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Strengthening Libraries as Entrepreneurial Hubs

Entrepreneurship: Where Urban Libraries Fit

April 30, 2022

Rebecca Joy Norlander, Rupu Gupta, Joanna Laursen Brucker, Uduak Grace Thomas, Adam Musser, Shaun Field, & Bennett Attaway



Members of a Food Truck Class
Photo credit: Mid-Continent Public Library



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4801 Rockhill Road
Kansas City, MO 64110

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Contributors to this paper

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tel: (347) 766-3399
40 Exchange Pl. Suite 1403
New York, NY 10005

tel: (442) 222-8814
3630 Ocean Ranch Blvd.
Oceanside, CA 92056

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Executive Summary

Programs supporting entrepreneurship are a growing area of focus for urban libraries. Across the United States, libraries provide a wide range of supports including webinars, mentorship, and business databases that serve the needs of entrepreneurs, from freelance craftspeople to established restaurant owners, fledgling business owners to non-profit executives. Understanding the landscape of entrepreneurship programming models that urban libraries use to deliver services is critical to giving them the support that they need to best meet their communities' needs.

Knology, a social science research organization, with the support of the Urban Libraries Council and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, assessed the range and impact of entrepreneurship programs offered by urban libraries across the US. The evaluation questions were designed to explore how entrepreneurs engage with the library programs and services, and how these interactions lead to changes in knowledge, skills, confidence, or behaviors around entrepreneurship. By focusing on a set of case studies and a national survey, the research identified critical domains where entrepreneurship is being supported, and potential areas where libraries could expand their services. Our evidence included a wealth of free resources, classes, meeting spaces, mentorship, and other services designed to support entrepreneurship.

Due to COVID-19, the research team adapted the project methods to accommodate the capacities of the library professionals and their service populations. Despite the pandemic, the study demonstrated that urban libraries' status as trusted community spaces helps them mediate between entrepreneurs and the broader business ecosystem in their areas. They are a crucial link between new businesses and government support organizations, associations, and other benefit providers.

Libraries offered opportunities to explore entrepreneurship without significant upfront investment, in environments that are affirming and supportive of the unique needs of their populations. Free and low-cost resources were perceived as particularly beneficial for people from groups historically underrepresented in entrepreneurship, and those without the financial capacity to enroll in formal training. Some libraries also offered multilingual programming which allowed them to support a broader swathe of their communities.

This study documented the ways that libraries currently support entrepreneurs. It also identified areas where the demand for business-related programming is increasing. We learned that entrepreneurs need support with technology and training to identify and adopt useful new platforms for their business. Library professionals also reported frequent requests for training in money management and financial resources to help make their businesses more resilient.

Lastly, urban libraries need trained staff to support their role as connectors, networkers, and mentors. The research suggested that urban libraries need publicity, capacity building and training for their staff to help them connect entrepreneurs to other local business resources and continue to provide business-related programming.



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Restaurant owner Marisa Wiruharyan of Tasty Thai in Kansas City met with other small business owners at her local library to share business practices. Photo credit: Mid-Continent Public Library



Introduction



Urban Libraries Council Cohort. Photo credit: Kansas City Public Library

Today, public libraries are one of the few places in the country where people from all backgrounds and socioeconomic contexts can freely gather, find information, and engage in different kinds of learning. Entrepreneurship has emerged as a particular focus for urban library programming,¹ encompassing a variety of programs and services that are designed to help burgeoning entrepreneurs² build businesses. These services are invaluable to libraries' patrons, particularly those who are members of groups that have historically been underrepresented in entrepreneurship.

With the support of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, the Urban Libraries Council (ULC) launched the *Strengthening Libraries as Entrepreneurial Hubs* initiative with the stated goal of helping urban libraries in their role as support organizations for budding entrepreneurs, particularly those from underrepresented communities. As part of this work, ULC brought together a cohort of 11 member institutions to identify the landscape of entrepreneurial support practices and programming models used by urban libraries.

