

**JOSEPH F. SHUBERT LIBRARY EXCELLENCE AWARD APPLICATION**

Please check one category only: **Individual Library** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Library Consortium (System)XX** \_\_\_\_\_

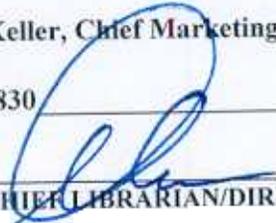
NAME OF LIBRARY OR LIBRARY CONSORTIUM (SYSTEM) Queens Library \_\_\_\_\_

PARENT INSTITUTION: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: 89-11 Merrick Boulevard, Jamaica, NY 11432 \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT NAME: James Keller, Chief Marketing Officer \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER: (718)990-0830 \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_  
  
CHIEF LIBRARIAN/DIRECTOR

**For Consortia applications:**

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_  
CHIEF OFFICER

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_  
CHIEF OFFICER

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**1. a) Briefly describe your library or library consortium (system) and its community. Provide information about size, budget, type, users. b) Briefly describe your project/achievement.**

a) Queens Library is one of New York City's three independent public library systems. It consists of a Central Library, 61 branch libraries, 7 Adult Learning Centers and 2 Family Literacy Centers. It serves 2.2 million people in one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse counties in the U.S. Total annual budget in FY 2010 was approximately \$100 million.

Queens Library for Teens is located in Far Rockaway. Total budget for Queens Library for Teens is approximately \$475,000 a year, most of it grant-funded from multiple State and federal sources. Far Rockaway is an economically disadvantaged community. Local housing projects are riddled with gang activity. It is located on an oceanfront peninsula, physically isolated from most of New York City. Unemployment is high due to the difficulty of commuting. Although there have been many re-investment and re-development initiatives over the years, none have made much progress.

b) Queens Library for Teens opened in December 2008 in Far Rockaway, NY. It is two blocks from the full-service branch library but worlds apart in ambience, function and community impact. It has unilaterally renewed library service for the community at every age level, because it directs and serves teens in and out of school who had previously been disruptive. At the same time, it gives teens incentive to stay in school/get a GED and directs them into socially positive activities. Dedicated youth counselors provide service and referrals, while librarians at the full-service branch give in-depth traditional reference services. Collections, programs and facilities are geared toward the interests of teens. A key component is that the teens must behave in an acceptable manner in order to gain entry, something that becomes more and more attractive as the Queens Library for Teens gains its street cred. Features that attract users are a new professional-grade sound recording booth, Wii, video gaming, magazines, multi-user computers, manga, popular programs such as "So You Think You Can Dance" which drew more than 300. Pre-GED classes are given in the space before it opens at 2:30. More than 120 teens use the center every week day.

**2. How did you identify the user need(s) for your project?**

The full-service library branch in Far Rockaway is among the most heavily-used, but it is housed in a library of only 9,000 square feet. While the library served the full-spectrum of neighborhood users, large groups of teens would congregate in the library because they had no where else in the community to go. The library did not have a separate young adult area. Another demographic, those who had already dropped out of high school, hung out in the library during the day while their age-mates were in school. Other users were intimidated and the whole library was disrupted by the noise and horseplay.

Queens Library has had a Youth Empowerment Model for several years. When faced with a lot of undirected teen energy in the library, they seek to positively engage them via teen-friendly programming and collections, a relaxed set of rules, the services of dedicated youth counselors who work with the young adults' environmental, social and academic challenges as well as their informational and reference needs. The success of the program depends on a space in which to hold it, where it will not disturb other library users. No such space existed in Far Rockaway. Expanding the library was impossible.

An added urgency was the presence of heavy gang activity. There was a lot of peer pressure for teens to drop out of school. Street shootings were badly frightening the whole community. The library was

respected as neutral territory, but did not have the facilities to give “safe haven” to all the young people who needed it.

The Community Library Manager at the time had grown up in the community. She told of a young man whom she had known since his childhood who came into the library with a handful of money and asked her to help him take care of it. He had made it selling a small amount of drugs. Having failed at school in the early grades and then dropping out at the first opportunity, he had neither the education nor the skills to “take care of business.” It was a heart-breaking and eye-opening moment.

### **3. What did your library or library consortium (system) do to respond to that (those) need(s)? What challenges were met?**

Queens Library for Teens opened in 2008. The library’s regular hours are 2:30 – 6 every Monday through Friday. Pre-GED classes are held in the mornings. The annual budget is approximately \$475,000 per year, most of it funded by grants. It is staffed by a full time Youth Counselor, two part-time Youth Counselors, plus a couple of hourly-rate Youth Workforce Development workers. They handle programming, homework assistance and social service referrals if needed. In-depth research and reference is done by librarians at the full-service library branch down the street.

