Small Business and Entrepreneurs Pathway

This pathway includes:

- Understanding how small business builds local economies

- Building training and programs to support local small businesses

- Connecting patrons with resources for small business development and sustainability.

Why is it important?

Starting new local businesses or sustaining existing small business is a viable way to create jobs and stimulate the local economy, especially in communities where job opportunities continue to be scarce. Libraries can be productive partners in supporting local economic development.

Small Business

- Discovery & Assessment
- Collections
- Training & Programming
- Collaboration
- Communication

This pathway is online at: **www.webjunction.org/explore-topics/workforce-resources/materials.html**.

Links to all resources are listed in the URL Reference List at the end of this document.
The online version has embedded hyperlinks to resources.

Case Study: The Fairfield Public Library Means Business

After building a successful program for job seekers at the Fairfield (CT) Public Library, **Judy Sparzo** focused the spotlight of her innovative energy on how her library could support small business and entrepreneurs in the community.

Discovery: know your community

Fairfield, Connecticut, has a high percentage of highly skilled, white collar professionals who were surprised to find themselves suddenly jobless as the economy plummeted. Sparzo recognized that this demographic was ripe to become their own bosses. She wanted to transition them to thinking about starting their own businesses. She also guessed that there were small community business people who were foundering in the recession but did not know they could find help at the library.

Collection: ready for business

The Fairfield Public Library was fortunate to have a basic set of books, periodicals and databases to provide important information for local entrepreneurs. Most of the reference staff are not trained specifically as business librarians but they are experienced and confident in their strong reference skills and their ability to locate requested information.

These three databases top the list for usefulness:

- *Reference USA*—an online directory of over 14 million U.S. businesses that can be sorted by geography, size and type of business

- *Business and Company Resource Center*—company profiles, industry rankings, products and brands, stock prices, investment reports, industry statistics

- *Dunn's Million Dollar Database*—premier directory of all U.S. public and private companies with sales of at least $1 million or at least 20 employees; excellent source for biographies of company officers.

Collaboration: finding partners

Although it may seem like putting the cart before the horse, when developing programs to support entrepreneurs, it makes sense to start by first identifying partners in your community. The partners the library finds to work with will help to shape the type and the scope of the services to offer. Making connections with experts who can provide training and programming can compensate for the library's lack of a business or financial reference specialist.

Sparzo turned to the local office of SCORE, a national organization that bills itself as "America's premier source of free and confidential small business advice for entrepreneurs." In that first connection, the SCORE representative brainstormed some starter topics, which became the basis of the first workshop series. He also recommended a host of speakers, all of whom had already been vetted by their organization for quality.

Once the Small Business Strategies program was rolling, it became easier to find other interested partners. Sparzo's value proposition leverages the connection with SCORE and its e-mail promotion list of several thousand clients, and highlights the program's success in reaching current and prospective entrepreneurs.

Programs: build on what works

If you've got a successful formula, why not see if it applies to other efforts? That's exactly what Sparzo did—she started with the workshop series format that had worked so well for the job seekers workshops. With the help of her SCORE partner, she identified topics and contacted speakers. The timing of the program schedule was carefully selected to reach the intended audience. The 7 PM weekday evening start time has worked well for most small business people, where a Saturday morning program would exclude too many current business owners.

In the first two seasons of the Small Business Strategies programs, the hot topics (those with the highest attendance) were:

- Creating a business plan
- E-mail marketing
- Using LinkedIn to promote your business
- Online marketing with social media
- Search engine optimization.

Communication: go meet your neighborhood business people

Sparzo printed brochures for the **Small Business Strategies series**, which was the only notable expense in the development of the program. The brochures, which were distributed to key community locations, list not only the workshop topics in the series, but also the services and resources the library has to support small business. Press releases were sent to more than 20 online, print, radio and television media contacts. Additionally, word-of-mouth marketing was deployed. One Fairfield librarian hand-delivered brochures to many local businesses, talking personally to the owners in the process.

