Libraries as Entrepreneurial Hubs: Literature Review

Introduction

Effective entrepreneurship requires a robust support system including access to training programs geared towards helping people launch new or grow existing businesses. The **Libraries as Entrepreneurial Hubs** project is an initiative of the **Urban Libraries Council** and the **Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation**, that was launched to strengthen libraries' capacity to support entrepreneurs in their communities, especially people of color, women, immigrants, and veterans. This document summarizes a small subset of the current literature on entrepreneurship. It covers four key topics:

- **Types of Entrepreneurship Programs:** Several studies highlight the proliferation of training programs designed to help diverse people launch and run successful businesses. The literature covers everything from single classes and workshops all the way up to degree programs.
- **Opportunities for Evaluation:** To date, little has been done to evaluate how well programs meet their learning objectives and goals. The literature also suggests that there is little consensus around teaching methods and content offered through entrepreneurship programs, which makes assessing impact more complicated.
- **Support for Women Entrepreneurs:** The contributions that women entrepreneurs make to their communities are well-documented in the literature. Supporting the learning needs of women entrepreneurs can have important implications for local economic development and job creation.
- **Entrepreneurship in Low-income Communities:** People in low-income communities often use the library and attend library-run programming. To best help budding entrepreneurs in these communities, it is important to explore the context and environment where their businesses operate.

The Importance of & Need for Evaluation

Building Lasting Programs

Entrepreneurship education programs are designed to equip participants with the knowledge and skills to create economic value. Duval-Couetil[1] outlines how difficult it can be to evaluate the impacts of these programs. The main challenge is limited standardization of these programs across the organizations and institutions that deliver them. However, the author identifies some ways to overcome this key difficulty, First, they suggest using stakeholders' priorities and concerns to drive discussion around goals for the assessment as well as gaining consensus on learning outcomes for assessment both at the course and program levels. Second, programs should consider using "assessment champions" to lead assessment initiatives. The author notes that these individuals "must have a stake in its outcomes" and "should have the responsibility for the program evaluation integrated formally into their roles."

Let's Put it to Work

- How is your program different or similar to other library entrepreneurship support and training programs that you know of? Are there evaluation strategies that you could learn from programs similar to your own?
- What goals do your key stakeholders – library leadership, program deliverers, participants, and community members – have for the program?
- Do you have someone who spearheads evaluation initiatives in your library? If not, how could you re-think workloads to free someone up to focus on this task?

Assessing Program Quality

Periodically assessing the quality and effectiveness of entrepreneurship training initiatives is important for identifying gaps and making programs better. However, the wide range of training program types and structures can make identifying an evaluation strategy challenging. In a 2017 paper, Gedeon[2], proposed measuring the effectiveness of entrepreneurship programs by looking at changes in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of people that participate in them. The way to do this, Gedeon writes, is to identify specific goals that the program has for participants learning and development, as well as the resources in place to support them. Program participants might need, for example, to cultivate communication and social capital skills as well as creativity and innovation skills. In terms of support resources, programs administrators might think about the qualifications of their instructors, and how many classes they offer. As a next step, Gedeon suggests focusing on subsets of outcomes. For example, instructors could plan entrepreneurship courses that prioritize specific learning outcomes for students, and create class assignments that directly

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[1] Duval-couetil, N. (2013). Assessing the Impact of Entrepreneurship Education Programs: Challenges and Approaches. *Journal of Small Business Management.* 51:3, 394-409, DOI: 10.1111/jsbm.12024

[2] Gedeon, S. A. (2017). Measuring Student Transformation in Entrepreneurship Education Programs. *Education Research International*. 2017, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1155/2017/8475460

test whether they have developed the skills in question. They could ask their students for feedback, and use the information to refine the class. For example, they might select different textbooks or invite more guest speakers based on what participants say.

Let's Put it to Work

- How would you describe your current evaluation strategy? How was it developed?
- What knowledge, attitude, and skill changes do you expect for your program participants?
- How might your evaluation approach assess participant knowledge, attitudes, skills, or a combination of these?
- When mapping the resources your program provides (inputs) against what participants should be learning (outputs), do they match up or is there a discrepancy? What changes could you make to realign the two?

