are still struggles in the neighborhood, and not all houses have been renovated and are in need of help. John described the recent past of the neighborhood:

It is a really strong African-American neighborhood. It was a really amazing and then went through all different housing crisis stuff, and when we came in five years ago and started building our project, this entire neighborhood was like almost, I would say, 75% vacant. The entire block across the street from us was vacant, vacant homes. The buildings across the street didn't exist. The Baltimore Design School right up the street was an abandoned factory. There was really not a lot happening in this area.

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