With the encouragement of the community, Queens Library pursued grants including a federally-funded Juvenile Justice Grant, to support the renting of an empty storefront to house the teen library. It is two blocks away from the full-service library. It is 3,500 square feet. Funding for furniture and outfitting was very limited. Queens Library called on an interior design consultant who specializes in teen spaces. High-energy paint colors were chosen for the walls, the cement floors were just topped with gloss, a few soft seating pieces encouraged lounging and slouching, and the rest are bare-bones folding tables and magazine racks.

The “bait” that draws teens to the space has been technology, the kind they crave but is too expensive for most of them to have at home. The Queens Library for Teens has 40 customer-use computers with high-speed internet access. That compares to a mere 22 that the full-service library has to serve *everyone*. The teen computers can be used to do homework, access Facebook, email and all the other apps that are so attractive. Snacking is allowed, another irresistible draw which could not be accommodated in the regular library, and the library provides food whenever the budget allows. Pizza makes a lot of new friends. Programming is key. Computer skills workshops, career development, job readiness fairs, college fairs, meet your favorite urban fiction authors, open mics, all engage young adults in a positive way and encourage them to use the library even just to hang out. The library serves more than 120 teens daily. The alternative would have been to be out in the street.

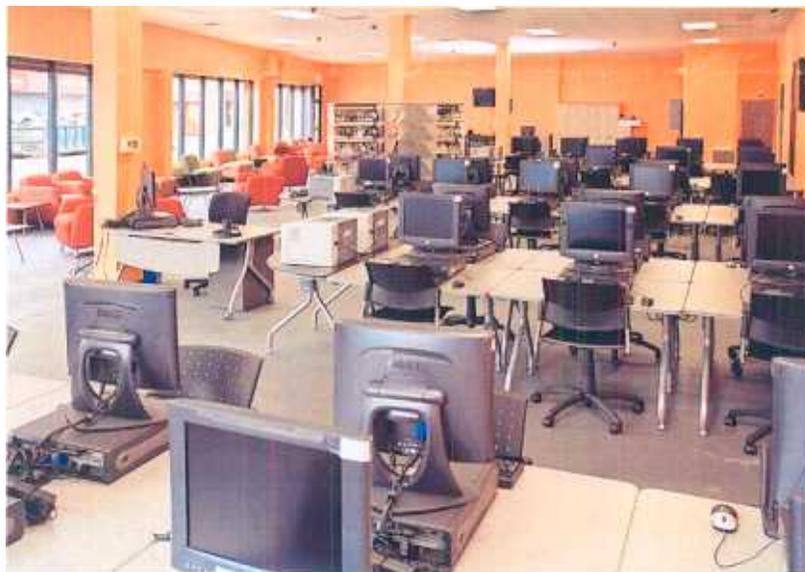
Nothing succeeds like success. Queens Library for Teens has been such an obviously successful alternative to delinquency, additional grant monies were sought and received. Large format gaming consoles draw the kids into healthy competition. Recently, the pièce de résistance, a professional sound-recording booth with editing stations, was installed. It was funded by two State Assembly Members. In order to be allowed recording sessions, teens must attend six sessions of training. They learn to work the recording/editing software (computer and math skills), how to write music and lyrics (language arts) and how to start your own recording business (business skills). It has generated a tornado of excitement.

Security is handled in a simple and straightforward manner: if someone is acting out, they are asked to leave. If it is repeated, they lose privileges for a week or longer. Everyone is asked to sign in as they come in. No gang colors or signs are permitted in order to maintain neutrality. Beyond that, there have

been no measures necessary and no incidents of note. The teens want to use the space. They respect the space.

In setting up Queens Library for Teens, challenges arose as to which parts of the collection would be housed at the Library for Teens and which would remain at the full-service library. Because the cost of duplicating resource materials and/or setting up circulation services was prohibitive, none of the material at Queens Library for Teens circulates. Young Adults may use the many periodicals and online resources in the library. To borrow they must go down the street.

Queens Library had been part of the community's redevelopment partnership for many years. The library has worked with community liaisons at the police precinct (one of the most crime-ridden in NYC) to give job training and academic support to youth-at-risk. In partnership with other organizations, high-school level tutors were hired to give homework assistance at the library. Queens Library for Teens is the most effective iteration to-date.



**4. What impact did this project have on your users and/or your community? Supply quantifiable data if appropriate.**

Queens Library for Teens immediately returned the full-service library to efficient operations because it removed a distraction – undirected teens – from the equation. Adults and children were more inclined to come to the library because all the computers were not being taken up by the young adults and because it had returned to a calmer atmosphere. One year after the Teen Library, circulation of materials at the regular library had jumped almost 15%.

Queens Library for Teens serves about 33,000 young adults a year. Certainly, some of them would have had much less of an academic focus if they didn't not have the library to turn to.

The Library provides a venue for pre-GED classes. Those attendees also would have a much worse outcome if not for Queens Library for Teens.



*The girl on the left, pictured at the Queens Library for Teens, was killed a few weeks after this picture was taken. She was an uninvolved bystander at a gang shooting. The library provided grief counseling to her shocked friends.*