

➤ **CASE STUDY**

FAB LAB COMMUNITY ACCESS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEW LISBON

BACKGROUND

The School District of New Lisbon is located on the beautiful Lemonweir River in Central Wisconsin. The area now known as New Lisbon was used by Native Americans as a winter location for hunting and trapping. New Lisbon then became a bustling center for railroad activity, with industrial cargo as well as passenger traffic passing through. Today, the community has slightly more than 600 students in pre-K through grade 12, with a student-teacher ratio of approximately 11:1.



The School District of New Lisbon is a two-time recipient of Fabrication Laboratories (Fab Labs) Grants from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation. One of the grant program's expectations is that recipient school districts offer community access to their fab lab spaces and take into account the unique needs of the community and the district.

APPROACH

Because New Lisbon is a small community, raising awareness is not as much of a challenge as it would be in larger districts. The fab lab's technology education instructor has been in the community for more than 20 years and is well known among local residents. Local organizations are aware of the fab lab's existence and routinely reach out with project ideas. When a new request is received, the fab lab's technology education instructor assists with fulfilling it and offers guidance and instruction on how to use the equipment. The local 4-H, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts groups have access to the fab lab for designing, problem solving, and project development.

Community access is handled on a "need-to-complete" basis rather than taking a more formal approach to scheduling. The district's technology education instructor and the family and consumer science teacher make themselves available to provide community access to the fab lab space and provide instruction if needed.

BUDGET

The district does not have a budget specifically for community access, but proceeds from fab lab-produced items that are sold go into an "activity fund" that can be used to cover materials and maintenance costs.

PARTNERS

The New Lisbon Technology & Engineering Department has worked hard over the years to develop partnerships by getting involved in local community improvement projects. These include working with local 4-H clubs to create plaques for Operation Christmas Cheer, mass-producing birdhouse kits for the local Outdoors Forever chapter's Youth Day, and creating duck houses for the local Kids and Mentors Outdoors Club. New Lisbon technology education students built a 12-by-16-foot kayak storage shed for the city and an 8-by-12-foot food stand for the New Lisbon Lions Club.



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In the most recent product, students created unique ornaments that were sold by the American Legion to raise money for a veterans' memorial in New Lisbon. The district then used its CNC plasma cutter to create two full-size soldier silhouettes that became part of the veterans' memorial.

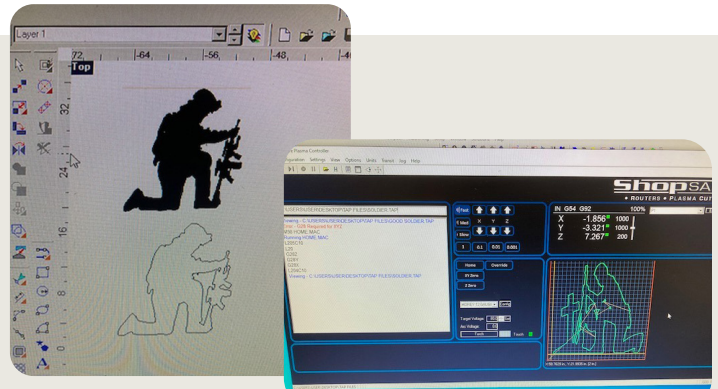
The department's partnerships continue to grow as the instructors help local groups with their needs, and connections with the local business community are already helping to guide the fab lab's plans for the future.

DETAILED PROCESS AND FINDINGS

A strategy that has contributed to this fab lab's success is active community involvement via churches, the Lions Club, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, and more. Talking about what the fab lab does, showing/sharing work samples, and asking how its offerings might assist in local projects has been a simple yet effective strategy for increasing community integration.

ADJUSTMENTS

The community learned through experience that community access needs to happen in a controlled setting and environment in which the technology education instructor does the teaching, demonstrates how to use the equipment, and then assists with using it. Because the instructor is in charge of machine repairs and maintenance, it is important to make sure it is being used safely and correctly, and the instructor's presence is needed/required when outside groups are using the equipment.



KEY INSIGHTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The School District of New Lisbon fab lab team reported these lessons learned from their experience:

- Some of the technology education instructor's favorite memories of teaching are the times students have helped a local organization or group. Students clearly had a sense of pride in giving back to the community.
- Be adaptable and flexible but don't overcommit. Consider the repercussions—in terms of the amount of work required for students and for staff—when deciding whether to take on a project.
- Anytime the school can be better connected with the community, it improves public perception and buy-in.