



# ONE SMALL BUSINESS AT A TIME

## Building Entrepreneurial Opportunity in America's Communities

**L**ibraries propel entrepreneurship across the United States. To research or brainstorm new ideas or markets, develop business plans, gain access to or learn about emerging technologies, obtain information about intellectual property, and sustain an enterprise, the 120,000 libraries across the country are ideal partners. Libraries possess the relevant information, technology, and expert resource base and are widely acknowledged as a respected and trusted community institution.

Libraries are a cost-effective, turnkey national network of resources for implementing new initiatives advancing entrepreneurship. We urge decision makers in the U.S. Small Business Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, and other federal agencies; the White House; U.S. Congress; business-related associations, foundations

and corporate philanthropy; think tanks; and other organizations to include libraries in their plans to promote entrepreneurship and small business development. Libraries represent economic opportunity for all.

### **Brainstorming and formulating new business concepts**

America's libraries are well-equipped to enable the creation of business ideas, providing access to both relevant resources and relationships. From offering digital media labs that enable original audio and video production to hosting author talks, libraries stimulate creativity across topics and walks of life. Libraries are ►

rich centers for brainstorming and discovery—with staff that guide businesspeople to the right resource among an avalanche of options. They also offer valuable networking opportunities for entrepreneurs, such as the popular Princeton Tech Meetup hosted by the Princeton (N.J.) Public Library.

Libraries provide no-fee access to specialized digital content available online 24/7—indispensable for exploring new ideas. With a library card, any resident can access their virtual library and find demographic information, market research, industry sector profiles and company information and financials. Reference USA, for instance, is a database of 14 million U.S. businesses and 220 million U.S. residents that powers search for suppliers, patent research, and competitive intelligence. Whether starting up or growing a business, the library connects businesspeople to newspapers, magazines, e-books and databases for exploration and deepening knowledge.

### Market research and business planning

Completing a business plan is one of the first tasks at hand to bring an idea to reality—and libraries are there to help. The Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh, for instance, has created a Business Plans and Profiles Index that offers resources in 28 major categories that include Baby & Children's Products; Computers, Software & Electronics; Retail; and Travel & Tourism. The Lansing (Mich.) Community College Library offers a Business Planning: Start-up Guide through its website.

In addition to online resources, libraries also provide and host training and consultations. The New York

Public Library Science, Industry and Business Library offers a business plan research workshop, in which participants receive tailored guidance. And the non-profit WomenVenture has partnered with an alliance of more than 100 libraries in the Minnesota Twin Cities area to provide small business classes at libraries, such as “How to Write a Business Plan.” The Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County (N.Y.) placed a librarian in Eastman Business Park, which serves 65 companies, to provide direct, on-site service to these small businesses.

Libraries also partner with national small business support organizations to extend the reach and depth of support available to startups. The Small Business Administration administers the Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) program, which provides

management and technical advice in partnership with varied organizations. SCORE (formerly known as the Service Corps of Retired Executives) provides free and confidential business advice for entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Libraries work with both SBDCs and SCORE. The Boulder (Co.) and Evanston (Il.) public libraries are home to two of 900 SBDC service sites across the nation, connecting dedicated small business technical assistance with deep and diverse

library collections and resources. At the Pima County (Az.) Public Library, the local SCORE chapter teaches weekly classes and supports nonprofit formation.

### Access to capital and workspace

A big challenge for entrepreneurs is access to capital, and some libraries have stepped up with programming to help. For example, the Houston and Brooklyn public libraries partnered with financial institutions to administer competitions that provide seed funding. “Liftoff Houston!” and “PowerUp!,” respectively, provide information resources and training to participants who are eligible for prizes up to \$15,000.

Increasingly, libraries are re-designing spaces to accommodate co-working and mobile work. Libraries of all sizes informally support freelancers and contractors, but a growing number (more than 1,000 nationwide) offer dedicated co-working spaces. Damian Huising partially operates his IT and cybersecurity consulting business out of the co-working space at the Akron-Summer County (Ohio) Public Library. The Alexandria Co-Working

**More than 6,000 public library outlets (38% of the U.S. total) provide specific assistance with the development of small business plans.**

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND  
DIGITAL INCLUSION SURVEY, 2013

**L**isa Kilby relied heavily on resources at the Cecil County (Md.) Public Library to write a plan that helped her secure \$50,000 in seed money and realize her dream of opening an ice cream shop. Kilby Cream now has two locations.





# ABOUT AMERICA'S LIBRARIES




**T**he 120,000 libraries across the United States are a powerful force in addressing public policy priorities. Libraries advance Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Engagement for Everyone, Everywhere—The E's of Libraries®.

Libraries serve America's cities, towns, counties, and states; on school and college campuses; on military bases; in hospitals, government agencies, corporations, and other institutions. Library professionals provide diverse programs, services and resources tailored to community needs.

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with more than 57,000 members. The ALA Annual Conference, held in June, typically attracts over 20,000 participants. ALA maintains a Washington Office to engage federal and national decision makers and influencers.

For further information about this publication, contact Alan S. Inouye ([ainouye@alawash.org](mailto:ainouye@alawash.org)) or Larra Clark ([lclark@alawash.org](mailto:lclark@alawash.org)); 202-628-8410.

Published November 2016. © 2016 American Library Association. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at [creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/). 

**ALA** American  
Library  
Association