To further support this effort, in late 2019, ULC and Kauffman partnered with Knology to assess the effectiveness of a subset of programs offered by the libraries in the cohort with an eye towards building best practices for library-based programs and helping to level the playing field for entrepreneurs. The partners initially identified five urban libraries to participate in the evaluation process, eventually expanding data collection to include three

¹ <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/initiatives/strengthening-libraries-as-hubs-for-entrepreneurship>

² Note: Throughout this paper, we use the term “entrepreneur(s)” to refer to individuals who are interested in starting or who have launched a small business. Businesses could take many forms, including selling products in-person (in a store, food truck, local market, etc.) or online (Amazon, Etsy, etc.) or providing services (classes/coaching, writing, design, software, etc.).

additional systems. The services and programs of the libraries where most of the data were collected are highlighted in an appendix to this paper.

This white paper focuses on examples of the range of programs that those urban libraries already offer to support entrepreneurs in their communities, and some promising areas for expanding those services. The information is supplemented with data from a national survey of 2,520 entrepreneurs that assessed their use of library resources as part of their business development. (See Appendix 2 for a summary of our methods).

The primary questions that informed the writing of this paper focused on understanding the impact of libraries' entrepreneurship programming on their audiences. Specifically, how communities engage with the library programs and services, and what changes in knowledge, skills, confidence, or behavior could be attributed to that engagement. Because this work coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, we also explored how libraries adapted their programming to support entrepreneurs in their communities during the crisis.

The evaluation also assessed the ecosystem of partnerships forged by urban libraries to expand the opportunities for entrepreneurship support available to their patrons.



A Baltimore County Public Library event during the pandemic featured a local entrepreneur's pop-up shop displaying skincare products. Photo credit: Baltimore County Public Library

Entrepreneurship Programming in Urban Libraries

Once seen primarily as homes for books and reference resources, urban libraries have evolved to offer much more to their communities. Besides information on every conceivable subject, libraries provide meeting spaces and a wealth of freely available public programming and resources to their communities. These programs encompass the needs and interests of diverse groups of library users, from English language classes for adults to book clubs for retirees and reading groups for toddlers and young children. The ongoing shift toward more expansive public programming – and its impact – is being documented and investigated as an important development in the library world.³

As part of this broader trend in public programming, libraries are increasingly becoming incubators for new business owners seeking access to resources and training to support their entrepreneurial endeavors. This is crucial for persons with limited entrepreneurial experience and resources to pursue more formal training. A 2018 assessment that was followed by flash polls of ULC libraries' entrepreneurial services⁴ identified a broad range of education and information resources offered to patrons, personalized mentoring from library staff and other experts, and strategic partnerships with community organizations that expand libraries programming portfolios. That assessment also identified intentional efforts by libraries to be inclusive in their entrepreneurship programming and provide viable pathways to success.

Due to their status as trusted community spaces, libraries are uniquely positioned to act as mediators between budding entrepreneurs and the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. They are access points for potential partnerships with local businesses or access to other forms of support and services. Many libraries that offer entrepreneurship programming have collaborations with entities such as the local Small Business Administration office, nonprofit organizations such as SCORE,⁵ as well as social service providers in the community. They also offer collaborative workspaces for hands-on learning and exploration that double as a resource for entrepreneurship pursuits.

Our national survey indicated that most people are interested in help from the library for various aspects of entrepreneurship, but their primary need was basic support for planning and launching their businesses. The survey results revealed that half of all new business founders (49%) had used library resources for business-related reasons at some point in their start-up process, and 45% of those who used the library had used it for something beyond borrowing books, meeting space, or internet access.

An Awareness Challenge

A 2015 research study by the funders of this current project found that new business start-ups account for virtually all new job creation in the United States and nearly 20% of gross job

³ National Impact of Library Public Programs Assessment: Phase 1. Source: American Library Association. https://nilppa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/NILPPA_Phase-1-white-paper.pdf

⁴ 2018 Strengthening Libraries as Hubs for Entrepreneurship: Summary of National Scan. Source: Urban Libraries Council. <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/assets/2018-Entrepreneurship-National-Scan-Summary.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.score.org/>

creation. These results were supported by both an American Express study and a Dun and Bradstreet analysis⁶. In other words, start-ups spur job growth even though they have a high rate of failure⁷.

