

This report highlights the key learnings and program elements of Libraries Build Business, a \$2 million national initiative of the American Library Association (ALA), that have wide application and opportunity for expanding impact: to narrow economic divides and empower diverse entrepreneurs to reach their potential. Scheduled to launch just as the pandemic began, the pilot demonstrated powerful impacts in a short time on small businesses, local communities, and the library

and underrepresented small business owners and

With our insights and lessons learned, Libraries Build Business can be leveraged for further impact on economic opportunity and advancement in communities across the United States.

## INITIATIVE OVERVIEW

Entrepreneurship and small business ownership are viable and growing paths toward economic stability and independence, fostering resiliency and empowerment in individuals, their families, and communities. While interest in entrepreneurship

grows, marginalized communities face numerous barriers to successful business ownership, including a lack of access to capital and essential

support for underrepresented small business owners and entrepreneurs, the nation's nearly 17,000 public libraries are a critical infrastructure to leverage.

reputation as inclusive and safe spaces for all

learning opportunities. In this role, libraries are  
  
aspiring and existing entrepreneurs into the local  
infrastructure of entrepreneurial services and  
  
to basic technology, equipment, and information,  
making it easy for an entrepreneur to explore  
or test out a business idea before committing or  
investing in it. Libraries excel at addressing many  
of the unseen barriers to economic advancement  
by: building digital skills; offering literacy, English  
as a Second Language (ESL), and GED classes;  
providing internet and technology access;

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the conversation around how this work is done—bringing together library professionals to learn from one another and seed further development in this area. As the importance of entrepreneurship grows in the U.S. economy,

n **Building and sustaining a national network of library professionals** working together on small business, entrepreneurship, and other economic development programs and services to build relationships, share promising strategies and models, and make connections to

n **Demonstrating the library's critical role** as a key stakeholder and partner in the small business development ecosystem to business community.

## INITIATIVE IMPACT

Using both quantitative and qualitative methods,

and challenges that running the program during

trouble accessing the necessary equipment and infrastructure at home due to availability, usability,

adapting this model in spring 2021 based on the

showcase how libraries can creatively leverage their knowledge of local communities, partnerships with other community stakeholders, and existing

internet to support small business and local

initiatives, please see the “LBB Resources” box near the end of this report.

### Building Library Capacity

demonstrates that any library, no matter their size or budget, can and should support small

to build capacity in libraries to develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain impactful library small

business development programs, primarily in the

Libraries Build Business Playbook.

in February 2022, is a resource collaboratively developed by LBB cohort members to share practical resources and advice, promising strategies and models, and inspiration for programming and services for any library, no matter their size or budget, to adapt in their context. It is designed to support library workers interested in starting or growing a small business/entrepreneurship program and includes information to help libraries get started, build partnerships, integrate principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), conduct

demonstrates the value of libraries as partners and leaders in the small business and entrepreneurial

small business services in order to help libraries assess their current resources and capacity as they develop and implement a program for their



and welcomed; ensuring that community member feedback informs library programs and services;

rather than making assumptions; and recognizing that words are important. Yakama Nation, for

through their similar

aspect of LBB demonstrates the importance of convening library professionals to work

Libraries—ranging from big to small—were able to learn from and support one another to ultimately offer better small business and entrepreneurship programming to their communities and more comprehensive tools, to build on. One member of the peer learning

that would have sat on the back burner forever. Especially as a new [library] director, I have a lot of competing priorities and I wasn't really sure

The opportunities provided through this project—presentations, book chapters, etc.—gave us all the opportunity to stretch and added value to the work we do. These opportunities also provided staff with validation—the work they do is important and these opportunities reinforced the importance of the work they do.”

—LIBRARIES BUILD BUSINESS COHORT MEMBER

where to begin here. But [my LBB coach] helped talk me through it and break my goals down into manageable chunks, and now we're already well on our way to having a small business program at my

### Leadership Development

LBB offered an intensive leadership development experience for cohort participants to learn from peers and advance library business initiatives,

and inclusive programming.

Librarians described gaining a general

initiative required them to stretch professionally.

perspective, reactions, and ideas in relation to library business outreach.” Another added, “I think I am a much better librarian today than I was at the start of the project, and it encourages me to pursue even bigger projects in the future.” Librarians expressed a sense of accomplishment in

and managing a relatively large grant; in making things work despite the challenges posed by the

awards or promotions; in acting as a coach to other libraries; in launching a statewide initiative; and pride in being able to make a difference in their communities. In sum, the LBB project facilitated the development of a set of library leaders in small business and entrepreneurship.

## LIBRARIES BUILD BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The community of practice, seeded during the grant period, continues to grow, with 200+ individuals to date, offering libraries an opportunity to learn from others, gain perspective, and network. As libraries build additional business programs across the country, the peer learning community provides consistency, sustainability, and scalability for the profession. Monthly community discussions and peer coaching are also available for individuals to develop relationships and learn from and with one another.



for the wider profession for years to come both individually (as coaches, for example) as well as via the project materials they collectively created (the Playbook, the book, etc.), creating channels for sustaining and scaling libraries' essential work in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and ensuring

small business owners.

