

LIBRARIES BUILD BUSINESS



INITIATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

This report highlights the key learnings and program elements of Libraries Build Business, a \$2 million national initiative of the American Library Association (ALA), that have wide application and opportunity for expanding impact: to narrow economic divides and empower diverse entrepreneurs to reach their potential. Scheduled to launch just as the pandemic began, the pilot demonstrated powerful impacts in a short time on small businesses, local communities, and the library field. The program reached thousands of low-income and underrepresented small business owners and entrepreneurs and built capacity in the library field. With our insights and lessons learned, Libraries Build Business can be leveraged for further impact on economic opportunity and advancement in communities across the United States.

INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

Entrepreneurship and small business ownership are viable and growing paths toward economic stability and independence, fostering resiliency and empowerment in individuals, their families, and communities. While interest in entrepreneurship

grows, marginalized communities face numerous barriers to successful business ownership, including a lack of access to capital and essential support. To tackle economic divides and bolster support for underrepresented small business owners and entrepreneurs, the nation's nearly 17,000 public libraries are a critical infrastructure to leverage.

U.S. public libraries have a long-standing reputation as inclusive and safe spaces for all to access information, resources, and life-long

“The library has always been a place of refuge and resource for me, personally and professionally. I study the work of other artists in their monographs, take a class via [the library’s] Creativebug subscription, and read books on art history and business. I am currently enrolled in a small business course offered by my local library that would otherwise be unavailable to me.”

**—MEGAN PERKINS, ARTIST, ENTREPRENEUR,
AND SMALL BUSINESS BOOT CAMP PARTICIPANT,
SPOKANE COUNTY, WA**

learning opportunities. In this role, libraries are well-suited to serve as gateways for welcoming aspiring and existing entrepreneurs into the local infrastructure of entrepreneurial services and opportunities. Libraries offer low-barrier access to basic technology, equipment, and information, making it easy for an entrepreneur to explore or test out a business idea before committing or investing in it. Libraries excel at addressing many of the unseen barriers to economic advancement by: building digital skills; offering literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL), and GED classes; providing internet and technology access; supporting Green Card and citizenship application

processes; connecting people with affordable health care; offering early education programs; giving youth of all economic backgrounds the opportunity to engage with STEAM learning, coding, and makerspaces; and more. Libraries also support local economic development explicitly via entrepreneurship and small business programs and resources, by supporting jobseekers and building job readiness, and offering financial skills workshops.

Library support for entrepreneurs-of-color, women- and immigrant-owned-businesses, startups in lower-income neighborhoods, and others is critical because these groups face

LEVERAGING LIBRARIES IN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

Libraries have a significant history of supporting small businesses—offering their own programs and resources as well as programs in partnership with local chambers of commerce, Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) chapter offices, and other community entrepreneurship organizations.* Because of their broad reach, high-quality resources, and collaborative ethos, libraries are a natural fit for engaging entrepreneurs.

Reach: Libraries have unparalleled reach into urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities nationwide, convenient hours and locations, and community trust and rapport, creating low-barrier access points for services and information for underrepresented individuals.

Information and Resources: Physical meeting space, computers, internet, databases, and other technology offer entrepreneurs resources for researching, developing, and implementing business plans, testing out ideas, and working on their business without upfront investment in this necessary equipment. Physical space also offers partners opportunities for programming or co-location.

Strategic and Flexible Collaboration: Libraries excel as community partners, providing referrals, co-located services, complementary programming, and space. By conducting formal and informal requests for feedback, libraries are also aware of needs and interests within the community and can strategically connect with partners and other stakeholders to respond.



* ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/ALA_Entrepreneurship_White_Paper_Final.pdf

significant historical, structural, and financial barriers, which result in measurable disparities. A [National Community Reinvestment Coalition research report](#) notes, for example, that: “There are tremendous gaps in black and Hispanic business ownership relative to their population size. Although 12.6% of the U.S. population is black, only 2.1% of small businesses with employees are black-owned. Hispanics are 16.9% of the population yet own only 5.6% of businesses.” By providing access to the resources and services necessary to get a business off the ground, libraries play an important role in fostering equity, diversity, and inclusion within the entrepreneurship community and addressing existing disparities in access and opportunity. With strategic partnerships, libraries can also make referrals and help entrepreneurs get connected. A sense of belonging and inclusion

is vital to sustaining a small business venture, and thus library-initiated networking and introductions can be a critical link to success.