Outcomes: voting with their feet

Right from the beginning, attendance at the Small Business Strategies series indicated that Sparzo had guessed correctly about the untapped need in the community. The 11 workshops offered in the first two seasons (fall and winter 2010) attracted 496 attendees. During the same period, the library's 14 job seeker programs had 497 attendees. The Power of E-mail Marketing program had 91 people, which is the most ever for a Fairfield library program.

Feedback from attendees affirmed that the series was extremely helpful. Not only did they receive valuable information, but they also had opportunities to interact individually with presenters from the business community and to network with fellow entrepreneurs.

Read the full story; in addition, **podcasts** are available for several of the workshops.

Rules of the road

Christine Hamilton-Pennell has written and taught widely about the powerful connection between libraries and their local small business communities. She offers these "rules of the road" for any library that embarks on this pathway:

1. Get out and listen!

2. Meet business people and providers on their turf.

3. Track and monitor your efforts: what works and why.

4. If something doesn't work, try something else!

5. If you have basic research skills, you can answer most business questions.

6. If you understand a few basic business research needs (competitor, customer, market and industry information), you will be able to help the majority of business owners.

7. Practice makes perfect—go for it!

8. Personal connections and networks are best way to promote your business services (and library).

9. Assume that you are invited to the table and everyone wants to partner with you.

10. Don't be afraid to ask—the worst that can happen is someone says, "No."

Small Business and Entrepreneurs Pathway

Discovery & Assessment	Resources and ideas to help you take action

Focus here to learn more about:
• The needs of your local business community
• How libraries can support small business contributions to workforce recovery
• Local, state or national agencies available to provide support for local small business.
	Consider:
	• Are you able to articulate small business needs to potential partners?
	  ⇨ Look at **Collaboration**
	• Are you able to articulate small business needs to key community stakeholders?
	  ⇨ Look at **Communication**

What do you know about the needs of the local business community?

☐ I understand how small business contributes to the strength of the local economy.	• **Economic Gardening Overview** gives a brief summary of the concept of economic gardening and the potential role of libraries to support it. • **Growing Local Economies** is the website created by Christine Hamilton-Pennell, a librarian with expertise in economic gardening concepts and practices.

What can your library do to support local small business?

☐ I know how libraries can support local entrepreneurs and the development of small businesses. ☐ I know what my library has already done to support local business. ☐ I can identify at least one way that my library can increase its support.	• Read **Public Libraries and Community Economic Development: Partnering for Success**, a report about the role that public libraries can play in supporting local economic development. • Read **25 Ways Your Library Can Support the Small Business Community**. • Listen to the webinar archive of *How to Make Your Library Entrepreneur-Friendly*, webinar #1 in the **Libraries and Economic Development series**, which covers basic ideas and strategies. • Get out in the community and find out what local businesses need and want, and show that the library can effectively meet that need.

How can your library help patrons discover entrepreneurship?

☐ I encourage patrons to consider the possibilities of starting a business. ☐ I help patrons understand what it takes to be an entrepreneur.	• Create an "entrepreneurship test" handout based on this list of **qualities it takes to be an entrepreneur**. • Use the SBA **Small Business Readiness Assessment Tool** to help your patrons determine if they are ready to start their own business. • Develop a "Small Business Resource Center"; include a print collection, computers dedicated for small business users, and other equipment like printer or scanner.

What local, state or national agencies are available to provide support for local small business?

☐ I am able to connect patrons with state and local agencies and organizations that provide support for entrepreneurs and small business.	Start with national agencies that may have local offices: • U.S Small Business Administration (**SBA.gov**) has local offices across the country. • **SCORE** is a nonprofit organization that offers free help and advice. • Small Business Development Center (**SBDCNet.org**) has a local SBDC locator. • Find out if your state economic development or secretary of state offices offer a free small business start-up kit.

