

Urban Libraries Council Strengthening Libraries as Hubs for Entrepreneurship

Summary of National Scan

Overview

ULC, with support of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, is conducting a national scan to identify and gather information about how libraries are currently supporting entrepreneurs in their communities. The purpose of the scan is to develop a baseline of information about the state of library entrepreneurial practice in order to identify specific models and promising approaches for further study.

The scan has included research on library programs and approaches to entrepreneurship drawing largely on ULC's innovation database, a survey of ULC members and telephone interviews with library leaders and other resources. Lists of the people who were interviewed and the libraries that responded to the survey are included as Appendices 1 and 2.

This report provides a summary of key themes, survey highlights and state-of-practice examples from the national scan to inform the December 11-12 discussion and shape continuing work on this project.

Key Themes

The following themes have emerged from the national scan:

1. Libraries currently provide a range of services to support entrepreneurs at every stage of their development from very early thinking through launching and sustaining a business.
2. There is considerable variation in the services libraries provide to support entrepreneurs. Approaches include:
 - A broad menu of education and information resources offered throughout the library system for all patrons
 - Centralized programs and resources in spaces dedicated to research, innovation, creation, collaboration and carrying out business activities
 - One-on-one assistance to individuals interested in aspects of business development and entrepreneurial activity using library staff and/or other experts/resources to provide information and support
 - Strategic partnerships to offer specialized services, leverage local resources and expertise, align rather than duplicate services and enhance library capacity.
3. The two most frequently mentioned challenges libraries face in supporting entrepreneurs were *lack of staff capacity* including time, expertise and staff confidence and the library *not being seen as a player in the entrepreneurial community*.

4. As the entrepreneurial scene becomes more crowded, libraries can be highly valued *resource navigators* to help individuals find resources to support their entrepreneurial and economic hopes and dreams.
5. Strategic partnerships with local leaders, local and national entrepreneurial resources and business organizations are vital to library success in supporting and guiding entrepreneurs and establishing the library as a key player in the business/entrepreneurial community.
6. The community culture around entrepreneurship and economic development – the “entrepreneurial ecosystem” – may influence how the library approaches its work and shapes its role and place in that ecosystem.
7. Libraries help build entrepreneurial communities by embracing an entrepreneurial approach to their work including being willing to take risks and venture into new territory.
8. Deep community connections, status as trusted resources and willingness to provide personalized and tailored services make libraries valuable resources, particularly for people at the very earliest stage of thinking about economic options and who may be intimidated by less welcoming places than the public library.

Survey Highlights

A total of 116 ULC members responded to the 16-question survey for a response rate of 78 percent. The following sections summarize highlights of the survey input.

Services

- More than 96 percent of respondents said their libraries currently provide services that support entrepreneurs in the community. Even the five libraries that said they did not currently provide services for entrepreneurs identified activities and resources in their libraries that support small businesses and entrepreneurs.
- While workshops, publications, and research and planning tools were the most frequently selected programs offered, more than 63 percent said they provide one-on-one assistance to support business development/entrepreneurial activities.
- Forty percent of respondents (46 libraries) have a dedicated space to support entrepreneurs.

Partners

- Libraries connect with a range of local partners to strengthen entrepreneurial programs including city/county government (89 percent), local organizations that support small business (83 percent), chambers of commerce (80 percent), and local economic development corporations and councils (77 percent).
- Nearly 70 percent of responding libraries work with SCORE, the Small Business Administration's network supporting entrepreneurs. The Veterans Business Resource Center was the next most frequently selected national resource at 26 percent.

Targeted services and outreach

- Half of respondents (52 percent) said they provide targeted services to women, people of color, veterans and/or immigrants
- Nearly 70 percent of respondents use presentations at community meetings and gatherings to connect with target audiences in familiar places.
- Many respondents commented that women, people of color and/or immigrants are their most regular audiences for library services and frequent participants in entrepreneurial programs.

Outcomes

- The top two outcomes that libraries hope to achieve through their entrepreneurial work are *increased opportunities for individuals to succeed economically* (74 percent) and *recognition of the library as an essential partner in building entrepreneurial communities* (71 percent).
- Only 35 percent of respondents are collecting outcome data to assess the value and impact of their programs. Among those, most are using traditional evaluation tools such as surveys, exit interviews and anecdotal information.
- Only 28 percent maintain contact with people who use entrepreneurial services to monitor progress/offer additional assistance. Several respondents mentioned library commitment to privacy as a reason they do not follow up with participants.