Libraries Build Business

Starting in 2020, ALA’s [Libraries Build Business](#) focused on addressing this disparity through the trusted and sustainable resources of our nation’s public libraries. The initiative immediately worked to advance equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice in library programming for small business owners and entrepreneurs in 13 pilot communities while building capacity and leadership in libraries for sustainability and scalability.

Libraries Build Business (LBB) built on the widespread but often disparate programs and resources offered by libraries across the country. The initiative, supported by Google.org, was a significant investment in centering

Libraries Build Business Cohort



the conversation around how this work is done—bringing together library professionals to learn from one another and seed further development in this area. As the importance of entrepreneurship grows in the U.S. economy, LBB was an opportunity to significantly advance this area of library work with an eye toward innovation and the future of libraries, the economy, and the country. During the project period (April 2020–January 2022), 13 cohort libraries developed, implemented, and evaluated small business and entrepreneurship programming and resources tailored to the needs of their local communities, with an emphasis on low-income and underrepresented small business owners and entrepreneurs. The cohort made use of grant funding, technical assistance, and peer learning opportunities to benefit small businesses,

working together to share promising strategies and models as well as practical resources with the field, building capacity and strengthening channels for libraries to support small businesses and entrepreneurs. To this end, LBB has expanded and amplified the tools, resources, and peer learning opportunities available to libraries to engage in this work, ultimately helping to strengthen the small business support ecosystems in their communities and nationally. This initiative demonstrates the impact and value of library programs to small business owners and entrepreneurs, to libraries themselves, and to local economies more widely. Our investment in and management of this project also was of great value to the grantees, as they built capacity personally, professionally, and for their libraries.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Libraries Build Business initiative developed and worked toward ambitious goals to impact small business owners and entrepreneurs and the library field at large. Goals included:

- **Supporting 15,000 aspiring and existing small business owners and entrepreneurs** with library programs, resources, and services tailored to the specific needs of the community through the course of the initiative.
- **Building capacity in libraries** to develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain impactful library small business development programs, primarily in the 13 cohort libraries and secondarily in the field at large through project-created resources such as the Libraries Build Business Playbook.

- **Advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice** in library programming for small business owners and entrepreneurs. LBB programs were tailored to the specific needs of local communities, prioritizing low-income and underrepresented entrepreneurs. LBB projects focused on Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), women, immigrants, speakers of other languages, and formerly incarcerated community members, among others.

“Overall the project goals and impact were challenging, but productive. As a cohort we were able to produce a lot of content, advocate, and persevere!”

—LIBRARIES BUILD BUSINESS COHORT LIBRARY

- **Building and sustaining a national network of library professionals** working together on small business, entrepreneurship, and other economic development programs and services to build relationships, share promising strategies and models, and make connections to benefit individuals and libraries at large, growing together and advancing the field.

- **Demonstrating the library’s critical role** as a key stakeholder and partner in the small business development ecosystem to partners, elected officials, and the small business community.

INITIATIVE IMPACT

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the LBB team sought to understand the impacts of the program on small businesses and entrepreneurs, the cohort libraries, and the library field as a whole during the grant period.

Small Business Impact

Small businesses and entrepreneurs who participated in LBB cohort library programs benefited significantly. The initiatives were timely, relevant, and impactful for the communities that they served. Using the LBB Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework, the cohort libraries employed small business surveys and quarterly reporting forms to measure the impact of their programs over time. The [Monitoring and Evaluation Impact Report](#) highlights key areas in which libraries provided value to local aspiring and existing small businesses and entrepreneurs. Most notably:

- Libraries hosted 1,210 total events with 14,417 total attendees.
- Two-thirds (68%) of survey respondents indicated that they were very likely to recommend their library’s support for small business.

