Cultural Community Solutions (CCS) is testing and developing the potential to establish Creative Work Spaces within a library context and, in particular, seeks to co-design new complimentary services within library branches with library users. The following case study outlines their learning to date.

Context
Cultural Community Solutions is a not-for-profit subsidiary of Carillion. Cultural Community Solutions (CSS) manages Croydon, Ealing, Harrow and Hounslow library services on behalf of their local authorities. In addition to service delivery contracts, the libraries generate income through room hire, gallery space and exhibitions at present.

During the course of the pilot project, CCS explored the potential to rent space to establish a more comprehensive service offer linked to the establishment of “creative work spaces”. Simply stated, the idea of the project was to scope out and further define the proposed service offer, exploring the potential for Fabrication Laboratories, or ‘Fab Labs’ and small business incubation spaces to fit with deliverables developed through the concurrent Enterprising Libraries project. Before engaging with the programme, the libraries had already established some links with the economic development departments in the local authorities and participated in the Enterprising Libraries programme which have since proved particularly helpful.

Exploring creative work spaces
The intention of the pilot project was to test the concept of creating added value work spaces within a library setting, drawing on the influence of other projects. The aim was to explore with local communities the potential scope and design of such spaces, as well as the operating models that might sustain them. Initial work, following a high-level site options appraisal, focussed on one library in each of the four boroughs of Ealing, Croydon and Hounslow and Harrow. The aspiration is for the Creative Work Spaces to enable individuals living in all four boroughs to use tools and support to develop hobbies, creativity and even business ideas or small/sole trader enterprise in library spaces - redefining their use and understanding of their public library. For local enterprises there is potential, also, for them to showcase their business products and undertake market research.

Two main potential sources of income were explored:

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• Payments by the general public for using value added facilities and services (including subscription and one-off payment models).

• Commissioned services and/or partnerships with local government enterprise teams, third sector enterprise organisations, co-operative banks and credit unions targeting small businesses, local higher and further Education institutions.

CCS also explored the potential to generate income from the delivery of related specialist workshops – for example, to teach people how to operate 3D printers.

The activities undertaken in the course of the pilot project were:

• Developing three local partnership forums (one in each library service) to create strong relationships with stakeholders to both understand how they might want/be able to contribute to the offer and to ensure that the offer is effectively publicised to potentially interested parties in the local area.

• Scoping resources and spaces that could be made available in each library service.

• Conducting research with local people in each local authority area to understand what they would value in a creative work space, explore potential pricing structures and willingness to pay (this may need to be conducted in two phases).

• Developing initial pilot activities to test interest in the offer and willingness to pay.

Market research activities
CCS focussed on four key audiences in the course of undertaking market research:

Local populations –

• CCS publicised the prospect of it introducing maker spaces through the local libraries, the library websites as well as via ‘Meetup’: http://www.meetup.com/.

• CCS hosted three public meetings with members of the public interested in the Creative Work Space in Northolt library in Ealing, with an average attendance of 12 people and a Meetup community of 33 people.

• In Croydon, the prospect of setting up a Creative Work Space has been raised with a local Residents Association, which has been very supportive, and discussions are ongoing with councillors.

Local authority partners –

• The aims of this engagement exercise have been to raise awareness of the project among partners in the enterprise development, adult services and education teams across the four local authorities - specifically, engaging any local teams that focus on the areas where the libraries are located. These partners will spread the word about the spaces, and identify any avenues of funding they may be aware of to ensure that the project is linked into wider work they are involved with.
Other maker spaces –

- Maker spaces tend to have a strong co-operative ethos and CCS approached them to help spread the word about the new maker spaces it plans to open as well as to explore avenues for partnership working and co-operation once the creative work spaces are up and running.

- CCS is now a member of the Open Workshop London forum and attends regular meetings to update other maker spaces about its plans; there is broadly very strong support for developing maker spaces in libraries from this group.

- Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College (WLC) have recently launched their own tech lab http://wlc.ac.uk/thinglab and there is scope for creative work spaces to link up with students through the ‘Thinglab’ going forward.

Partners to support delivery –

- CCS has approached tech start-ups and presented its project at Croydon Tech City meetings to gauge interest in running workshops and coding clubs in it’s creative work spaces.

- Manufacturers of equipment and academic institutions were approached to see if they would be interested in supporting the spaces.

- There has been a very positive reaction and CCS will soon host its first workshop to teach the public how to operate its new 3D printer in Northolt Library, with more to follow in future.

