How to Start a Tool Library

BorrowTools Preview Edition — November 2026 · Excerpts from Full Edition v1.1

This 2-page preview is taken from the same revised Full Edition text. It is educational only — not legal advice and not a promise of income or membership results. Encoding: UTF-8 with embedded DejaVu Sans fonts.

Tool libraries lend drills, ladders, mowers and more the way book libraries lend books. Rebuilding Together Central Ohio states that the Columbus (Franklin County) Tool Library was founded in 1976; Berkeley Public Library states that its Tool Lending Library was established in 1979.

1. Choose your model (from Full Edition ch. 2)

- **Standalone nonprofit** — most control; needs governance and fundraising. There is no single surveyed “typical” membership fee. Named official examples include Rockville Tool Library ($60/year or $15/month), Tool Library of Lake County ($50/year), and Anchorage Tool Library (tiered $50 / $75 / pay-what-you-can).
- **Public library collection** — pitch a “Library of Things”; borrowing is often free with a library card.
- **City program** — municipal cleanup-tool sheds and neighborhood services.
- **Tool bank** — lends mainly to nonprofits and community groups (for example ToolBank USA affiliates).

2. Find a host space (from Full Edition ch. 4)

Library branches, makerspaces, museums, churches, community centers, even malls. Start small: one lockable dry room and two open days a week. Aim for ground-floor or ramp access and power outlets to test tools.

3. Set up software (from Full Edition ch. 7)

Many libraries use myTurn for inventory, membership and reservations; Lend Engine is used by a number of UK projects. A spreadsheet works for a first collection of about 100 items. We do not claim a majority platform without a published count.

4. Build inventory (from Full Edition ch. 8)

Run a tool donation drive. Prioritize expensive, rarely used items: pressure washers, tile saws, post-hole diggers, carpet cleaners. Label and photograph every item. Expect a substantial share of donations to need repair or be unsuitable.

5. Policies, waiver and insurance (from Full Edition ch. 5 & 9)

Write a borrower agreement covering loan period (a common sample is 1 week), late fees, damage and liability. Ask brokers for liability and contents quotes; treat worksheet dollar figures as placeholders until you have written quotes. Consult a local insurer or attorney. Sample policies are starting points, not universal standards or safety guarantees.

6. Volunteers and hours (from Full Edition ch. 10)

Recruit a small crew of handy volunteers; where it fits your model, offer free membership in exchange for shifts. Two volunteers per session — one at the desk, one checking returns — is a workable starter pattern.

7. Launch and grow (from Full Edition ch. 11–12)

Hold a launch day, list yourself on BorrowTools, then add workshops and repair cafés if staffing allows. Membership uptake varies widely; do not treat first-month headcounts as promised results.

Launch checklist (excerpt from Full Edition ch. 15)

- ☐ Model chosen and host agreed
- ☐ Software set up
- ☐ 100+ items cataloged
- ☐ Waiver and insurance done
- ☐ Volunteers scheduled
- ☐ Listed on BorrowTools

Full Edition continues with a hypothetical first-year budget worksheet, sample waiver and forms, a 90-day checklist, named fee examples with sources, and a sources list. This preview does not claim a live checkout price or revenue. © 2026 BorrowTools · educational use · not legal or income advice.