Our survey results demonstrated that 68% of the entrepreneurs who didn't use library resources didn't even think *"of looking for business-related help/resources at a public library."* We tested that result with those who reported that they no longer run the business they started. Of the people who were no longer in business and had not used the library, 71% had not looked for entrepreneurship-related help at the library. Less than half of our respondents who were no longer in business had used the library. While these data may not be equivalent, the variation is sufficient to warrant further study of a possible relationship between library usage and business survival.

Many urban libraries have built a wealth of free resources, classes, and services to support emerging entrepreneurs. This includes access to business databases for primary research, meeting spaces with printers and computers, business classes, one-on-one mentoring, networking opportunities, maker spaces, and much more. These resources support all kinds of entrepreneurship ventures from nonprofits focused on sewing skills to a homemade barbecue sauce shop to an online apparel business with a social justice mission.

Although urban libraries are champions for small business owners, not everyone who could benefit knows what they offer. The national survey demonstrated that many respondents were unaware that libraries offered resources, classes, services, and mentorship to entrepreneurs. Since many small businesses are structured with an online presence or storefront, fully 48% of respondents are serving national and global groups, even if they are based on one urban location. Unfortunately, 72% of women in our surveys reported that they did not use resources, claiming lack of awareness of these opportunities compared to 61% of men. This suggests that if more people know about the entrepreneurship resources available to them through their local libraries, they would be more likely to avail themselves of those services and have a higher likelihood of success.

Sharing a family tradition

The founder of Daniel's Barbecue started out helping his father manage a barbecue restaurant as a child before launching his own business in 1996. He manufactures and markets his own barbecue sauce and sells through more than 100 stores. At this critical point in business growth, he needed help developing a more strategic approach to building his business. He turned to his local library for support and learned different marketing strategies for leveraging various social media platforms, valuable photo formatting skills. He is also learning on the library for support with a new business venture --- creating a mobile artisanal market.

⁶ Tzanetos G. (2021, September 26). What Do Small Businesses Really Mean for the US Economy. *Go Banking Rates*. <https://www.gobankingrates.com/money/economy/what-do-small-businesses-really-mean-for-us-economy/>

⁷ 2019 Small Business Failure Rate: Startup Statistics by Industry. *National Business Capital*.

<https://www.nationalbusinesscapital.com/blog/2019-small-business-failure-rate-startup-statistics-industry/>

Our study also shed light on the broader role of urban libraries in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Libraries are an essential resource for people at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey. They provide a wide range of programming and resources including access to business databases, training on product marketing and social media, support with grant writing, and one-on-one mentoring. Though many urban libraries offer similar services, this evaluation indicates that they operate using different models, ranging from a loose set of business-related services to more structured programming.



Bay Boy Specialty Sandwiches Popup in Kansas City, a business created by an entrepreneur who took advantage of library entrepreneurship programming. Photo credit: Mid-Continent Public Library.

One outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic was a surge in the new business start-ups. According to *Forbes*, in July 2020, the number of applications for starting a business in the United States had increased by 95% compared to the same period in 2019.⁸ Starting and building a new business is challenging at the best of times, even with the formal training that comes from graduate degrees in marketing and business administration. Many entrepreneurs are typically starting out with access to fewer resources and may not have enough to invest in classes or subscriptions to business databases.

Prior to the pandemic, urban libraries were already spaces where people could access many of these entrepreneurial resources and mentorship at no cost. Our research demonstrated

⁸ Altun, YB. (2021, April 9). Pandemic Fuels Global Growth of Entrepreneurship and Startup Frenzy. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2021/04/09/pandemic-fuels-global-growth-of-entrepreneurship-and-startup-frenzy/?sh=480b553f7308>

that the value that these institutions provide became even more evident during the pandemic. Elsewhere, *Forbes* also singled out the variety of entrepreneurial programming and services provided by public libraries as crucial to helping businesses survive and remain competitive during COVID-19.⁹ By offering opportunities to explore entrepreneurship without the significant financial investment required by accredited business training programs, urban libraries can be exceptionally useful to people from minoritized and historically disenfranchised groups.