Discovery & Assessment (cont.)	Resources and ideas to help you take action
What can library staff do to better prepare to help entrepreneurs?	
☐ Staff at my library understand that helping entrepreneurs is similar to fulfilling the information needs of other patrons.	• Help staff understand that business owners' needs fall into a few key categories—marketing, competition, industry trends and demographics. • Assure staff that if they have basic research skills, they can answer most business questions. • Have staff form a study group to explore and learn from a resource like the RUSA **Selected Core Resources**.

Collections	Resources and ideas to help you take action

Focus here to:
• Identify what your library collection has to serve small business development and sustainability
• Identify what you need to begin or augment a collection to support local small businesses.
	Consider:
	• Does your collection align with assessed small business needs?
	  ⇨ Look at **Discovery & Assessment**
	• Who can you collaborate with to share resources?
	  ⇨ Look at **Collaboration**

What do you need to begin or augment a collection to support local small business?	
☐ My library has a basic business collection of print and online resources.	• Consult the Library of Congress **list of basic business collection materials** to identify the basics of a business collection.
☐ I use existing resource guides and pathfinders. ☐ I have adapted the resource guides and pathfinders to meet local needs.	• RUSA (Reference & User Services Association) has a comprehensive Libguide of resources for **Starting a Small Business**. • **Small Business: Step by Step** is a user-friendly website to help people start a small business.

☐ My library has developed an online directory to a list of websites that answer business questions, including how to secure funding.
 	
☐ My library website has a link to the state library (or other relevant library) small business resource section.
	• Examples of state and public library small business resource directories:
	  – Dallas Public Library **Starting a Small Business**
	  – WorkSC (State Library of South Carolina) **Start your own business**
	  – Burlington County Library System **Business Gateway**
	  – The small and rural Farmington Area (IL) Public Library has a section on **Economic Development Resources**.

☐ I know what databases my library has to support entrepreneurs.
 	
☐ I understand how to use common databases to support entrepreneurs.
 	
☐ If my library doesn't have adequate business databases, I am able to network with other libraries to share database access.
	• Listen to *Turning Your Databases into Business for Your Customers* (webinar #2 in **Libraries and Economic Development series**), to learn about resource options for small and large libraries.
	
	• **Manta.com** is a free source of information on small companies, helping business professionals promote their business and make connections.
	
	• Databases (for fee) commonly held by libraries for business reference:
	  – **Reference USA**
	  – **BusinessDecision**
	  – **Hoover's Lead Builder**.

Training & Programming	Resources and ideas to help you take action

Focus here to:
• Identify available self-paced training resources for entrepreneurs
• Identify programs and classes your library could offer to build skills and knowledge for entrepreneurs and small business.
	Consider:
	• Do your training/programming plans align with assessed small business needs?
	   ⇨ Look at **Discovery & Assessment**
	• Do you have the collection you need to support training and programs for small business and entrepreneurs?
	   ⇨ Look at **Collections**
	• Who can you collaborate with to deliver training and programs?
	   ⇨ Look at **Collaboration**
	• Do you have plans for effective marketing of your training and programs?
	   ⇨ Look at **Communication**