- Strong majorities indicated that the library’s support has increased their confidence (82%), motivation (88%), and feelings of success (52%) as a business owner.
- The initiative provided needed support to those typically underserved by and underrepresented in small business activity—77% of survey respondents were women; and 64% were BIPOC.

In sum, the LBB project reached and successfully served its target audience—in spite of the barriers

SMALL BUSINESS SUCCESS

The **Ferguson Municipal Public Library** helped an aspiring entrepreneur set up a Facebook page to sell his BBQ sauce. The library assisted him with this, as well as computer skills, and connected him with other resources, including SCORE. The BBQ sauce—Freddie Lee’s American Gourmet—is now available in 1500+ grocery stores.



and challenges that running the program during the COVID-19 pandemic posed for libraries, communities, and small businesses. Please see the final Monitoring and Evaluation Impact Report for further details.

Program Implementation

Highlights

The Libraries Build Business cohort included libraries of all sizes and service areas including urban, suburban, rural, and tribal locations across the United States. The programs were tailored to diverse audiences including BIPOC, immigrant, women, rural, tribal, and formerly incarcerated individuals and offered various supports including makerspaces and business centers; expert-led classes and workshops; equipment to check out; peer networking; mentoring and coaching; and databases, reference, and research support. Libraries reported a range of accomplishments for their individual LBB projects including program graduate success: “One student’s business is currently up and running with several employees and 14+ contracts.” Libraries also reported success in terms of “connecting business owners who are still connected and providing support to one another.” In other words, the library helped to foster an ongoing network of support for entrepreneurs by bringing them together in their program. Libraries were also proud of successfully making small business programs more accessible and responsive to diverse community members. The examples that follow are a small sample of Libraries Build Business programs that demonstrate the scope of the initiative.

► **The Gwinnett County Public Library (GCPL) in Georgia offered the New Start Entrepreneurship Incubator (NSEI)** to formerly incarcerated individuals. The program provides a business education through in-person classes,

online coursework, and a robust network of mentors and community partners. Each student is matched with a business mentor, provided with a laptop and business books, and meets regularly with a social worker to assist with wraparound services (finding childcare, affordable housing, etc.) that are necessary to successfully start a business. Finally, local donors host a “Shark Tank”-style funding opportunity called Launchpad at the end of each cohort. Students who complete the course in good standing are eligible to pitch their business proposals to a judging panel to receive feedback and potentially obtain startup capital. The first two cohorts graduated a combined total of 22 participants, who went on to participate in Launchpad and connect with potential funders.

► **The Richland Library in Columbia, South Carolina, expanded their Entrepreneurial Launch Pad**, offering: Entrepreneurs-in Residence (EiR), a Library of Things and makerspaces, and workshops and classes on business and related topics. The EiR model employs a local businessperson to provide one-to-one support and programming to aspiring entrepreneurs, thus connecting budding entrepreneurs to seasoned peers who can offer advice, resources, and support. “We see hiring entrepreneurs as part of our mission. We’re investing in our own small business community, by hiring them to work with us,” said Diane Luccy, Richland Library Business and Careers Manager.

► **The Topsham Public Library in Maine provided one-to-one small business support in their rural community** for jobseekers and aspiring and existing entrepreneurs through their partnership with the CareerCenter of Maine. The library provided scheduling and technical support, a Zoom and internet connection, and other resources to support online CareerCenter appointments on library computers for community members with

trouble accessing the necessary equipment and infrastructure at home due to availability, usability, or affordability barriers. The program was scaled across the state of Maine, with seven other libraries adapting this model in spring 2021 based on the preliminary success of Topsham’s work.

These projects demonstrate the breadth and depth of library capacity to respond to local needs. They showcase how libraries can creatively leverage their knowledge of local communities, partnerships with other community stakeholders, and existing resources such as meeting space and high-speed internet to support small business and local economies. To learn more about LBB cohort library initiatives, please see the “LBB Resources” box near the end of this report.