- CCS has also been in contact with Wimbletech who will be doing some market research in the four boroughs to scope the potential of setting up a co-working space to run alongside the creative maker spaces.

Market research outcomes

A map of makerspaces in London demonstrates a significant gap in provision in the North, West and South West of the city, which is exactly in line with where CCS library services are located: http://openworkshopnetwork.com. Furthermore, market research showed that the gap in provision does not correlate with a lack of community interest or need for maker spaces. Over-crowding and a lack of suitable accommodation in which to practice practical hobbies is cited by members of the Northolt community as reasons why they wish to participate in a Creative Work Space to pursue their hobby, interest or business idea. Based on its community engagement exercise so far, CCS customers are mainly local residents and makers from surrounding areas, although the Northolt project is attracting more men than women - perhaps, due to the fact that it is more technology-oriented.

Northolt Creative Maker Space: Several meet-ups at Northolt library were set up as the basis of our consultation with the community. The idea, looking ahead, is to develop a space within Northolt library where people can explore, learn and make use of the most up-to-date making technologies, as well as undertake more low-tech projects. Ultimately, CCS hopes that the space will be a creative hub for the local community, building interest in learning and micro-enterprise – and, crucially, a space co-owned by the library service, the community and local stakeholders. Advice, in this regard, was sought from Independent Mind; the Waiting Room in Colchester; the Common Libraries initiative; Devon Fab Lab; Create Space London and the South London Makerspace.
Cranford Creative Maker Space: Another meet-up has been arranged for Cranford Library, although CCS engagement with the community in Cranford is considered a longer term project, by virtue of its existing and prospective user demographic. CCS held an initial meeting with prospective partners including the Council and, especially, Adult Education as well as with other relevant local organisations. It also forged links with Cranford Stronger Together which focuses on identifying existing networks on the estate and, in particular, how these networks can be used to support struggling and isolated individuals.

Norbury Creative Maker Space: CCS has entered into discussions with the council regarding the use of the space at Norbury library and how best to involve the community in implementation of the project. There are two rooms available at the library, and the discussions with the council concern one of the spaces which hasn’t been used for a few years. CCS plans to help establish a film club in the room which will also be used for relevant workshops, talks and seminars.

Harrow Creative Maker Space: The council ran a consultation with the public about the future of the libraries, with the potential of possible closures, concurrent with the pilot project. As a result, the project in Harrow is on hold until CCS is clear about the outcome and next steps.

Pricing
Following initial scoping work with input from experienced managers of maker spaces as well as with library staff, CCS decided that the maker space element of creative work spaces should operate on a subscription model according to a sliding scale linked to users’ ability to pay. A charge of £5-£20 per month for unlimited use of the spaces will therefore be requested on a self-certified basis (i.e. rather than verified by evidence which would introduce disproportionate costs to the charging regime). This will apply to all of its creative work spaces, and feedback from the Northolt meetings suggests that people are content to pay a subscription on a monthly basis.

The fees are intended to sustain the space in terms of materials and maintenance of equipment so that there is not a dependence on securing grants in future, but also so that the original investment in equipment represents a sound investment. This “honesty scheme” approach is intended to try and achieve a balance between maximising accessibility, and establishing a viable level of income from and for the spaces. This model is similar to other maker spaces operating in London and will ensure that CCS spaces complement other social enterprises operating in this market - rather than under-cutting or undermining their membership or fee generating models. It also means that CCS maker spaces should be eligible to benefit from any London-wide reciprocal membership agreements that are developed in future. Those attending initial meetings to gauge interest in the maker spaces and their model of operation were also positive about the fee level and the community-led management approach.

Resources
The total capital investment to establish the services is expected to be around £15,000 although will depend on the outcome of ongoing work to identify equipment needs. This investment will be in start-up equipment in each library space as CCS does not propose to provide consumables or cover other expenses, which will need to be contributed by makers themselves along with the makerspace fees solicited.

CCS are providing the library space and covering the overheads (electricity, insurance, wi-fi) as an in-kind contribution to support the development of the maker spaces during development. This is regarded as an investment in their longer term development to help attract new users to the libraries. Further work is required to more clearly identify and quantify the income strands as the groups develop.
Staff and volunteers
The project, to date, has been managed by CCS’s Adult Services Manager in collaboration with staff from the four designated libraries, the Marketing and Communications Officer and the Cultural Development Officer.

