Libraries: The Missing Link for Underserved Entrepreneurs

Simple Steps Any Librarian Can Take to Better Support Local Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses (and Why You Should!)

Libraries as Launchpads
Powered by creative startups
Agenda

- Why libraries should take on this role
- About Me and Libraries as Launchpads
- Gain a better understanding of your local entrepreneurship ecosystem
- Questions to ask to gain awareness of the challenges in your community
- Ideas to fill the gaps in your local ecosystem
- Contact Info
Libraries are uniquely positioned to be equitable centers of economic opportunity

- **Libraries are Resource Equalizers**
  - Libraries have always provided unmatched accessibility to resources. It is their goal to remove barriers to information and grant access to the resources their communities need.

- **Libraries Respond to the Needs of Their Communities**
  - Libraries are embedded in their communities and respond to the needs expressed by their patrons who frequent libraries for many reasons far beyond checking out a book or attending story time.

- **Librarians are Information Literacy Experts**
  - One of the biggest reasons businesses fail is due to lack of market demand. Yet we hear time and time again from idea-stage entrepreneurs that they think their largest barrier is funding even before they know who their customers are. With a little bit of training librarians can gain a better understanding of the entrepreneurial journey, the type of support useful to businesses at different stages, and then direct entrepreneurs to the support they really need.
In partnership with librarians and library systems, we connect, build capacity in, and advocate for libraries.

Together, we bring hyper-localized support to small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Ginny Sterpka

Community-Based Programs Manager at Creative Startups

Director of the Libraries as Launchpads Program

Since 2007, Creative Startups has been the pioneering leader in accelerating creative entrepreneurs, companies, and visionaries to business success with their suite of acceleration programs operating on four continents. Ginny focuses on building equitable and sustainable entrepreneurship ecosystems through the Libraries as Launchpads program (LaL). Launched in 2018 through a partnership with the New Mexico State Library and public libraries around the state, LaL has increased capacity in over 75 librarians around the country to support small businesses and entrepreneurs in their communities.
Understanding Your Local Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

- Understand the Entrepreneurs' Journey
- Map Your Local Ecosystem
- Regional, National, and online resources
The Entrepreneurs Journey

WHY THEY START

Entrepreneurship by necessity

- I HAVE TO MOVE
- I AM UNEMPLOYED

Entrepreneurship by opportunity

THERE IS A GAP IN THE MARKET THAT I CAN FILL BECAUSE I HAVE THE:
- RIGHT SKILLS
- RESOURCES REQUIRED
- NETWORK

STAGES

- EXPLORING
- IDEA
- PROTOTYPING
- PROTOTYPING WITH USERS AND/OR CUSTOMERS
- GROWTH/EXPANSION
- MATURE/STEADY STAGE
- EXIT
Where can you look for assets, resources, and gaps?

- Experts/Knowledge
- Networks
- Experiences
- Resources
- Financing and Capital
- Other

It's an iterative process!
Challenges in your community

The only way to learn about challenges is to talk to entrepreneurs!

Find entrepreneurs and listen to them!

- Attend local meetings
- Go to a makerspace
- Invite entrepreneurs in and interview them
- Host a networking event for entrepreneurs and listen

Keep track of common questions and problems you become aware of.
Entrepreneurial Reference Interview

Why listen to entrepreneurs?

To understand common challenges
To identify gaps in the resources currently available
To discover what resources would be most helpful

WHAT TO ASK:

☐ What stage?
  - Exploring
  - Idea
  - Prototyping, etc.

☐ What is your goal?
  - Hobby
  - Part time/side income
  - Full time w/ employees, etc.

☐ What are you currently working on/struggling with?
Filling the gaps in your local ecosystem

Take what you have learned and identify the gaps

Brainstorm ways your library can work to fill the gaps

Identify partners, plan events, and invite entrepreneurs in!

Get feedback and iterate!
Filling the Gaps

Where does your library fit in?

- Where during their journey are local entrepreneurs getting stuck?
- Can you fill existing gaps?
- Can entrepreneurs find all the available assets and resources?

What can your library offer?

- Networking events
- Databases
- Resource access
- Workshops
- Mentor time
- Other?
What other libraries are doing

☐ Speaker series
☐ Workstations
☐ Acceleration and/or incubation programs
☐ Peer meetups
☐ Makerspaces

JOIN THE MONTHLY ENTREPRENEURSHIP LIBRARIAN CALL TO LEARN MORE
Contact

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