Building Library Capacity

The Libraries Build Business initiative demonstrates that any library, no matter their size or budget, can and should support small businesses and entrepreneurs. The initiative set out to build capacity in libraries to develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain impactful library small

business development programs, primarily in the 13 cohort libraries and secondarily in the field at large through project-created resources such as the Libraries Build Business Playbook.

The Libraries Build Business Playbook, released in February 2022, is a resource collaboratively developed by LBB cohort members to share practical resources and advice, promising strategies and models, and inspiration for programming and services for any library, no matter their size or budget, to adapt in their context. It is designed to support library workers interested in starting or growing a small business/entrepreneurship program and includes information to help libraries get started, build partnerships, integrate principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), conduct M&E, and ensure program sustainability. It also demonstrates the value of libraries as partners and leaders in the small business and entrepreneurial ecosystem. One Playbook reader shared: “The Playbook provides so many possibilities to expand our business offerings and the examples help inspire ideas! So grateful that our team has discovered this robust resource!” The Playbook provides a three-tier model (see below) for library

The LBB 3 Tiers Model



TIER 1: RESPOND

Leverage your existing resources and promote them to the small business community.



TIER 2: BUILD

Seek partners and develop dedicated programs and resources for small business owners.



TIER 3: SUSTAIN

Become a leader in the small business community. Provide dedicated services and staff.

small business services in order to help libraries assess their current resources and capacity as they develop and implement a program for their community. The model demonstrates that libraries of different sizes, budgets, and capacities will need different supports and starting points to be successful. This is a foremost lesson from the initiative and empowers libraries to meet the needs of entrepreneurs with existing resources, while strategically planning for future programs. The tiers are briefly described in the figure.

Monitoring and Evaluation

In order to promote sustainable and scalable programming, the LBB initiative prioritized building evaluation capacity and supporting the adoption of M&E systems in library programming. The cohort and project team collaboratively developed M&E instruments and protocols to

measure the impact of library small business programming on local entrepreneurs and small business owners. The initiative created a M&E framework and Theory of Change, as well as survey instruments for library staff and program participants, focus group protocols, and reporting forms to capture quantitative and qualitative data about the library programs and experiences of the participants. The cohort participated in trainings to create further capacity in administering M&E in their libraries and create a culture of evaluation. Significantly, all of the M&E Resources are now available to the field in the Libraries Build Business Playbook. In order to gain further traction these tools are also being adapted to the Public Library Association (PLA)'s [Project Outcome](#), a survey platform that many libraries already use and are familiar with. In other words, the M&E component of the LBB project is an important contribution towards increased capacity and resources for building evaluation into library small business programming.



The Appleton Public Library in Wisconsin used M&E strategies

throughout their project. At the outset, the library took time in developing their initiative to listen to community leaders, partners, local business owners, and other stakeholders. They continued this process of listening, gathering feedback, and making adjustments through a continuous improvement cycle. They also employed PLA's Project Outcome surveys to assess impact and learned that a majority of program participants felt more knowledgeable about what it takes to start a business, intended to apply what they learned, and were more aware of resources and services provided by the library to help.

Advancing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Social Justice

LBB programs were tailored to the specific needs of low-income and underrepresented small business owners and entrepreneurs including BIPOC, women, immigrants, speakers of other languages, and formerly incarcerated community members to address disparities marginalized communities face in starting and sustaining a business. The cohort integrated principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into their programs to create a sense of belonging, strengthen business support, and cultivate a community vision of social justice and economic opportunity.

More specifically, cohort members learned together about: integrating EDI into everything the library does and recognizing that this is a long-term multi-faceted effort; working to create online

and in-person spaces where everyone feels valued and welcomed; ensuring that community member feedback informs library programs and services; finding out what participants really need and want rather than making assumptions; and recognizing that words are important. Yakama Nation, for one, shared that the project “transformed [their] perspective of entrepreneurship” providing alternative ways of supporting indigenous and traditional “lifeways” in the community. Libraries also emphasized the importance of creating equitable partnerships and stakeholder relationships. For example, offering honorarium or other compensation to business owners who served as consultants or program facilitators in exchange for their time and expertise is one way to reflect the value of their expertise and honor a commitment to equity.