What programs or classes can my library offer to build skills and knowledge for entrepreneurs and small business?	
☐ I connect patrons to free, good quality offerings for self-directed online training on topics of interest to entrepreneurs.	• See the SBA's **Online Small Business Training**. • **BizLaunch** offers free webinars for entrepreneurs. • The IRS offers a virtual **small business tax workshop**. • **How-To Guides for Small Business** on a range of pertinent topics from the *Wall Street Journal*.
☐ I am aware of what programs and services other libraries provide for entrepreneurs. ☐ I can identify at least one program idea that we could offer at my library. ☐ I can adapt and use existing curriculum for entrepreneur classes and programs.	• The **Small Business Notes** site describes a variety of programs and services offered by public libraries, including the **Power Up program** at Brooklyn Public Library, which provides help for business start-ups. • Look for ideas in the events calendar for the New York Public Library's **small business resource center**. • Boulder (CO) Public Library regularly offers a **Business 101** class to train aspiring entrepreneurs how to use the library resources for business research. • The Fast Forward program at the New Mexico State Library shares the curriculum for its **Small Business Success series**.
What programs and services could my library offer that connect entrepreneurs to new ideas and opportunities?	
☐ I am able to research and connect entrepreneurs to new ideas and opportunities.	• Follow entrepreneurial blogs like **Small Business Trends**. • Share the tips in **How To Market A StartUp With Social Media** or develop a class on the topic. • Find a successful **Etsy.com** entrepreneur to give workshops on how to use the online marketplace. • Research new developments in small business and connect entrepreneurs to efforts like **Kiva**, which has brought **Microlending Home to the U.S.**, or **PieLab**.

Training & Programming (cont.)	Resources and ideas to help you take action
☐ I inform entrepreneurs about the use of social networking and an online presence for small businesses. ☐ I am able to plan a networking event, or series of events, at my library to facilitate peer knowledge exchange.	• **Entrepreneur Connect** is an online networking site for business people; membership is free. • Other social networks available to business owners: **LinkedIn**, **Meet the Boss** and **Partner Up**. • See a list of the **Best Blogs** for young entrepreneurs. • Small Business Trends offers this list of **videos for small business**, including how to use YouTube, LinkedIn and other social media tools. • The Johnson County (KS) Library holds an annual **GovFest for Entrepreneurs** to connect them with government and nonprofit agencies that can help; check out the list of participating agencies for ideas.

Collaboration	Resources and ideas to help you take action
Focus here to: • Identify strategic community connections and potential partners • Build relationships and develop partnerships with community-based agencies to augment services and provide programs for small business.	**Consider:** • Are these partners able to help the library augment its collections? ⇨ Look at **Collections** • Are these partners able to help the library communicate its value to the community? ⇨ Look at **Communication**
How do I build relationships and develop partnerships with community-based agencies to augment services and provide programs for small business?	
(For general information, see the *Partnership and Collaboration Guide*.) ☐ I connect with business entities in the community. ☐ I identify and connect with regional, state or federal opportunities to support entrepreneurs and small business.	• Attend local business meetings and volunteer to serve on committees. • Attend meetings and events of entrepreneurship groups or inventors clubs. • Have a library booth at community events for "power networking" with potential partners; let the business community know what services the library provides for them. • **South Central Michigan Works** is an alliance of nine organizations, including the library, that have come together to coordinate services they provide to small business entrepreneurs. • **SBA Project in Illinois** describes a statewide effort in Illinois to expand access for small businesses and entrepreneurs in 66 public libraries.

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Where do I find potential partners to collaborate on programs for entrepreneurs?	
☐ I have identified appropriate partners to augment the library's support of entrepreneurs.	• Find the local offices of: **SBA**, **SBDC**, **SCORE**, **Chamber of Commerce**. Business librarian Christine Hamilton-Pennell suggests these other partners for small business collaboration. Typical business-related partners: • Economic development organizations • Civic and social groups such as Rotary and Kiwanis • Workforce centers • Universities, community colleges, continuing education and training programs • Financial institutions such as banks and credit unions • Professional business associations and groups Other potential partners (think outside the box!): • Community foundations and loan funds • Utility companies (many have economic development departments and funds) • City/county governments and elected officials • Entrepreneurs and inventors groups • Nonprofit organizations (arts and cultural entities) • Healthcare agencies • Tourism offices • Senior centers • Youth entrepreneur programs (Scouts, 4-H) • Technology organizations • Venture capital and angel investors • Incubators and technology transfer programs • Microfinance organizations • Churches and other religious institutions • Recreation and sports organizations • Professionals who serve small businesses (lawyers, accountants, financial advisors, designers and marketing professionals).
☐ I have identified and approached appropriate partners to implement programs and projects.	• **Carson City (NV) librarians helping city regain its economic mojo** describes a library program that focuses on the needs of startup and growth businesses. • Glen Carbon (IL) Centennial Library (LJ's **Best Small Library in 2010**) partnered with the Glen Carbon Chamber of Commerce to provide educational programs and a Business After Hours program for local businesses. • Find local successful small business owners to give presentations at the library. • Find local community college offerings of classes on starting a small business; instructors may be willing to deliver seminars at the library. • Engage volunteers from SCORE to deliver programs or provide 1:1 help for patrons at the library.