Supporting Women Entrepreneurs

Drawing on existing literature on entrepreneurship as well as their own experiences, Bullough et al[3] offer suggestions for developing training programs that empower and support women entrepreneurs. They cover goals for programming initiatives such as business success, entrepreneurial attitudes and intentions, and leadership capabilities, and what is needed to successfully achieve those goals including evaluation, curriculum content, available funding, and program delivery. Though the emphasis is on women entrepreneurs, the paper makes several valid points about evaluation for entrepreneurship programs in general. Crucially, the authors write that protocols and funds for the evaluation should be part of the conversation during the program design phase. The authors also suggest evaluating participants' performance at multiple time points after the program because it gives entrepreneurs time to implement what they have learned and provides a better sense of the program's long-term performance.

Let's Put it to Work

- What is your library currently doing to support the needs of women entrepreneurs?
- What conversations about evaluation (and how to fund it) currently are or need to be part of the program design phase?
- At what key stages in your programming would it be useful to monitor participants' progress?

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[3] Bullough, A., Sully de Luque, M., Abdelzaher, D., & Heim, W. (2015). Developing women leaders through entrepreneurship education and training. *Academy of Management Perspectives.* 29(2), 250-270. https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2012.0169

Entrepreneurship in Low-Income Communities

People in low-income communities use the library and participate in library programming frequently. This is true for budding entrepreneurs in these contexts. Understanding their unique needs may have implications for the kinds of programming that is developed. In a 2017 report, Kugler et al[4] looked at the characteristics of entrepreneurs and businesses in low-income communities, and compared them to entrepreneurs and businesses in other parts of the US.

The report uses data from two national surveys that include details on demographics, income sources, employment, and geographic characteristics of the U.S. population. What emerged is a picture of the unique challenges and barriers that entrepreneurs in low-income communities face that can make it hard for their businesses to do well. Compared to other areas, the study found that a higher proportion of self-employed workers in low-income areas were racial and ethnic minorities with no more than a high-school education. Most operated their businesses out of their homes, and worked in one of five sectors – construction, professional services, other services, trade, and healthcare. The businesses have lower average payrolls, and are typically located in areas with a much lower household income and higher poverty rates.

This report paints a helpful but incomplete picture. The authors highlight several areas where additional research could provide evidence on how to best support entrepreneurs in low income contexts. For example, they suggest further studying the effects of entrepreneurship on local economies, as well as a more detailed explorations of barriers to entrepreneurship in low-income areas.

Let's Put it to Work

- What value could your library contribute to research on entrepreneurship in local economies, especially in low-income areas?
- How would you describe the barriers to success faced by your program participants?
- Are there modifications to your programs that would provide additional help to entrepreneurs in low income areas?

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[4] Kugler, M., Michaelides, M., Nanda, N., & Agbayani, C. (2017). Entrepreneurship in Low-Income Areas. Office of Advocacy, U.S. Small Business Administration, Under contract number SBAHQ-15-M-0150, September 2017. https://www.sba.gov/sites/default/files/437-Entrepreneurship-in-Low-income-Areas.pdf

About the Project Team

Kauffman Foundation - The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation is a private foundation that works together with communities in education and entrepreneurship to create uncommon solutions and empower people to shape their futures and be successful. The Kauffman Foundation is based in Kansas City, Mo., and is the funder of the Libraries as Entrepreneurial Hubs project. For more information, visit *www.kauffman.org*.

Urban Libraries Council - The Urban Libraries Council is an innovation and impact tank of North America's leading public library systems. They drive cutting-edge research and strategic partnerships to elevate the power of libraries as essential, transformative institutions for the 21st-century.

Knology is a non-profit research institute dedicated to studying and untangling complex social issues through interdisciplinary social science and systems design. They partner with non-profits, businesses, and policymakers that can use social science research to make a difference on the ground. Knology is leading the evaluation of the Libraries as Entrepreneurial Hubs project. For more information, visit *www.knology.org*.