Peer Learning and Professional Growth

Many libraries around the country are already responding to and integrating with their local entrepreneurial ecosystem and developing tailored programming. In order to accelerate impact and

reach, the community of practice and peer coaching opportunities are avenues to share promising practices and foster peer learning and professional growth.

Libraries in the cohort met bi-weekly throughout the two years of the LBB initiative to learn from and with one another: sharing successes, challenges, resources, and ideas. They worked collaboratively on conference presentations, book chapters, the Playbook, and other resources and events. Through this experience, they recognized the value in peer feedback, support, and mentorship. The peer learning network was the highlight of the experience for many of the LBB cohort members. As one cohort member commented: “Library staff are collaborative by nature and our learning is enhanced by that collaboration. Hearing updates about everyone’s programs was great. . . . Learning from others who have done things before us (e.g., business Library of Things) was incredibly helpful as we extended our services. Also, particularly as we were all struggling with closings and the pandemic, it was nice to hear about how others were working

SUCCESSFUL STREET VENDING / Sea Un Vendedor Ambulante Exitoso

The Los Angeles Public Library’s street vending initiative, which developed iteratively and collaboratively, is one example of EDI in action. As the project lead, Madeleine Idefonso noted: “Initially the street vending project was centered on trying to help people better understand the permit processes. . . .



We eventually decided to put the government things aside and to really focus on what the vendors wanted. That’s when we started having meetings with the vendors—they became consultants. We learned from them where their priorities were.” Together with vendors, the library developed educational modules on topics including microenterprise, digital literacy, resiliency, and safety. These modules are available to use via mobile or smart phone, from the library’s partner, Cell-Ed. Bringing in the street vendors as project partners strengthened the curriculum, created buy-in and interest in the program, and made it more responsive to the local entrepreneurs.

through their similar concerns.” The peer-learning aspect of LBB demonstrates the importance of convening library professionals to work together to advance the field. Libraries—ranging from big to small—were able to learn from and support one another to ultimately offer better small business and entrepreneurship programming to their communities and more comprehensive tools, reflections, and best practices for other libraries to build on. One member of the peer learning community commented: “This is the sort of project that would have sat on the back burner forever. Especially as a new [library] director, I have a lot of competing priorities and I wasn’t really sure

The opportunities provided through this project—presentations, book chapters, etc.—gave us all the opportunity to stretch and added value to the work we do. These opportunities also provided staff with validation—the work they do is important and these opportunities reinforced the importance of the work they do.”

—LIBRARIES BUILD BUSINESS COHORT MEMBER

where to begin here. But [my LBB coach] helped talk me through it and break my goals down into manageable chunks, and now we’re already well on our way to having a small business program at my library. Truly magical.”

Leadership Development

LBB offered an intensive leadership development experience for cohort participants to learn from peers and advance library business initiatives, including a specific focus on developing equitable and inclusive programming.

Librarians described gaining a general boost in confidence due to the ways the LBB initiative required them to stretch professionally. One wrote, “I am [now] more confident in my perspective, reactions, and ideas in relation to library business outreach.” Another added, “I think I am a much better librarian today than I was at the start of the project, and it encourages me to pursue even bigger projects in the future.” Librarians expressed a sense of accomplishment in a variety of areas. This included: pride in receiving and managing a relatively large grant; in making things work despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic; in receiving librarianship awards or promotions; in acting as a coach to other libraries; in launching a statewide initiative; and pride in being able to make a difference in their communities. In sum, the LBB project facilitated the development of a set of library leaders in small business and entrepreneurship.

LIBRARIES BUILD BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The community of practice, seeded during the grant period, continues to grow, with 200+ individuals to date, offering libraries an opportunity to learn from others, gain perspective, and network. As libraries build additional business programs across the country, the peer learning community provides consistency, sustainability, and scalability for the profession. Monthly community discussions and peer coaching are also available for individuals to develop relationships and learn from and with one another.



