MAKERS' TOOLKIT

Fun Palaces in Libraries

A how-to guide for library staff, volunteers and anyone making a Fun Palace in a library.



Pyrography at Paignton Library Fun Palace, Devon. Photo: Mat Stillo

Fun Palaces have happened in allotments, community centres, museums, schools, housing estates, shopping centres, theatres, swimming pools - and, again and again, in libraries. From St Ives to Stirling, libraries are one of the most popular places to make a Fun Palace, because they're already woven into their communities.

This guide covers what Fun Palaces are, how to make one in your library, and how to hand it over to your community so your load is a little lighter.

What are Fun Palaces?

Fun Palaces is a campaign for cultural democracy: the idea that everyone should have a say in what counts as culture, who makes it, where it happens and who it's for. Local people make their own free Fun Palaces, sharing skills, connecting communities and creating tiny revolutions.

Since 2014, more than 50,000 Makers have made over 2,800 Fun Palaces, with almost a million people taking part. Every year there's a Fun Palaces Weekend of Action - in 2027 it's **1st to 3rd October** - and you can make a Fun Palace on any other date too.

A Fun Palace is...

Free

Free to come, free to take part.

Local

Made by local people for local people. In a library, local means your staff and volunteers, your regulars - and the people nearby who never come in because they don't think the library is for them. Rather than putting on an event for them, hand your space over and let them decide what happens.

For all ages

It's easy to think up activities for children, but what about the 17-year-old who doesn't think of themselves as a child, or the 75-year-old who never gets to play? Children and young people are welcome as Makers in their own right.

Inclusive

Even small steps make a big difference: easy-to-read signs, step-free access, and inviting groups who don't usually come to share their own interests.

Hands-on

Arts, science, craft, tech, digital, heritage, sport - whatever brings people together. Everyone gets to have a go.

Yours

You know your library and your community. The process matters as much as the day: the meetings, the cups of tea, the conversations.

> "I've met a young girl today who I've never spoken to before and she lives on my street. Through chatting I've found out her grandma was my best friend at school."
>
> Participant, South Elmsall Library Fun Palace

A Fun Palace isn't...

- **A fête or an open day.** Part of the point is helping people see that they can make a Fun Palace too, and feel that the library is theirs.
- **Just a community arts project, or just science communication.** It's both and neither: people share their hobbies, enthusiasms and secret skills alongside professional ones.
- **Ordinary face painting.** Turn the ordinary upside down. At Brixton Library, people learnt to paint their own bones, muscles and veins on their skin - or let the children paint the adults' faces.

What should happen at your library's Fun Palace?

Whatever you - and, more importantly, your community - want to happen. There's no right or wrong way for a Fun Palace to look.

> "We used every single inch of space: boxing in one corner, someone teaching people how to make pasta in another, someone teaching illustration in another. Then there was tai chi next to the boxing - and someone teaching people how to make perfume."
>
> Caroline, Library Manager

Library Fun Palaces have included crafting, nature and growing, local history and heritage, food, games and gaming, digital making, languages, science experiments, sport, music and much more. Browse over 50 tried-and-tested ideas at funpalaces.co.uk/makers-toolkit/resources/activity-ideas.

Handing over

You and your colleagues may be keen to run activities yourselves, and that's great. But the more you hand over to your community, the more it becomes theirs - and the lighter your own load.

> "The library connected us to their volunteers, staff and the Friends of Lancaster Library group, and all of them have been involved in different ways. It's been a really exciting relationship for us to develop."
>
> Emma Rucastle, Fun Palace Maker, Lancaster Library

Practical ideas for handing over

- **Start early if you can.** April or May is a good time to start meeting people and finding out what they'd love to share. (And if you're reading this in September, see "Last-minute Fun Palaces" below.)
- **Hold a skills swap.** Invite people to bring a skill or hobby to share - a mini Fun Palace earlier in the year.
- **Put up a skills-share sign-up sheet** where people can leave their name, contact details and the skill they'd share.
- **Talk to groups already using the library** - knit and natter, parents at storytime, reading groups, homework clubs.
- **Use the Fun Palaces Skill Share postcards.** A postbox in the library is a lovely way to find Makers. Email alicia@funpalaces.co.uk to order them.

A suggested timeline

You could decide to make a Fun Palace the night before and it would be just as valid. But libraries are busy - especially over the summer holidays - so here's a timeline that gets most of the work done early.

When	What
March	A first meeting with staff and volunteers to share what a Fun Palace is. The video on the Libraries page of the Fun Palaces website does this for you.
April	An open meeting for your community and library staff. Find out what skills people could share.
May	Put your Fun Palace on the map at funpalaces.co.uk, so people can find you.
July	A catch-up with everyone involved - new people welcome. Look out for free Fun Palaces workshops from late summer.
September	A final planning meeting for the timetable and practicalities. Add your timetable to your Fun Palace page.
October	The Weekend of Action, 1st to 3rd October 2027. Have fun!

Last-minute Fun Palaces

Picking this up in September and worried you've left it too late? You haven't. Every year, Fun Palaces sign up in the final few weeks - and even the day before.

Keep it small and work with people you already know: staff, volunteers and groups already using the library. Just one or two things happening is still a Fun Palace. Put up some posters, tie up some bunting and you're ready.

Top tips from library Makers

- **Use what you know about your borrowers.** Who has read every book on natural history and might share what they know? Who's always borrowing cookery books?
- **Get nosy.** Chat to people about what they love and whether they'd like to be involved.
- **Flip it.** Instead of the usual children's crafts, ask the children to teach the adults something.
- **Connect with local groups** - your RSPB group, swimming club, choir or local history society.

- **Start small.** Two or three things happening is absolutely fine. Next year, more people will know what a Fun Palace is, and it will grow.
- **Look after yourself.** You don't have to do it all. Read the Look after yourself guide on the Fun Palaces website.

> "Say yes and work out the details later."
>
> Miriam Storey, Library Manager, Eltham

> "One of the first things we had to do was teach everyone at our library what a Fun Palace is and what it isn't."
>
> Zoey Dixon, Librarian, Brixton Library

Spreading the word

Make your Fun Palace easy to find: posters, direction arrows, chalk on the pavement, signs and banners. Or let the fun spill outside with an activity or two by the door.

Annie Smith from Dacorum Fun Palace shared what worked for her:

- She posted every day for the eight days before, featuring each activity and the person running it, with a link to the Fun Palace page every time.
- She sent the logos and images to everyone running activities, so they could share it too.
- Local schools included it in their parent newsletters.
- Her press release was picked up by the local paper, online magazines and BBC Three Counties Radio - she was on air at 8am on the morning of the Fun Palace.
- The local shopping centres shared it on their social media.

Templates, press tips and social media ideas are all in the Publicity Toolkit. Every Fun Palace can ask for printed posters and leaflets - email alicia@funpalaces.co.uk.

Useful links

- Libraries page - the latest version of this guide, a video for library staff, the libraries podcast and library Maker Stories.
- Getting Started - a step-by-step guide to making a Fun Palace.
- Resources - risk assessments, accessibility, funding, sustainability and more.
- Maker Stories - how other Makers have done it.
- Maker Network - meet other Makers and share how you do it.

> **Questions, ideas or want to talk it through?** Email hello@funpalaces.co.uk - the team is always happy to chat. Fun Palaces also has Ambassadors in some areas; ask us and we'll put you in touch.