### Advancing Libraries as Economic Opportunity Centers

Bolstering the expertise of library workers and

the nation, and the future. On the whole, the Libraries Build Business pilot demonstrates that any library, no matter their size or budget, can effectively implement responsive small business and entrepreneurship programs, services, and resources for their community. In turn, this infusion of resources and professional development equips libraries to continue innovating and to demonstrate their key role as 21st century opportunity centers for career readiness, success, and transitions—including

and solving complex societal problems. With

LBB Playbook, Libraries Build Business has created opportunities for libraries to collaborate, learn from and with one another, and advance

dynamic learning opportunities through a

## PROFESSIONAL HIGHLIGHT



[Rachael Svoboda](#), Laramie County Library System's Business Services Coordinator and Wyoming Library to Business Project Manager, [won the Wyoming Library Association's 2021 Outstanding Librarian award](#) for her work on Wyoming Library to Business, her role as a Libraries Build Business peer coach, and her instrumental role in securing continued funding to advance the work of scaling Wyoming Library to Business across the state. This will extend and expand library support for rural entrepreneurs and women-owned businesses by providing mobile business stations and video production studios. This achievement is one example of the effort, commitment, and caliber of the LBB grantees and the significant opportunity this project provided to make a long-lasting, scalable impact in the small business space.

framework of continuous improvement for all.

In addition to the Playbook, resources

and other stakeholders developed through this initiative include: the Libraries Build Business

“Libraries have done much to help bridge the traditional digital divide between those who have computers and internet and those who don’t. When I applied for the Libraries Build Business grant, I wanted to empower our library and our community partners with more tools to tackle the 21st century digital divide—a lack of representation and opportunities in tech for underrepresented groups.”

—SHELDON BURKE, BROWARD COUNTY LIBRARY

ALA Editions book, *Libraries*

*That Build Business*; peer

coaching; and conference presentations, panels, and networking events at a variety of virtual and

and local business ecosystems. One library wrote, that LBB “allowed us to be viewed by the business community and the other workforce/ small business support organizations as a viable

### Visibility and Value

Creating accessible, inclusive opportunity centers is advantageous to local and national stakeholders who can look to libraries as strategic partners and connectors. Several libraries expressed that taking part in the project helped them gain recognition for their work with small business and entrepreneurship at various levels including nationally, statewide, in their communities,

visibility, and the opportunity to create connections with stakeholders, is a critical way that libraries demonstrate their value for partners and other stakeholders. Because of their visibility, libraries are often entry points to partners, resources, and successful pathways for aspiring entrepreneurs.

## NEXT STEPS

At the library level, all LBB cohort members are sustaining their small business and entrepreneur initiatives beyond the grant. Using what they’ve learned from the grant period and participant feedback, libraries are adapting and making program adjustments, using a continuous

Examples of program developments and future plans include:

w [The Providence Public Library is creating a business Library of Things](#) with a local partner,

offer improved programs and services in the future. As one library wrote, “this project encourages me to continue to offer programs for entrepreneurs and to also not be afraid to try new things in our community.”

education agency that is using library space to run an initiative called CHOP. CHOP will have culinary prep students run a café and wine bar at the library. PPL will further support entrepreneurship by providing students with library business resources

to supplement their curriculum, SCORE mentors, and databases and research support to help them develop their own food businesses.

W The Baltimore County Public Library in Maryland will pilot new versions of their successful Entrepreneur Academy

speakers (*Academia de Emprendedores*), Entrepreneur Academy in correctional facilities,

W The Independence Public Library (IPL) in rural Kansas created an innovative self-paced business course using Beanstack (a tool typically used by libraries to help individuals achieve literacy goals using reading challenges). As learners complete tasks and m8s

in their communities and on the national scale. At the library level, library workers are reimagining their roles within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. One noted, “libraries should step out of their lanes, especially when it’s to connect underserved populations.” Another added, “I learned that it is not necessary to be an expert. I

and make connections for our patrons with those who have the expertise to provide support. Small steps and informal conversations lead to the most creative solutions.” Other takeaways about the role and voice of libraries from the LBB initiative included that libraries can help shift culture toward partnership and better integration with other community based organizations, agencies, and small businesses.

With this pilot initiative, we have developed and contextualized key tools and resources for

“The Libraries Build Business project is a powerful example of how today’s libraries and seasoned library professionals advance innovation and economic growth, especially in libraries serving entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups.”

—PATRICIA “PATTY” WONG,

responsive small business

thirteen public libraries involved in the pilot are leaders and innovators in the resources, and offer guidance to libraries getting started with or wishing to expand small business development

assets to be leveraged via the country’s network of nearly 17,000 public libraries, and addressing disparities in economic opportunity. work, provide support, and disseminate actionable professionals in the United States and beyond. With systems and resources in place, Libraries Build Business is an excellent starting point for advancing economic opportunity and economic development in communities across the country.

For further information about this report or Libraries Build Business , contact Megan Janicki ([mjanicki@alawash.org](mailto:mjanicki@alawash.org) ) or visit our website: [ala.org/advocacy/workforce/grant](http://ala.org/advocacy/workforce/grant) .



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