As CCS want the spaces to be self-sufficient in future, it does not expect staff to get directly involved in their management. Nonetheless, staff have been very positive and enthusiastic about the project from the outset and perceive significant added value in developing creative work spaces within CCS managed libraries.

CCS are, therefore, eager to engage the support of volunteers to help them manage and run the spaces. Volunteer role specifications are being prepared with this in mind, and they had already managed to secure a volunteer to run a code club for children at Northolt library, as well as being in discussions with others to run code clubs at Norbury and Wealdstone libraries, at the time of reporting learning from the pilot programme.

There has, however, been substantial staff time invested in setting up the meetup groups, investigating potential partners and sources of funding and resources, as well as in planning and designing the approach for the spaces. CCS envisages that this up-front investment of time will taper down as the spaces become established and each making community agrees a formal structure at the local level before taking responsibility for the management and day-to-day maintenance of its own space.

Due to various administrative and organisational issues in gaining approval for the use of the spaces identified in the libraries it is taking longer than anticipated for CCS to make the creative work spaces operational and, as a result, it has not been possible to test the financial viability of the co-operative makerspace model in its public libraries yet. However, it will begin evaluating the financial viability of the spaces once the first space in Northolt is functioning – prospectively, during Spring 2015.

Capital investment requirements
CCS secured £6,000 from Ealing Council to invest in equipment for Northolt Library. It also set aside £7,000 for the spaces in two other boroughs, which will be match-funded by the local authority.

CCS has been in discussions with Croydon Economic Development Team who are keen to work with them in a bid to support the creative work space. It has also been in discussion with Croydon Tech City, a Community Interest Company which is promoting Croydon as a hi-tech start-up zone in Outer London.

CCS is also in the process of securing some funding from Hounslow Council to support the creative work space at Cranford because it is a low-participation area that does not currently score well on wellbeing measures and the creative work space can support participation, wellbeing and community cohesion.

CSS has secured a long-term no-cost loan of a 3D printer and low-cost loan of another printer from Ultimaker who have also committed to running a workshop in Northolt library to help the public understand how to use the printer. This is understood to be a pilot approach and they may roll out this offer to the other three creative work spaces once they are up and running, because of the marketing and business development potential of the spaces being located in libraries and available to the whole community.

CCS plans to approach Trotech to see if they will offer a good deal on a laser cutter. Open Workshops London has provided them with information about other sources of funding and other suppliers who may provide equipment for low or no cost to maker spaces.
Once the space is up and running, there are plans to build partnerships with makers and artists to enable the group to bid for a Libraries Fund Grant for the Arts project which will develop the potential and impact of creative work space. CSS is planning a small initial bid, to test its proposition, of around £10,000 which will be followed by a larger bid of up to £50,000 if the initial bid is successful.

**Development support**

CSS gained substantial insight into the usual running of maker spaces from Tom Lynch (South London Makerspace) and Rory Gallagher (Createspace London) who run their own maker spaces in London in the course of participating in the pilot programme. This enabled them to understand the principles of a community-led and managed maker space, which include ensuring that the community has a say in the resources and equipment that is purchased for the space from the outset, rather than adhering to established ‘formulas’ for example formally branded “Fab Labs”, and ensuring that the community is constituted before the maker space becomes operational. They also advised on the constitution of separate governance and financial arrangements for the maker spaces, which mean that although they are linked to the main library space, they will be self-managing and empowered to make their own decisions about budgets and investment going forward.

CSS acknowledges that it will continue to explore how the maker spaces can best interact with main library spaces, and operate service roll-out and development on an agile and iterative basis in partnership with those maker groups that are established over the coming period. This includes from a financial perspective, since none of the spaces are currently operational, but many of the makers involved have expressed interest in running workshops for the community in the library and from the new maker space.

CSS also plans to develop an agreement or code of practice between each maker space and its host library to ensure the relationship remains positive and the maker space adheres to the ethos of the public library in future.

**Outcomes**

The intended outcomes longer term are to:

- Establish a model to work with the community to co-produce services that the community see as relevant.
- Be creative with the use of library spaces, as the traditional physical book issue declines libraries need to review their use of space for different purposes.
- Establish a self-sustaining model of service delivery for aspects of the service and generate an income.