Our case studies demonstrated that a wide range of entrepreneurs rely on urban libraries for support, including freelance craftsmen, students, adults in career transition, and some individuals running larger enterprises. Other user categories include people who are new to the libraries service community, such as recent immigrants seeking help with launching businesses to support themselves and their communities. Most entrepreneurs want to use libraries' services when they are made aware of them. They tend to use mostly resources that focus on the basics of business planning, and market and accounting practices.

Table 1. Use of and interest in library resources for specific aspects of entrepreneurship (N = 2520)

	Have used		Would use if offered	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Developing a business plan	696	28%	1294	51%
Identifying potential customers, market research	509	20%	1286	51%
Advertising/marketing my business	414	16%	1412	56%
Building a website/setting up an online store	383	15%	1090	43%
Budgeting, accounting	314	12%	1046	42%
Being part of a community interested in small business ownership	312	12%	1127	45%
Finding potential grants/funding sources	245	10%	1076	43%
Filing to register business	151	6%	915	36%
COVID-19 related support (CARES Act, PPP Loan, etc.)	109	4%	514	20%
Other	103	4%	49	2%

⁹ Segal, E. (2020, November 25). Public Libraries Can Help Companies Survive The Coronavirus Crises. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/edwardsegal/2020/11/25/public-libraries-are-guiding-companies-to-information-they-need-in-the-pandemic/?sh=37b767a12b91>



A group of new business owners attending a promotional event for other new business owners, laying foundations for a mutually supportive community of practice.

Photo credit: Saint Louis County Public Library

These data also highlighted demand for possible funding opportunities for entrepreneurs. However, we note that this survey was conducted during the pandemic when businesses faced existential threats. As such, entrepreneurs may have actively sought grant opportunities to sustain their businesses and workforce; it is unclear if the demand will remain after the pandemic.

The case study data helped bring clarity to those uses and desires. For example, the multilingual programming and workshops were cited as particularly valuable for helping some entrepreneurs learn skills in their first language and understand how to work within the business and tax reporting requirements that preference English language proficiency. In one major metropolitan area, a participant in a library entrepreneurial program described it as *“a great resource for the urban lower income community.”*

Helping an independent bookseller reach a new market

An independent author in Kansas City who writes contemporary romance novels and women’s fiction needed help with marketing and promoting her books. She turned to the business services program offered by her local library, taking several classes at the library that taught skills critical to running a successful business, including one focused on how to effectively advertise her work on Facebook. Prior to the COVID-19 related closures, the author attended various library-hosted events where she could talk about her books and connect with other local authors and entrepreneurs.

Knology's national survey indicated that urban libraries create an affirming environment for entrepreneurs. We also saw evidence of this in the case studies. Participants in one entrepreneurial program described the social experience of gathering in the community to learn business skills together as energizing and helpful. Besides classes and mentorship, urban libraries provide space for entrepreneurs to rethink their business goals and strategies and to adjust them in the face of expected and unforeseen challenges. In some instances, urban libraries are the first places where entrepreneurs are exposed to classes on business and business practices. For others, our findings suggest that a library's resources were instrumental in helping them rebuild careers and develop new workforce skills. Still others described their library's entrepreneurial programs as essential for cultivating skills for the future.

Through oversampling of communities traditionally underrepresented in entrepreneurship programs, our survey revealed that library programming and resources are equitably being accessed when we consider results by race (Figure 1 below). We note that White audiences reported less use than others, but these differences were not significant enough to suggest an exclusion.