Resources to Strengthen Library Work

- More than 75 percent of respondents said staff development opportunities would help them strengthen their approach to supporting entrepreneurs, followed by examples of successful programs (69 percent), webinars to explore best practices and emerging approaches (68 percent) and national benchmarks (65 percent).

State-of-Practice Examples

There is a wealth of information about the state of library practice in the open-ended comments and descriptions in the 114 individual survey responses. Here are a few snapshots of practices that support the themes from the scan:

- **Free Library of Philadelphia's *Business Resource and Innovation Center (BRIC)*** works with new and experienced entrepreneurs to help them launch their businesses through a series of programs and mentor relationships and provides support for small businesses to grow to the next level in order to drive down the failure rate of startups.
- **Houston Public Library's *Liftoff Houston*** is an annual start-up business plan competition to support small business development and growth. The competition awards \$30,000 in start-up capital along with business and financial mentoring and business resource workshops. The library works with the Mayor's Office, the Office of Business Opportunity, and Capital One Bank to carry out the competition.
- **Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library** is a partner in *712 Innovations*, a coworking and makerspace small business incubator in downtown Topeka. The library also serves on a newly-formed Entrepreneurial Task Force whose mission is to accelerate and expand opportunities for entrepreneurship in the county.
- **New Haven Free Public Library** offers consulting services to entrepreneurs in partnership with a Yale-affiliated student group that provides free office hours in the main library and conducts workshops on business practices. In addition, the library is an anchor institution and grantee in a state initiative, *CTNext Innovation Places*, which has provided grants to develop the state's entrepreneurial ecosystem and support network.
- **Broward County Library's *Creation Station Business*** provides entrepreneurs with a place to work on taking their dream of starting a business from idea to reality. The library maintains close relationships with people "who are building their futures with us" through targeted emails to provide continuing support and builds connections with a wide range of community resources to meet specific needs of entrepreneurs. "If we cannot provide the service a new entrepreneur needs, we pair them up with someone who can."
- **Dallas Public Library's *Business Resource and Information Network (B.R.A.I.N)*** offers programs for local entrepreneurs supported by specially trained staff and in partnership with the city of Dallas Office of Economic Development. Dallas B.R.A.I.N collaborates with the Office of Business Diversity to provide counseling and training to minority and women-owned companies and potential entrepreneurs and with the Office of Welcoming Communities and Immigrant Affairs to provide education and economic opportunity for

immigrants and refugees. The library recently added a foundational workshop series to cover the basics of entrepreneurship when marketing and outreach led to an influx of people who were interested in but totally unprepared for entrepreneurship.

- **Baltimore County, Broward County, Chattanooga, New Haven, San Diego, Toronto** and **Anythink Public Libraries** have entrepreneur-in-residence programs to provide one-on-one support to entrepreneurs at various stages of their work and conduct workshops to share their knowledge and experience on specific topics important to entrepreneurial success.
- **St. Louis County Library** formed a collaborative relationship with Balsa Foundation, Grace Hill Women’s Business Center and the Small Business Associations to focus on needs of and opportunities for women and minorities. A particularly important focus of the library’s work with entrepreneurs is to provide reassurance and encouragement. “We have heard from many people who will not use other organizations because they do not want a shark tank approach.”
- **San Antonio Public Library’s *Launch SA*** is a partnership of LiftFund and the San Antonio Economic Development located in the Central Library. It serves as a one-stop shop where entrepreneurs and small business owners can get information, resources, market data and guidance to start and sustain their business. LaunchSA is staffed by a team of experts from LiftFund and the San Antonio Economic Development Department with support from library staff.
- **Mid-Continent Public Library** offers one-to-one personal assistance through its *Square One Small Business Services*. The library provides networks, programs, and referrals to connect people with experts and good data to make sound decisions. Candace Futch, a fiber artist and “solopreneur” said the support from the library has helped her turn her hobby into a small business. “I need a partner that truly has no agenda other than to provide me with all the information and guidance I need,” Futch said, adding that library is the “true essence of entrepreneurial assistance.”

Questions for Additional Research and Discussion

Several questions were raised in the survey responses and interviews that will be explored through additional research and interviews and discussed during the December 11-12 meeting.

