**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## "Sparks" are flying at Hartford Public Library

*The Institute for Museum and Library Services Awards $25,000 to develop digital tracking tool*

HARTFORD, CT (September 3, 2015) – Hartford Public Library is pleased to announce that the Library has received a Sparks! Ignition Grant for Libraries from the Institute of Museum and Library Services for $25,000, *one of only 20 libraries nationwide*. The Library also won a Sparks! Ignition Grant in 2013.

In collaboration with the University of Hartford's Center for Social Research, Capital Region Education Council and the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology, YOUmedia Hartford, the Library's teen digital and maker space will build a digital tool that tracks teens' non-cognitive skill development in a variety of learning spaces.

The project directly addresses two local needs, the need for equal access to technology and the need to minimize the opportunity gap. These challenges are often hoisted on the shoulders of low-income youth with few options for gaining the access or support necessary to reach their full potential. Additionally, the project will evaluate the efficacy of informal learning environments, particularly YOUmedia Hartford. As the number of learning labs and maker spaces in libraries continues to grow, this kind of baseline evaluation could prove invaluable to sustainability efforts nationwide.

This is a first step in tracking learning that happens outside school walls – in places like libraries. It will create a fully functional skills tracking platform, supported by decades of research in positive youth development and tested by teens, mentors and teachers in Hartford. This platform could shift the perspective of learning labs away from extracurricular and highlight opportunities for informal learning spaces to create real impact for our patrons.

"Non-cognitive skills are valuable and we've known that for a while. We have not, however, come up with ways to widely track the development of those skills across students' many learning environments," said Hartford Public Library Chief Executive Officer Matthew K. Poland. "YOUmedia Hartford, with its partners, will take the next step in showing the value and capability of informal learning spaces for character development in teens."

This project will build on work being done in public libraries' STEM learning spaces nationwide by demonstrating the impact these programs have on young people's attitudes towards and engagement with learning.

**ABOUT HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY**

As a finalist for the 2013 and 2014 National Medal from the Institute for Museum and Library Services, Hartford Public Library has been recognized as a national leader in redefining the urban public library in the 21st century as an innovative and stimulating place where people can learn and discover, explore their passions, and find a rich array of resources that contribute to a full life. Hartford Public Library provides free resources that inspire reading, guide learning, and encourage individual exploration. Serving the residents of Hartford and beyond at its nine branches and Downtown location, Hartford Public Library receives more than 833,000 visits per year from adults, children and families seeking early literacy opportunities, work skills training, civic engagement, arts enrichment, and so much more. Visit www.hplct.org.

**ABOUT THE INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY SERVICES**
The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 35,000 museums. Our mission is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. Our grant making, policy development, and research help libraries and museums deliver valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive.

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