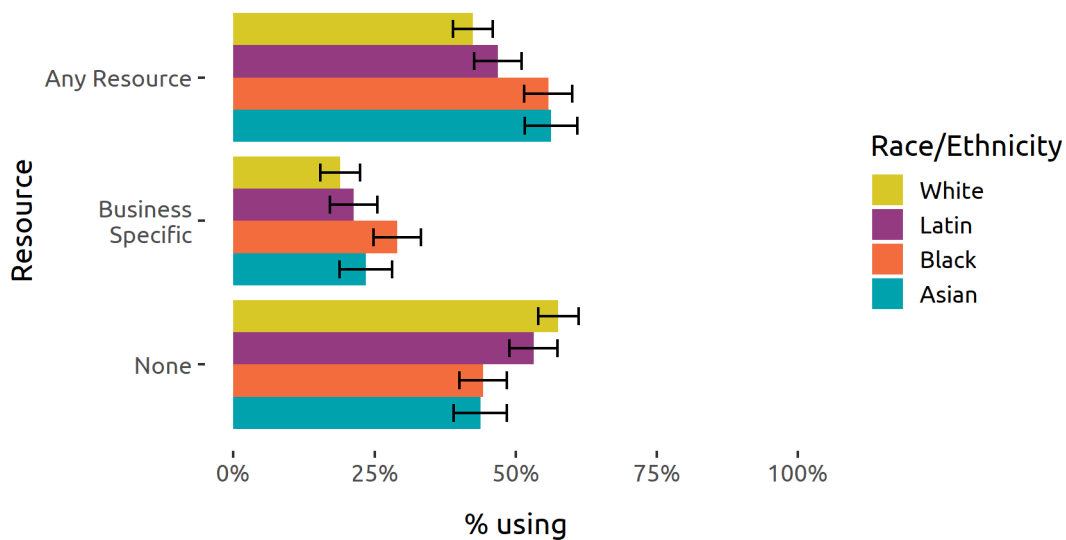


Figure 1. Types of library resources used by race

Providing an education in natural hair care

The founder of The Kitchen Salon, a hair care business that teaches a holistic approach to natural hair care for African Americans, turned to her local library for meeting rooms and equipment needed to host her community classes and workshops. The founder benefited from one-on-one mentorship to revise her company's vision, purpose, and mission by a library staff member who herself was a former entrepreneur and business coach.

Where Exactly do Libraries Fit in the Ecosystem?

A community partner praised their library for creating a safe and welcoming space for people to access the resources they need in Spanish and English. We heard library staff describe their partnerships with local immigrant-serving organizations to facilitate access to resources and community cultural-navigators for patrons. This study confirmed that urban libraries aid entrepreneurs by helping them form connections, build skills, expand their understanding of business management, and collaborate as part of a broader community of entrepreneurs. Access to one-on-one mentoring from library staff emerged as a crucial part of the support ecosystem that urban libraries have built around entrepreneurs in their communities.



Library staff in Kansas City encouraging patronage of new business entrepreneurs. Photo credit: Mid-Continent Public Library

There are mundane realities to running a business that are essential to the success of any entrepreneurship endeavor. Not every librarian is an expert in small business start-up and administration, but many libraries have access to people who are. Staff at one urban library highlighted the value of their community-partner network in meeting the entrepreneurial needs of their patrons. At many urban libraries, business owners have opportunities to share their entrepreneurship plans and get constructive feedback on their products and growth plans. Some of the libraries we worked with also provide training on market systems, how marketing and advertising skills are essential to success, and the importance of patents, copyrights, accounting, and taxes.

As the Table 1 above illustrates, the most common services used were related to business planning, customer identification, and advertising / marketing. However, the desire to access those services is substantially higher, with the desire for advertising / marketing services representing 56% of all entrepreneurs responding to the survey compared with only 16% who have actually used such services in the past.

For small businesses, one of the fastest ways to gain customers is to develop an online platform and establish a social media presence. This was especially true during the pandemic when many businesses had to modify their models to remain profitable. Entrepreneurs needed to cultivate their digital skills quickly. In our case studies, we found that urban libraries helped to fill this gap by offering free classes focused on product marketing and leveraging social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook to communicate and engage with potential customers. Of particular interest was support and training focused on building skills and launching direct to consumer e-commerce products through platforms such as Etsy.

