

# PUBLIC LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO CHECKOUT KITS

Today's libraries are centers for exploration, creativity, learning, and community connection. Checkout kits expand access to experiences patrons may not otherwise have while encouraging hands-on learning, family engagement, skill-building, and lifelong curiosity. These kits can help your library reach new audiences and provide meaningful experiences beyond the walls of your rural, small town, or busy city library. And you don't need a huge budget to get started! A few thoughtfully designed kits can make an impact.

## **Checkout kits can help your library:**

- Increase circulation and patron engagement
- Support lifelong learning and exploration
- Promote digital and information literacy
- Encourage family and intergenerational learning
- Provide equitable access to tools and experiences
- Showcase the evolving role of the library

## **Start with Purpose**

Before purchasing materials, think about what your community needs most. Start with a small pilot collection. Five successful kits are better than fifty overwhelming ones.

## **Questions to Consider**

- Who are your primary audiences? (children, teens, adults, seniors, families)
- What community interests exist?
- What gaps could your library help fill?
- Which kits are realistic to manage?
- Will items be consumable, reusable, or mixed?

- How will patrons discover and reserve kits?
- What storage and inventory systems will work best?

## Checkout Kit Ideas by Audience

### Families & Young Children

Support early literacy, exploration, and family engagement.

- **Early Literacy Kits:** Pair books with interactive experiences.
  - **Ideas include:**
    - Storytime backpacks
    - Read-and-play kits
    - Letter and phonics games
    - Story retelling puppets
    - Sensory play kits
  - **Example:** A transportation-themed picture book + toy vehicles + simple activities + caregiver guide
- **STEAM Exploration Kits**
  - Magnets and engineering activities
  - Building challenges
  - Nature exploration backpacks
  - Beginning coding kits
  - Science discovery bags

### Tweens & Teens

Encourage creativity, identity exploration, and hobbies.

- **Creative Kits**
  - Graphic novel drawing kits
  - Jewelry-making kits
  - Embroidery or crochet starter kits
  - Photography challenges
  - Journaling kits

- **Tech & Maker Kits**
  - Podcasting equipment
  - Coding kits
  - Stop-motion animation tools
  - Robotics kits
  - Electronics exploration kits
- **Gaming & Social Kits**
  - Tabletop role-playing kits
  - Escape room experiences
  - Board game bundles

## **Adults**

Libraries are increasingly hubs for practical skills and personal enrichment.

- **Hobby & Creativity Kits**
  - Gardening kits
  - Birdwatching kits
  - Baking or cooking tool kits
  - Knitting or crochet starter sets
  - Watercolor or sketching kits
- **Wellness Kits**
  - Meditation and mindfulness kits
  - Walking kits with local trail guides
  - Yoga or stretching kits
  - Stress-relief kits
- **Technology & Learning Kits**
  - Wi-Fi hotspots
  - Technology learning kits
  - Language learning kits
  - Home repair basics
  - Financial literacy kits

## Community & Outdoor Kits

These tend to be highly popular and circulate well. **Think local:** The strongest kits often reflect community interests and regional opportunities.

- **Ideas include:**

- State park passes
- Fishing kits
- Stargazing kits with telescopes or binoculars
- Birdwatching kits
- Backyard exploration kits
- Local history walking kits

## What Makes a Great Lending Kit?

The most successful kits are easy to understand and simple to use. Consider including a “Start Here” card so patrons know exactly what to do first.

### Include:

- ✓ Clear instructions or activity cards
- ✓ Durable, easy-to-clean materials
- ✓ Inventory checklist
- ✓ QR codes for tutorials or extensions
- ✓ Recommended books or media tie-ins
- ✓ Reusable storage

## Managing Lending Kits Without the Headache

Concerned about lost pieces? You aren't alone!

### Tips for Success

- **Start simple:** Choose kits with fewer pieces initially.
- **Use inventory sheets:** Laminated checklists make returns easier.
- **Create replacement plans:** Expect occasional missing items. It is part of the process!
- **Package thoughtfully:** Clear pouches, bins, or backpacks work well.
- **Promote often:** Many kits go unused simply because patrons do not know they exist.
- **Gather patron feedback:** The best future ideas often come directly from users.

## **Funding Your Kits**

Many libraries successfully fund kits through creative partnerships. You may also discover opportunities to collaborate with local parks, museums, schools, extension offices, or health organizations.

### **Funding Ideas**

- Friends of the Library groups
- Community foundations
- Local businesses and sponsors
- Library grants
- Donations and wish lists
- Community partnerships

### **Start Small. Learn Fast.**

You don't need a perfect system to begin. Choose one audience, one interest area, and one simple kit to pilot. Learn what works, adapt, and grow from there. Libraries have always connected people with information. Today, they can also connect people with experiences.