How does the library address the possibility of self-promotion by business collaborators?	
☐ There are policies in place that define the acceptable level of promotion by partners from the business community.	• Form partnerships with business entities that are local to the town or region, rather than large national chains. • Develop a policy and tell commercial presenters up front that they may not sell or promote their businesses in any way during their presentations. • Some libraries allow presenters to leave business cards and brochures for their audiences; others do not allow it.

Communication	Resources and ideas to help you take action
Focus here to learn more about: • Marketing the library's services to small business and entrepreneurs • Communicating the value of the library's support for economic recovery to community stakeholders.	**Consider:** • Are you able to engage partners to help with promotion of services or communication of value? ⇨ Look at **Collaboration**
How do I let the business community know about the resources and services the library has to support them?	
(For general information on effective communication, see the *Getting the Word Out Guide*.) ☐ I know ideas and strategies for marketing and outreach to the small business community.	• *Going to Your Customer* (webinar #3 in the **Libraries and Economic Development series**) addresses outreach to the business community. • Create a bookmark with quick reference information on the state and local forms required to start a new business. • Create a **Small Business Start-up Backpack**.
☐ I am able to communicate the value of the library as essential for the development of the local economy.	• **Public Libraries and Community Economic Development: Partnering for Success** makes a case for public libraries' contributions to the business community and economic development. • Capture testimonials from small business patrons (with permission to use them) and convey these successes to stakeholders. • Develop library advocates among small business community leaders.

URL Reference List

Links to resources are listed below in the order they appear in this pathway.
The online version has embedded hyperlinks to resources.

Case Study

Judy Sparzo:
www.libraryjournal.com/csp/cms/sites/LJ/LJInPrint/MoversAndShakers/profiles2011/moversandshakersSparzo.csp

Small Business Strategies series: **www.fairfieldpubliclibrary.org/documents/SmallBusiness.pdf**

Fairfield Public Library full story:
www.webjunction.org/documents/wj/The_Fairfield_040_CT_041_Public_Library_Means_Business.html

Jobs and Small Business series podcasts:
www.fairfieldpubliclibrary.org/Podcasts/Jobs/SmallBusiness/podcasts-smallbusiness.htm

Christine Hamilton-Pennell: **http://growinglocaleconomies.com/about**

Discovery & Assessment

Economic Gardening overview:
www.webjunction.org/documents/wj/Economic_Gardening_libraries_help_to_grow_local_economies.html

Growing Local Economies: **http://growinglocaleconomies.com/**

Public Libraries and Community Economic Development: Partnering for Success:
www.iira.org/pubs/publications/IIRA_RRR_688.pdf

25 Ways Your Library Can Support the Small Business Community:
www.webjunction.org/documents/wj/25_Ways_Your_Library_Can_Support_the_Small_Business_Community.html

Libraries and Economic Development webinar series:
www.webjunction.org/events/wj/Libraries_and_Economic_Development_Series.html

Entrepreneur test:
www.openforum.com/articles/forget-harvard-heres-the-entrepreneur-test-for-the-rest-of-us

SBA Small Business Readiness Assessment Tool: **http://web.sba.gov/sbtn/sbat/index.cfm?Tool=4**