This study demonstrated that some urban libraries offer exceptional support to patrons interested in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs who access those services describe friendly and welcoming staff who know what questions to ask and where to find answers; in-person and virtual programming to support all manner of entrepreneurial endeavors; space to meet, print and file forms; brainstorm and learn together; and access to a community entrepreneurial ecosystem. As one entrepreneur said in an interview, *"I can't even express how useful that is just to be able to save money [by] not having to buy all those books that could [either] be great or could be a waste of my limited resources. I feel more confident and knowledgeable."*

Entrepreneurship with a social justice mission

In the wake of recent movements in support of Black lives, a local entrepreneur saw an opportunity to do more to support social justice causes. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, he launched Civic Saint, a small business that sells affirming apparel and accessories. He donates the proceeds of his sales to nonprofit and grassroots initiatives focused on supporting marginalized communities. This entrepreneur turned to his local library for advice on building a social media presence, identifying a niche for his products, and developing a marketing strategy. In his interview, he highlighted the challenges that Black business owners face with finding and accessing the capital needed to develop and grow their businesses. He highlighted the wealth of resources and services available at the library as crucial to helping him succeed as an entrepreneur.

Libraries' place in the national entrepreneurial landscape, however, remains relatively unknown. For those using libraries, the top two ways these programs were discovered were a direct online search for support (59%) and word of mouth (56%). Other avenues included direct communications through the library website (45%) or on-site materials such as

brochures (41%). Most of these approaches limit awareness to existing library users. As evidenced in our national survey, few people who accessed programs had heard of these programs through their local small business development centers (14%), community events (7%), or business conferences (7%).

Overall, our survey data suggest that nearly half the entrepreneurs in the US do not think of the local library as a useful partner, and few users heard about offerings at their library through the local organizations dedicated to business development. These findings suggest that there is an untapped opportunity for libraries to build awareness through partnerships and targeted communications to these development organizations.

Key Takeaways

Across the US, urban libraries provide hundreds of hours of free classes and one-on-one instruction to prospective and current entrepreneurs enabling them to build successful businesses. Their ability to reach diverse communities makes them ripe for investment in entrepreneurship programming from government as well as public and private philanthropy. These businesses breathe new life into local economies and create new career opportunities.

Some important takeaways from the research are:

- Urban libraries are places for entrepreneurs to learn from mentors with business expertise.
- Urban libraries are places for entrepreneurs to workshop business plans and opportunities.
- Urban libraries are places for entrepreneurs to access affordable training.
- Urban libraries are spaces for fostering and growing community partnerships that are beneficial for entrepreneurship.
- Urban libraries provide valuable entrepreneurship support for individuals from low-income and underrepresented communities.

Entrepreneurs that use the libraries' small business programming describe broad support that has been critical to helping them accomplish their goals. Our research has demonstrated that these programs are equitably meeting the needs of a diverse population, although women entrepreneurs could benefit from additional targeted messaging to ensure that they are aware of the opportunity. We further demonstrated that libraries are providing valuable support for those aware of the opportunity, but that the demand for these programs is much higher than libraries' current capacity.

Examples of Libraries' Community Partners

*The **Ennovation Center** is an incubator in Kansas City, MO that offers commercial kitchen space, offices, laboratories, and other non-food manufacturing spaces for people starting their own business.*

***SCORE** volunteers across the US work with libraries to provide free one-on-one mentoring and workshops for small business owners. In some libraries, these partnerships provide entrepreneurs with various resources such as templates for structuring a business plan and training through joint workshops focused on foundational business concepts.*

***Forward Cities' ESHIP Communities** program takes a community-driven approach to building and strengthening entrepreneurial ecosystems. It supports entrepreneurs who are disconnected from the broader business resource ecosystem.*

Future Opportunities

During the pandemic, many libraries pivoted to offering some form of virtual entrepreneurship programming. Other libraries, rather than offer programming themselves, referred their users to community partners for support. There is some evidence that the demand for entrepreneurship services from the library declined during the pandemic but that might be due to factors other than the library closures, such as family obligations or illness.

