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Independent Workers Are the Economy of the Future: Libraries Come Together to Help Entrepreneurs Launch Businesses with Focus on Women and People of Color

Washington — Starting one's own business may soon become the most viable path to achieving the American dream. It is projected that by 2020 half of all workers will be independent freelancers, responsible for their own fortunes and well-being. Knowing this, the Urban Libraries Council is bringing together 12 public library systems from across the U.S. and Canada to explore ways libraries can reach and engage entrepreneurs in their communities — particularly people of color, women, immigrants and veterans. Entrepreneurs play an increasingly important role in growing local economies as technology continues to transform the labor market. However, barriers to resources and information prevent many individuals from pursuing or achieving entrepreneurial success. Public libraries are uniquely equipped to reach populations who are underrepresented in today's entrepreneurial economy and most in need of guidance.

This effort is an extension of ULC's collaboration with the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation to strengthen libraries' capacity to support entrepreneurship.

"The library plays an important role in building businesses and our economy," said ULC President and CEO Susan Benton. "This experience will shape current thinking about how libraries can support entrepreneurship and create new opportunities for disadvantaged community members."

The Urban Libraries Council also released a Leadership Brief titled Strengthening Libraries as Entrepreneurial Hubs, which you can read [here](#).

The participating library systems have proposed the following projects to explore new approaches to reaching and engaging entrepreneurs in their communities:

- **Austin Public Library (Texas)** will develop partnerships with local businesses and associations to offer workshops for starting and growing a successful small business, and will create a space for resources needed by entrepreneurial startups.
- **District of Columbia Public Library** will develop a strategy to target library resources and partner-led programs toward citizens returning from jail seeking to become entrepreneurs.
- **Durham County Library (N.C.)** will provide access to free co-working spaces that will feature innovative technology, resources and relevant programming.
- **East Baton Rouge Parish Library (La.)** will develop a program to connect their business librarian to established and new entrepreneurs, to provide them with customized library resources to meet their specific needs.
- **Enoch Pratt Free Library (Md.)** and **Baltimore County Public Library** will develop a program supporting economic independence through entrepreneurship for small, minority- and women-owned businesses by providing access to a collaborative network of library resources, services and partnerships that offer education, training and support services.
- **Kansas City Public Library (Mo.)** will work to bring multilingual small business and entrepreneurship programs to immigrants and refugees in Kansas City.
- **King County Library System (Wash.)** will develop and implement a holistic and equitable approach to addressing the needs of immigrant and refugee entrepreneurs through research into local economic development plans, sector strategies and demographics.
- **Mid-Continent Public Library (Mo.)** will develop its Food Ed program that concentrates on the first steps of starting a food business.
- **St. Louis County Library** will explore new ways to grow its monthly educational series that engages local entrepreneurs with outreach events, instructional sessions and a small business and nonprofit expo.
- **Toledo Lucas County Public Library (Ohio)** will develop a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing aspiring women and immigrant entrepreneurs as well as how those obstacles differ for aspiring male entrepreneurs, and will analyze strategies to attract and effectively serve both groups.
- **Toronto Public Library** will develop an entrepreneur-in-residence program and perform community outreach to newcomers in the community, focusing on women and refugees.

About the Urban Libraries Council

The Urban Libraries Council, founded in 1971, is the voice for public libraries and the force that inspires them to evolve. ULC creates the tools, techniques, and ideas to make ongoing improvements and upgrades in services and technology. ULC also speaks loudly and clearly about the value public libraries bring to communities, and secures funding for research that results in the development of new programs and services. And by serving as a forum for library leadership, ULC produces innovative ideas and best practices that ensure community impact.

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