These leaders can serve as learning resources for the wider profession for years to come both individually (as coaches, for example) as well as via the project materials they collectively created (the Playbook, the book, etc.), creating channels for sustaining and scaling libraries' essential work in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and ensuring high-quality engagement for entrepreneurs and small business owners.

Advancing Libraries as Economic Opportunity Centers

Bolstering the expertise of library workers and equipping libraries with high-quality technology and other resources is beneficial to the economy, the nation, and the future. On the whole, the Libraries Build Business pilot demonstrates that any library, no matter their size or budget, can effectively implement responsive small business and entrepreneurship programs, services, and resources for their community. In turn, this infusion of resources and professional development equips libraries to continue innovating and to demonstrate their key role as 21st century opportunity centers for career readiness, success, and transitions—including

LBB RESOURCES

- [Libraries Build Business Webpage](#)
- [Libraries Build Business Playbook](#)
- [Libraries That Build Business](#) edited by Megan Janicki (ALA Editions, 2022)
- [Final Monitoring & Evaluation Impact Report](#)



future-oriented careers, entrepreneurship, and solving complex societal problems. With initiative-developed resources, particularly the LBB Playbook, Libraries Build Business has created opportunities for libraries to collaborate, learn from and with one another, and advance their professional practices and offerings. This significant investment provides accessible, dynamic learning opportunities through a

PROFESSIONAL HIGHLIGHT



Rachael Svoboda, Laramie County Library System's Business Services Coordinator and Wyoming Library to Business Project Manager, [won the Wyoming Library Association's 2021 Outstanding Librarian award](#) for her work on Wyoming Library to Business, her role as a Libraries Build Business peer coach, and her instrumental role in securing continued funding to advance the work of scaling Wyoming Library to Business across the state. This will extend and expand library support for rural entrepreneurs and women-owned businesses by providing mobile business stations and video production studios. This achievement is one example of the effort, commitment, and caliber of the LBB grantees and the significant opportunity this project provided to make a long-lasting, scalable impact in the small business space.

framework of continuous improvement for all.

In addition to the Playbook, resources for the library field and other stakeholders developed through this initiative include: the Libraries Build Business Community; a May 2022 ALA Editions book, *Libraries That Build Business*; peer coaching; and conference presentations, panels, and networking events at a variety of virtual and in-person events.

Visibility and Value

Creating accessible, inclusive opportunity centers is advantageous to local and national stakeholders who can look to libraries as strategic partners and connectors. Several libraries expressed that taking part in the project helped them gain recognition for their work with small business and entrepreneurship at various levels including nationally, statewide, in their communities,

“Libraries have done much to help bridge the traditional digital divide between those who have computers and internet and those who don’t. When I applied for the Libraries Build Business grant, I wanted to empower our library and our community partners with more tools to tackle the 21st century digital divide—a lack of representation and opportunities in tech for underrepresented groups.”

—SHELDON BURKE, BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY

and local business ecosystems. One library wrote, that LBB “allowed us to be viewed by the business community and the other workforce/ small business support organizations as a viable partner and influencer in the community.” This visibility, and the opportunity to create connections with stakeholders, is a critical way that libraries demonstrate their value for partners and other stakeholders. Because of their visibility, libraries are often entry points to partners, resources, and successful pathways for aspiring entrepreneurs.

NEXT STEPS

At the library level, all LBB cohort members are sustaining their small business and entrepreneur initiatives beyond the grant. Using what they’ve learned from the grant period and participant feedback, libraries are adapting and making program adjustments, using a continuous improvement model of action and reflection to offer improved programs and services in the future. As one library wrote, “this project encourages me to continue to offer programs for entrepreneurs and to also not be afraid to try new things in our community.”