While the entrepreneurs who were interviewed for the evaluation appreciated the infrastructure that urban libraries already provide, they also identified gaps in support. Urban libraries may provide resources to address some of these gaps themselves or in partnership with community nonprofits, local Chambers of Commerce, and Small Business Development Centers. However, these gaps also represent opportunities for additional investment to enable urban libraries develop these capabilities and help strengthen their contributions to the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Technology Training

Entrepreneurs frequently asked for more classes on how to use technology. Specifically, they wanted help with creating videos showcasing their products, classes on e-commerce, and classes focused on best practices for creating webinars. Some urban libraries already have partnerships that may be able to support these needs. Austin Public Library, for example, offers the Grow with Google series, an initiative by Google that provides free training, tools, and resources to help people develop their skills, careers, and businesses.

Managing Finances

Business owners need help with developing skills related to managing money. This includes things like learning how to track their finances and filing the appropriate paperwork for tax purposes. With support from local businesses, urban libraries could build more financial programming into their offerings, including workshops that cover the fundamentals of finances, best practices for business accounting, and budgeting.

Capacity Building

As local institutions, urban libraries are well placed to identify valuable community resources and partners that benefit entrepreneurs. Furthermore, some staff at the libraries that participated in this evaluation had backgrounds in business or had been entrepreneurs at some point in time. Their experiences made them valuable mentors to the entrepreneurs. A potential area for future investment is in capacity-building and staff training that could, in turn, develop into additional workshops and classes for patrons.

Building a business around fitness and plant-based eating

The founder of Functional Fitness, a Kansas City business focused on fitness and wellness that targets local for-profit organizations, needed help cultivating the online aspects of her business such as advertising and social media. She turned to her local library where she received guidance on how to effectively use Facebook ads. She also got individualized help from mentors on how to use tools such as Microsoft PowerPoint as well as on product branding. She also turned to the library for help with launching a new arm of her business during the pandemic when she lost the bulk of the customers for her fitness classes.



Promotional Flyer for a Human Resources Workshop at Mid-Century Public Library illustrating the creativity and humor that helps entrepreneurship programming seem accessible. Photo credit: Mid-Century Public Library.

Appendix 1. Case Study Partners

This initiative relied primary on data provided by these library systems and communities:

Austin Public Library, Texas

Austin Public Library (APL) serves Austin, Texas, a metropolitan area with just under one million residents. The library consists of the Central Library, 20 library branches, a bookstore that recycles discarded books and other materials from the library system, and the Austin History Center. The library's entrepreneurial portfolio includes business guides; a Book a Librarian program through which patrons can request sessions with staff to discuss resources specific to running businesses; and LibAnswers, a communications platform that connects patrons and library workers. The library also offers financial literacy events, coaching and skills assessment, and help navigating applications for business loans and grants. Additionally, the library hosts business-related events such as the Austin Forum for Technology and Society and has partnered with the City of Austin's Small Business Program.

Baltimore County Public Library, and Enoch Pratt Free Library, Maryland

Baltimore County Public Library has 19 branch locations and serves Baltimore County, Maryland, and the Enoch Pratt Free Library has 21 branch locations serving the City of Baltimore. Entrepreneurs in the area have access to various resources through both systems including an online planning tool for starting, managing, and optimizing their businesses, a reference database of US and Canadian business profiles, and free access to databases of information on stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. In addition, the libraries offer the "Entrepreneur Academy," a series of workshops designed to advance marketing, business, and finance strategies for people interested in running their own small business.

King County Library System, Washington

King County Library System is one of the largest library systems in the U.S., with 50 branches and over 836,000 cardholders across King County, Washington. The library supports local entrepreneurs through Startup 425, a program which offers classes on starting a business and navigating taxes among other topics. The library also has local partners that help to support entrepreneurs including the Small Business Administration office and local business development centers. Additionally, the library provides access to databases for market research and resources for developing business and marketing plans.

Saint Louis County Library, Missouri

Saint Louis County Library serves a metropolitan area of roughly 1 million residents and has 21 branch locations throughout the county. The library hosts an annual Small Business and Nonprofit Expo, various outreach events, and offers Book a Librarian sessions through which it provides support to local entrepreneurs. The library also offers classes for entrepreneurs interested in launching businesses on Etsy.