1. How can libraries define their niche or “sweet spot” in the broad entrepreneurial scene to best serve their constituents, leverage library resources and capacities and balance competing priorities? How can libraries move from offering a “little bit of everything within our traditional structures” to a more focused and intentional approach – and is that desirable?
2. Who is the library’s most important audience for entrepreneurial services?
3. What are the most important outcomes for library work in supporting entrepreneurs and how can libraries begin to measure the effectiveness and impact of their work?
4. How can libraries better define their role in the local entrepreneurial landscape and ensure that they are seen as a player in the entrepreneurial community?
5. What are the most important roles for library staff in supporting entrepreneurs and are new skills and/or new staff needed to carry out those roles?

Both Thomas Edison and Henry Ford used the Detroit Public Library early in their careers, so we’ve been in the business of helping entrepreneurial people realize their hopes and dreams for a long time.”

Jo Anne Mondowney, Executive Director, Detroit Public Library

Appendix 1: Interviews

Library Directors

Cynthia Berner, Director of Libraries, Wichita Public Library

Jo Giudice, Director, Dallas Public Library

Crosby Kemper, Executive Director, Kansas City Public Library

Paula Miller, Director, Baltimore County Public Library

Jo Anne Mondowney, Executive Director, Detroit Public Library

Steve Potter, Library Director and CEO, Mid-Continent Public Library

Kristen Sorth, Library Director, St. Louis County Public Library

John Szabo, City Librarian, Los Angeles Public Library

Felton Thomas, Jr., Executive Director, CEO, Cleveland Public Library

Patricia Uttaro, Library Director, Monroe County Library System-Rochester Public Library

Library Staff

Dale McNeill, Assistant Director for Public Service, San Antonio Public Library

Morgan Perry, Business Specialist, Mid-Continent Public Library

Other Resources

Candace Futch, Owner, From My Basket, Kansas City

Jonathan Ortman, Founder and President, Global Entrepreneurship Network

Appendix 2: Survey Respondents

Alameda County Library	Alexandria Library	Allen County Public Library
Anythink	Arlington Heights Memorial Library	Arlington Public Library
Atlanta-Fulton Public Library	Aurora Public Library	Austin Public Library
Austin Public Library	Baltimore County Public Library	Boston Public Library
Broward County Library	Calgary Public Library	Cambridge Public Library
Carmel Clay Public Library	Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh	Cedar Rapids Public Library
Charlotte Mecklenburg Library	Chattanooga Public Library	Chesterfield County Public Library
Chicago Public Library	Cleveland Public Library	Contra Costa County Library
Cuyahoga County Public Library	Dallas Public Library	Dayton Metro Library
DC Public Library	DeKalb County Public Library	Denver Public Library
Des Moines Public Library	Detroit Public Library	Do Space
Durham County Library	East Baton Rouge Parish Library System	Edmonton Public Library
El Paso Public Library	Enoch Pratt Free Library	Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library
Fort Vancouver Regional Library District	Fort Worth Public Library	Free Library of Philadelphia
Fresno County Public Library	Frisco Public Library	Grand Rapids Public Library
Greensboro Public Library	Gwinnett County Public Library	Hamilton Public Library
Harris County Public Library	Hartford Public Library	Hennepin County Library
Hillsboro Public Library	Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative	Houston Public Library
Houston Public Library	Indianapolis Public Library	Jacksonville Public Library
Jefferson County Public Library	Johnson County Public Library	Kalamazoo Public Library
Kansas City Public Library	King County Library System	Kitchener Public Library
LA County Public Library	Lexington Public Library	Los Angeles Public Library
Louisville Free Public Library	Madison Public Library	Marin County Free Library
Memphis Public Libraries	Mid-Continent Public Library	Monroe County Library System-Rochester Public Library
Montgomery County Public Libraries	New Haven Free Public Library	New Orleans Public Library
Newport News Public Library System	NY Public Library	Oak Park Public Library

Oakland Public Library	Ottawa Public Library	Palm Beach County Library System
Palo Alto City Library	Pasadena Public Library	Pima County Public Library
Pioneer Library System	Portland Public Library	Poudre River Public Library District
Prince George's County Memorial Library System	Providence Public Library	Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County
Regina Public Library	Richland Library	Richmond Public Library
Roanoke County Public Library	Saint Paul Public Library	San Antonio Public Library
San Diego County Library	San Diego Public Library	San José Public Library
Santa Clara County Library District	Santa Monica Public Library	Shreve Memorial Library
Skokie Public Library	Springfield City Library	St. Louis County Library
St. Louis Public Library	Stark County District Library	The Public Library, Albuquerque and Bernalillo County
Toledo Lucas County Public Library System	Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library	Toronto Public Library
Tulsa City-County Library	Virginia Beach Public Library	Wichita Public Library