Examples of program developments and future plans include:

- ▶ **The Providence Public Library is creating a business Library of Things** with a local partner, PVDThings, to rent out tools, sewing machines, and more. They are also partnering with a local adult education agency that is using library space to run an initiative called CHOP. CHOP will have culinary prep students run a café and wine bar at the library. PPL will further support entrepreneurship by providing students with library business resources

to supplement their curriculum, SCORE mentors, and databases and research support to help them develop their own food businesses.

► **The Baltimore County Public Library in Maryland will pilot new versions**

of their successful Entrepreneur Academy including: Entrepreneur Academy for Spanish-speakers (*Academia de Emprendedores*), Entrepreneur Academy in correctional facilities, and Entrepreneur Academy for Teens.

► **The Independence Public Library (IPL) in rural Kansas created an innovative self-paced business course** using Beanstack (a tool typically used by libraries to help individuals achieve literacy goals using reading challenges). As learners complete tasks and meet milestones within the business course, they can receive benefits such as membership to the local makerspace or the chamber of commerce. The library is now working on developing a Handmade Business course specifically for crafters and hobbyists

LBB IN THE NEWS

- [As Entrepreneurship Grows, Libraries Fill the Gap](#), *Bloomberg*, January 28, 2022
- [Big Ideas for Small Business](#), *American Libraries*, November 1, 2021
- [Work in Progress: Workforce Development in Public Libraries](#), *Library Journal*, September 16, 2021



with the Beanstack incentive model. In addition, other libraries, as well as the Beanstack team, have reached out to IPL to adapt their innovative program, build new templates, and scale the idea.

The LBB project team is also taking what we've learned from this initiative and applying these promising practices and considerations to future grant-funded initiatives and beyond. A core goal in this project—and others—is to ensure a high-quality experience for participants with valuable professional opportunities for individual grantees that ultimately benefit the field as a whole. The project team, as part of the ALA's Public Policy and Advocacy office, will also leverage the lessons learned and impact data to further advocate for and advance libraries, highlighting the role of libraries in thriving small business ecosystems.

TAKEAWAYS AND OPPORTUNITIES

With 17,000 public libraries across the country, libraries provide a significant foundation to build upon. Libraries have existing physical locations in communities across the country—including in underresourced and marginalized communities—equipped with technology, professional staff, information resources, and a strong positive reputation and community goodwill. The existing

infrastructure, community relationships, and presence are key to successful initiatives and provides an opportunity to connect hard-to-reach communities with interventions, resources, and more.

Libraries Build Business cohort members, the larger LBB Community, and the ALA are equipped to and enthusiastic about continuing this work

in their communities and on the national scale. At the library level, library workers are reimagining their roles within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. One noted, “libraries should step out of their lanes, especially when it’s to connect underserved populations.” Another added, “I learned that it is not necessary to be an expert. I was able to find information and make connections for our patrons with those who have the expertise to provide support. Small steps and informal conversations lead to the most creative solutions.” Other takeaways about the role and voice of libraries from the LBB initiative included that libraries can help shift culture toward partnership and better integration with other community based organizations, agencies, and small businesses.

With this pilot initiative, we have developed and contextualized key tools and resources for

“The Libraries Build Business project is a powerful example of how today’s libraries and seasoned library professionals advance innovation and economic growth, especially in libraries serving entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups.”

**—PATRICIA “PATTY” WONG,
ALA PRESIDENT 2021-2022**

responsive small business support. Most critically, the thirteen public libraries involved in the pilot are leaders and innovators in the field, ready to support, share resources, and offer guidance to libraries getting started with or wishing to expand small business development programming. The pilot has developed significant assets to be leveraged via the

country’s network of nearly 17,000 public libraries, benefitting entrepreneurs across the United States and addressing disparities in economic opportunity. ALA is well-positioned to support further national work, provide support, and disseminate actionable findings and resources to libraries and library professionals in the United States and beyond. With systems and resources in place, Libraries Build Business is an excellent starting point for advancing economic opportunity and economic development in communities across the country. ■

For further information about this report or Libraries Build Business, contact Megan Janicki (mjanicki@alawash.org) or visit our website: ala.org/advocacy/workforce/grant.



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