

Public Libraries: A Critical Anchor in the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

As trusted public institutions, libraries are finding **new and expanded roles to support their local economy, job seekers and small business owners**. Libraries lead inclusive programs focused on creating economic opportunity and social mobility.

They help community members **build personal financial stability and contribute to the local economy**. Libraries also provide job search assistance, career development programs, and resume help, as well as partner with social services agencies streamline access to workforce assistance.

A library's entrepreneurial and small business programs are often designed to **support those who face the greatest barriers to entrepreneurship**, among them, women, people of color, immigrants and those previously justice involved. Libraries offer free access to tools and resources that can be a financial burden to anyone looking to start a business.

From subscriptions to business databases, business plan development software and research support to evaluate market competition, it's no surprise that a 2022 report by the Urban Libraries Council and Knology found that **“half of all new business founders (49%) had used library resources for business-related reasons at some point in their start-up process.”**

Snapshot of Libraries Supporting Local Entrepreneurs



Los Angeles Public Library (CA)

The Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL) has a **program for street vendors** to learn business, digital and English-language skills to be successful business owners, all from their mobile phone. Street vendors are often excluded from business development resources due to their lack of access and understanding of the formal systems to operate legal businesses in Los Angeles. To address this disparity, LAPL works directly with vendors to identify their needs and partners with Cell-Ed to build micro-lessons in English and Spanish that vendors can complete on a mobile phone. Lessons include basic Internet skills; business, sales, vending; and community safety.



DC Public Library (DC)

The Labs — a maker space Fabrication Lab, a DIY digital preservation Memory Lab, and a dance rehearsal and audiovisual production Studio Lab — serve as a hub for entrepreneurship services and programs at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Library in downtown Washington, DC. There are also coworking spaces at the library, where a vibrant partnership with the DC Department of Small and Local Business (DSLBD) offers **one-on-one consultations** to aspiring entrepreneurs each Wednesday.

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Mid-Continent Public Library (MO)

Square One is a hub for small business and jobseeker services throughout the Kansas City area library system. It offers regular classes and programs on how to start your own business, as well as one-on-one help with a business specialist. Over the past 10 years, Mid-Continent Public Library has provided trainings for local entrepreneurs, including the review of business plans, access to business databases, social media strategies, information on funding and start-up capital, and an emphasis on a broader understanding of local business ownership.



Spokane Public Library (WA)

StartUp Spokane is a free business resource hub that provides access to cutting-edge information and co-working spaces to allow local entrepreneurs to succeed. Spokane County Library District and Spokane Public Library offered business services for over a decade and are now partners to offer easier access to combined business services through the StartUp Spokane program.



WHAT'S AHEAD FOR LIBRARIES: INTRODUCING NEW PROGRAMS & CALCULATING BUSINESS VALUE

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC) is dedicated to strengthening and advancing the essential role of public libraries as a dynamic place for innovation, equity and opportunity. This year, ULC is helping nearly 100 libraries identify new approaches to reach and serve local entrepreneurs.

Through peer-to-peer sharing, relevant resources and community engagement tips, they are building programming models, deepening regional partnerships to advance economic opportunity, and understanding how to meet entrepreneurs at specific points in their business development journeys.

Additionally, ULC is developing a new Business Value Calculator. This online tool will allow libraries to calculate the economic impact of their business and entrepreneurial services.