Mid-Continent Public Library, Missouri

Mid-Continent Public Library serves nearly 800,000 people in the greater Kansas City metro area. The library has over 30 service outlets including local branches. Its Square One Small Business Services program offers a comprehensive suite of online resources to help local entrepreneurs learn basic skills needed to write business plans and tutorials to create reports and analyze business data. Also available are videos for starting specific kinds of ventures such as an event planning business or a daycare. The library provides online versions of various business and technology books and business publications and offers mentoring to small business owners.

Appendix 2. Research Methods

Knology initially proposed a comprehensive evaluation plan that included surveys, interviews, and, initially, in-person site visits. To ground the evaluation in relevant research findings, the project team reviewed existing literature on entrepreneurship training and programming models. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and staff furloughs at some sites, the program pivoted to document review and virtual workshops as a core strategy for pursuing the research questions and supplemented those data with virtual focus groups, interviews, and a national survey on entrepreneurship and library resource use.

Knology conducted three virtual workshops with representatives from libraries in the evaluation cohort. Because the strategy had pivoted to exploring unique case studies, the research expanded to explore impacts based on the priorities of each of our exemplar sites. During the workshops and in the months that followed, the researchers worked with library staff to create individualized logic models that showed inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes for the library's entrepreneurship programs and services. This work led the research team to co-create unique evaluation plans for each library in the cohort, based on their logic model, and to work with them to gather the data that informed this report.

The modified plan included a focus on how libraries adjusted their entrepreneurship programs and services to continue supporting their communities during the extended lockdown.

We also wanted to paint a broader picture of entrepreneurs' awareness and use of targeted library resources. To gather these data, we designed a national survey of US entrepreneurs, or those considering starting a business (Attaway, Voiklis, Norlander, & Field, 2021)¹⁰. The survey explored the range of business services currently being offered in some libraries, and why those services are perceived as valuable. We used demographic questions to determine whether there were distinct factors implicated in use or non-use, and how that might impact those traditionally underrepresented in entrepreneurship supports.

Helping people find financial stability through sewing

The executive director of The Sewing Labs, a nonprofit that teaches sewing skills for entrepreneurship, turned to her local library because she needed internet access. She discovered the wide range of resources available at the library and learned about its comprehensive suite of online tools intended to help entrepreneurs learn basic skills. Due to the library's support, The Sewing Labs increased its social media presence by using LinkedIn and Facebook more effectively. The library helped build connections with local expertise in video production to create online educational videos for trainees seeking to launch their own sewing businesses.

¹⁰ Attaway, E., Voiklis, J., Norlander, R.J., & Field, S. (2021). Libraries as Entrepreneurial Hubs National Survey of Entrepreneurs Topline Report. Knology Publication #NPO.180.636.14. Knology

We offered English and Spanish versions of the survey, but none of the respondents used Spanish-language option. In total, the survey received 1058 responses, with oversampling of Hispanic/Latino (24% vs 18.4% US 2019 census data), Black (24% vs 13.4% 2019 US census data), and Asian American/Pacific Islander/Asian (19% vs 7% 2019 US census data) populations. The oversampling by demographic criteria increased our reliability for assessing whether these factors influenced use.

In our sample 58% of respondents identified as women, compared to 51.1% of the national population reported by the US census in 2019. This latter result was likely an anomaly due to the panel providers' recruitment strategy but did not impact data analysis or results. About 3.1% of the population selected a gender identity other than female or male, but this low response rate limited our ability to generalize on library services for those individuals.



Toledo Lucas County Public Library maintaining programming while employing pandemic safety protocols. Photo credit: Toledo Lucas County Public Library

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, Missouri, 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.



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Knology.org
info@knology.org

tel: (442) 222-8814
3630 Ocean Ranch Blvd.
Oceanside, CA 92056

tel: (347) 766-3399
40 Exchange Pl. Suite 1403
New York, NY 10005