

beanstack
CASE STUDY

Austin Public Library: Building a Citywide Summer Reading Experience

Austin Public Library (APL) is known for its impressive Central Library, a landmark space that draws visitors from across the country. But the heart of the system lies in its twenty-one neighborhood branches, strategically located across the city to provide equal access to community resources. Ensuring that services feel equitable and consistent across all locations is central to APL's approach, especially during summer reading, one of the library's largest annual initiatives.

APL adopted Beanstack in the aftermath of COVID-19 to offer engagement opportunities that worked both in person and online. In the years since, the program has evolved and simplified, resulting in a streamlined, engaging summer reading experience for all.

Alanna Graves leads the summer reading experience at APL, coordinating a cross-departmental committee that plans and delivers a cohesive experience.

"Before, each age group had different marketing, different reading challenges, and different styles of logs. They had different parameters for how to participate. Consolidating it all into one has been really exciting."

Alanna Graves

Summer Experience Coordinator, Austin Public Library



Goals



Create One Citywide Summer Reading Experience

Consolidate programs into a single, unified challenge with shared branding, expectations, and incentives across all branches.



Strengthen Staff Capacity and Buy-In

Provide branch-level training, peer support systems, and clear program tools so staff feel confident delivering a consistent experience.



Demonstrate Measurable Community Impact

Use participation data and customer stories to show growth, reinforce the value of summer reading, and justify continued investment.

Strategies

1. Unifying the Experience Across Branches

Creating One Citywide Challenge

APL consolidated multiple age-specific programs into a single themed challenge with shared branding, expectations, and incentives. The challenge was intentionally designed to support both in-person and online participation, ensuring accessibility for all readers.

Selecting Meaningful Prizes

Prizes were thoughtfully chosen to resonate with each audience. Youth participants earn books—reinforcing reading as both the goal and the reward—while adults work toward collectible mugs and drinkware designed to feel elevated and worth returning for year after year.

Using Data to Guide Consistency

Insights from Beanstack revealed that readers frequently visit multiple branches for different programs. In response, APL adjusted policies to ensure customers would have a consistent experience citywide. This also opened opportunities for resource sharing, such as workshop kits that allow crafting programs to be easily replicated across locations.



2. Creating Staff Buy-In

To sustain engagement across twenty-one branches, Alanna prioritized early input, strong training, and clear support systems.

Train Branch-Level Experts

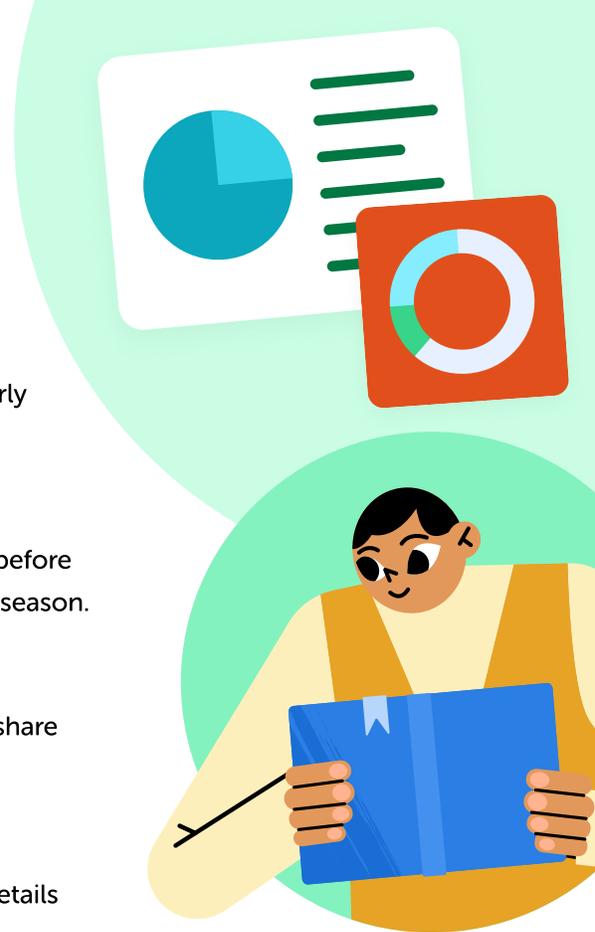
Each branch sends two staff members to an in-person Beanstack training before summer begins. These individuals serve as on-site experts throughout the season.

Create Ongoing Peer Support

A dedicated Microsoft Teams group enables trained staff to troubleshoot, share updates, and support one another during the busiest weeks of summer.

Provide Quick-Reference Tools

Each year, Alanna develops a concise cheat sheet outlining key program details and Beanstack guidance, giving staff an easy reference at service desks.



Outcomes

Beanstack helped APL expand participation while delivering a more consistent systemwide experience.



Strong Adult Participation

Adult participation between 2024 and 2025 increased by 50%



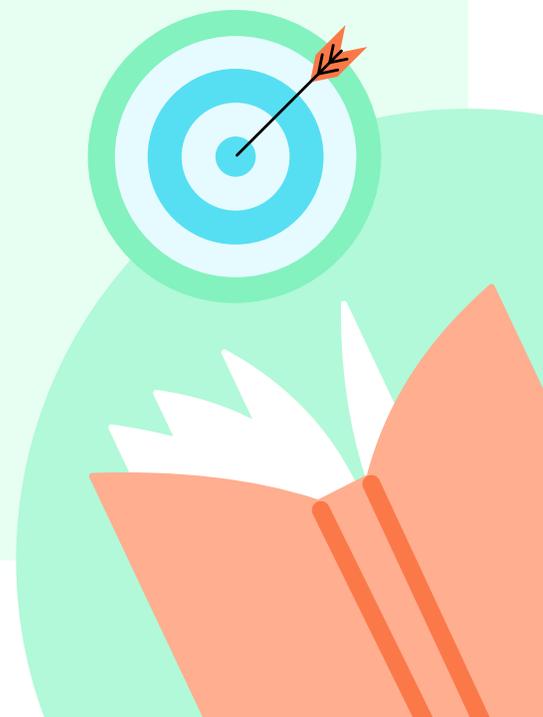
A Big Community Goal

In 2025, APL set and met a goal of 4 million minutes read.



One Clear Experience Across Branches

Customers now know what to expect at all APL locations.



Sharing the Impact: From Staff to City Leadership

After summer concludes, Alanna compiles an impact report that blends participation data with patron stories collected through Beanstack. The main goals are:



Demonstrating Growth

Clear metrics combined with meaningful context shows measurable improvements and the value of a consistent, systemwide summer reading program.



Celebrating Staff Effort

Alanna shares with staff across all branches, reinforcing morale and recognizing contributions at every level from custodial to circulation staff.



Informing Leadership

The report is shared at Library Commission meetings to show how summer reading supports community engagement and justifies continued investment.

Conclusion

Through thoughtful consolidation, strong staff preparation, and meaningful incentives, Austin Public Library transformed summer reading into a unified, citywide initiative.

What began as a hybrid engagement tool is now a strategic platform that supports accessible participation, strengthens internal collaboration, and clearly demonstrates impact.

APL's experience shows that when systems simplify structure and invest in both staff and readers, summer reading becomes more than a seasonal program. It becomes a shared community tradition.