In Northolt, CSS now has a group of 33 makers in its dedicated Meetup group, which is equivalent to 12 people attending each planning meeting in practice. Most of these makers were not library members and around ten have signed up for library cards. However, the space is still not furnished or functioning and CCS hopes that the final membership will be much higher. It has already facilitated a 3D printer workshop and benefited from a much higher attendance for this practical, hands-on session. It is being evaluated for user experience as well as to gauge whether it has changed perceptions of the public library service as envisaged, not least, because it is also expecting related Code Clubs and co-working space to attract new library membership in future. CSS currently have not been able to form groups in the other library locations as these have not been confirmed. However they are planning to start the meetup group in Cranford library, Hounslow in the next month.
During the development work, to date, many prospective members of the maker spaces have indicated that they value the opportunity to meet like-minded people in a safe, neutral space. Community members also spontaneously mention the desire to transmit their skills and knowledge to the community - suggesting potential benefits, both in terms of learning, but also in fulfilment and meaningful activities for those sharing their knowledge and skills.

When people join the Meetup site, they are asked what they would like to use a maker space in a library for, and here are a selection of their answers:

- “Make strange and unusual bespoke objects for strange people to enjoy”.
- “I am approaching retirement from working with CAD and 3D printing on architectural and urban planning projects. I am keen to keep “my hand in””. 
- “I love making things, I’m a graphic designer by trade and very interested in getting involved in this project”.
- “Run arts and crafts workshops”.
- “I want to be able to design my own robots”.

Because the creative work spaces are not yet operational it is difficult to know how they will finally impact on the library service. However, simply presenting the idea to stakeholders, members of the public and potential delivery partners (many of whom had no prior interactions with the library service) has created a shift in perceptions of the public library. While people instinctively think that maker spaces fit very well with the aims and objectives of the public library, they often do not expect the public library to be offering that kind of space and finding out about the project makes people reassess their relationship with the public library and the kinds of opportunities the library offers to them.

**Key learning**

- The CCS experience indicates that there is significant interest in creative workspaces and maker spaces where it operates library services. However, interest has varied considerably from one branch to another, suggesting that demographics may determine whether or not there is sufficient interest in any given area.

- Although most staff were very enthusiastic about the idea of the creative work spaces, there were some concerns about the role that they would be expected to play in running the spaces – which was one of the factors that led to the delivery model CCS has decided to develop, supporting independent groups to manage the facilities once they are established.

- Supporting the development of community-led spaces is preferred – so, in contrast to CCS establishing creative workspaces – because the aim is to develop ownership and involvement on the part of the community as well as to minimise the burden on existing library staff.

- An honesty approach and sliding scale subscription model based on a pay what you can afford principle works well in some other maker spaces and was supported by initial consultations. It is hoped that this model will help maximise accessibility and revenue in keeping with the public library ethos.

- The ethos of maker spaces is that the people using the space will care for the space and share learning. CCS hopes to use the maker space as a pilot for potentially rolling out this kind of co-operative approach to
extending library services in other areas, and to ensure the local community is invested in and participating fully in the development of local library services.

- Focussing on the creative maker space idea has real potential to attract new audiences into libraries that aren’t engaging at present.

- Online community sites such as Meetup.com can provide a very useful, low cost way of publicising creative work spaces and of generating a committed and enthusiastic community in the space. However, they should be used alongside more traditional ways of promoting the Meetups, e.g. via posters in libraries, to ensure less digitally literate and/or digitally excluded members of the local community are also engaged. Nonetheless, social media can also help to provide useful links to other like-minded local organisations operating in the vicinity of the Creative Work Spaces via their own meetup groups. For example, Croydon Tech City provided links to individuals wishing to share their skills in libraries and with other social enterprises such as Wimbletech, who may deliver co-working spaces in some CCS managed libraries in future, subject to the outcome of related feasibility studies.

- CCS found the Open Workshop London network to be a useful way to engage with a wide range of other makerspaces and find out about a diverse range of funding pots that may support the development of the creative work spaces.

- Other library maker spaces, such as Devon FabLab and the Waiting Room in Colchester, gave their time, expertise and support very generously - for example, by providing volunteer specifications and lists of equipment they have purchased or by sharing an understanding of how they developed their community and ethos. CCS recommends developing a national network of library maker spaces as more are opened across the country, to provide a community of practice to support the development of this unique intersection between the public library service and the maker space movement.

- Security and design issues can have a significant impact on the viability of a space as a maker space - in particular, allowing for secure access outside of core opening hours in a way that doesn’t compromise security of other library facilities.

- Council approval processes have had an impact on setting up some of the spaces and CCS awaits confirmation as to how to proceed and engage with the community. Concerns about the impact of localised work on wider service consultations have delayed progress in some areas.