U.S Small Business Administration: **www.sba.gov/**

SCORE: **www.score.org**

Small Business Development Center: **http://sbdcnet.org/**

RUSA Selected Core Resources:
www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/rusa/sections/brass/brassprotools/corecompetencies/corecompetenciesbusiness.cfm

Collections

Library of Congress business collection materials: **www.loc.gov/rr/business/index1.html**

RUSA Starting a Small Business: **http://brass.libguides.com/content.php?pid=112731&sid=849146**

Small Business: Step by Step: **www.starting-a-smallbusiness.com/**

Dallas Public Library Starting a Small Business: **www.dallaslibrary2.org/government/smallbiz.php**

WorkSC Start your own business: **www.worksc.org/start-your-own-business**

Burlington County Library System Business Gateway: **http://explore.bcls.lib.nj.us/business**

Farmington Area (IL) Public Library Economic Development Resources:
www.farmingtonpublic.org/Economic%20Development/economic_development.htm

Libraries and Economic Development webinar series:
www.webjunction.org/events/wj/Libraries_and_Economic_Development_Series.html

Manta.com: **www.manta.com/**

Reference USA: **www.referenceusa.com/**

BusinessDecision: **www.businessdecision.info/**

Hoover's Lead Builder: **www.hoovers.com/leads/build-a-list**

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Training & Programming

SBA's Online Small Business Training:
www.sba.gov/category/navigation-structure/counseling-training/online-small-business-training

BizLaunch: **www.bizlaunch.com/**

IRS virtual small business tax workshop: **www.irsvideos.gov/virtualworkshop/**

How-To Guides for Small Business: **http://guides.wsj.com/small-business/**

Small Business Notes: **www.smallbusinessnotes.com/starting-a-business/public-libraries.html**

Brooklyn Public Library Power Up program: **www.inc.com/howard-greenstein/start-up-help-at-your-local-library.html**

New York Public Library's small business resource center: **www.nypl.org/smallbiz**

Boulder (CO) Public Library Business 101: **http://research.boulderlibrary.org/content.php?pid=29613&sid=216568**

Small Business Trends: **http://smallbiztrends.com/**

How to Market a StartUp with Social Media:
www.ignitesocialmedia.com/social-media-promotion/how-to-market-startup-social-media/

Etsy.com: **www.etsy.com/sell?ref=so_sell**

Kiva Brings Microlending Home to the US:
http://techcrunch.com/2009/06/10/kiva-brings-microlending-home-to-us-entrepreneurs-in-need/

PieLab: **www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/magazine/10pielab-t.html?_r=2**

Entrepreneur Connect: **http://econnect.entrepreneur.com/**

Social networks:

      LinkedIn: **www.linkedin.com/**

      Meet the Boss: **www.meettheboss.com/**

      Partner Up: **www.partnerup.com/**

Best Blogs for young entrepreneurs: **http://oedb.org/library/beginning-online-learning/50-blogs-for-young-entrepreneurs**

Small Business Trends videos: **http://smallbiztrends.com/category/small-business-videos**

Johnson County (KS) Library GovFest for Entrepreneurs: **www.jocolibrary.org/default.aspx?id=17548&epslanguage=EN**

Collaboration

South Central Michigan Works: **www.scmw.org/about/partners.html**

Illinois Public Libraries Providing Access to Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs:
www.webjunction.org/documents/wj/SBA_Project_in_Illinois.html

Carson City (NV) librarians helping city regain its economic mojo:
www.nnbw.com/ArticleRead.aspx?storyID=16577

Glen Carbon Centennial Library Best Small Library 2010: **www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6716260.html**

Communication

Libraries and Economic Development webinar series:
www.webjunction.org/events/wj/Libraries_and_Economic_Development_Series.html

Small Business Start-up Backpack:
www.webjunction.org/documents/wj/Small_Business_Start_up_Backpack.html

Public Libraries and Community Economic Development: Partnering for Success:
www.iira.org/pubs/publications/IIRA_RRR_688.pdf