What Businesses Want from Libraries

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Questionnaire Respondents

• Morris County SCORE
• Peter Susberich of the SBA
• Don Newman Director of Small Business Advocacy NJ Business Action Center, Department of State
• Meghan Hunscher, Executive Director, Morris County Economic Development Corporation
• Dennis Bone, Feliciano Center and chair of the State of Montclair State University (interview)
• The Northwest NJ SBDC Director [Delores Stammer] and Assistant Director [Mary Adelman]
• Susan Scherreik of Seton Hall University
• Rana Shanawani, Executive Director, Women’s Center for Entrepreneurship

Doing a “kinda-sorta”* SWOT analysis helped me make sense of the responses

SWOT analysis helped me focus on answers to these questions and issues
• We do not have enough time to do it all
• Others may be doing it already
• Others may be able to do it better
• We serve other constituencies and they also deserve our time and resources

• Is this something we should be doing?
• Is this something we are able to do?
• If not, with whom should we partner?
• And what “niche” in this partnership should we fill
• What organizations can help us with providing speakers, making referrals to us, and helping us publicize our programs and we theirs.

STRENGTHS
ON OUR DATABASES

Everyone loves our database!
(at least those who know about them)*

- "Access to useful business resources such as the ones listed below are a great value to what a library can offer SBO’s. I often notice that SBO’s aren’t aware of all the free resources available to them from the libraries and end up paying for many of the equipment, spaces, collections and data services that they can find at the library." ** (Peter Susberich, New Jersey District Office, SBA)
- "I think we can agree that the libraries in general are an untapped treasure trove of information for businesses." (Meghan Hunscher, Morris County EDC)
- Now here is where the libraries and librarians can really shine if they want to...Here’s where libraries could partner with NJSBDC to hold joint training on these resources and how to use them. Business clients also need to understand the limitations in the databases. (NWSBDC)

Let’s not forget free e-resources not provided by the library

- Federal/State/Local Government Resources
  These are sites which list procurement opportunities
  ** State procurement**
  http://www.nj.gov/treasury/purchase/
  ** Morris County procurement**
  https://morriscountynj.gov/purchasing/
  ** Multiple levels of government**
  Bidnet Direct
  https://www.bidnetdirect.com/new-jersey/morris-county
  ** Help for companies seeking business**
  NJIT TPAC
  https://www.njit.edu/ptac/procurement-technical-assistance-center-ptac/

Let’s also not forget quasi and non-governmental resources

- The Morris County Economic Development Corporation provides free access to these e-resources:
  - Sector reports and economic impact studies on major industries in the region such as life science, aerospace, cybersecurity and advanced manufacturing.
  - Market reports that measure expenditures and consumer wealth within a particular region
  - Property reports that provide insight on what is for sale or for lease within the county
- Trade associations (NYT and TDn2K)*
My suggestion:
Libraries should work together to create well-arranged guides to these resources and to promote them once created
ON OUR SPACES

We have space and many kinds of spaces

- SCORE respondents saw library spaces to hold meetings and host programs as very useful
- Some libraries have developed co-working spaces
  - “The Akron-Summit coworking space was funded through a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight foundation to promote economic development in Downtown Akron and surrounding neighborhoods.”
  
  From: 5 Coworking Spaces and Business Incubators in Libraries That Support Local Workers

  - Dennis Bone: saw co-working spaces as very helpful, especially because they provide very useful networking among those who use the space.

Before you create a space, do some research

Meghan Hunscher – Morris County Economic Development Corporation

“In the long term, co-working and maker spaces is a great vision, but may need to be off site and in collaboration given space needs and cost. There are already a lot of competitors and networking opportunities so I would not wade into this water just yet. Stick to your knitting [niche?] with resources and grow from there.”

Co-working spaces in New Jersey* (from the NJ Tech Council)

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<td>• Jackson Township, Nj</td>
<td>• New Brunswick Convention Business Association, Nj</td>
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* Also adds an accelerator/incubator
Respondents had mixed views on makerspaces

“Makerspaces are a great way for the library to promote innovation, STEM education and the arts in their communities. The library can offer opportunities for small businesses to test innovations and examine how 3D printing or other technologies can offer opportunities for business growth. Limited only by the technology and equipment available, a business can experiment with CAD design of new products or components and test the manufacturing of those products. Whether the library offers 3D printing, embroidery machines, an electronics workshop for young future electrical engineers, the library can expand their services to their communities.”

Don Newman, NJ Business Action Center, Department of State

Perhaps consider offering Space for groups who help businesses

• They can meet with local businesses
• Helps you form a better partner

A corollary of this is for a librarian to spend time in the headquarters of those groups.

We have useful equipment

Free Wi-Fi, computers, printers, fax, copiers, scanners, 3D printers, video conferencing, digital media suites, connectivity to high capacity broadband access…and more…oh, my!

SCORE respondents did not rate this equipment as particularly critical for SBOs. Their assumption was that SBOs had these.

However, we provide access to these for use by all types of patrons and their availability should be mentioned especially if we target people involved in online businesses. They can see the library as an “office away from home.”

ON OUR EQUIPMENT
3D Printers

• Did not get many responses on the value of 3D printers for SBOs. One respondent was very positive about having one in your library

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Don Newman, NJ Business Action Center, Department of State

3D printers are also educational tools

Don Newman and Dennis Bone were much more passionate about the educational value of 3D printers—by helping students get into coding.

“The hardware is not important; what is important is to provide opportunities to support problem solving around the use of a 3D printer. The real innovation will be in the design of a program to solve a problem.”
Dennis Bone, Feliciano Center for Entrepreneurship & chair of New Jersey’s State Employment and Training Commission.

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Some caveats: are you filling a need not filled by others; is this a first priority?

• This one is from Meghan Hunscher, Morris County Economic Development Corporation (EDC)
  “In the long term, co-working and maker spaces is a great vision, but may need to be off site and in collaboration given space needs and cost. There are already a lot of competitors and networking opportunities so I would not wade into this water just yet.”

• From a SCORE member
  “Makerspace is an interesting concept, but I don’t think a priority for a library to provide the SB community. Training, education, mentoring, networking venue and meeting space are very important and much more efficient and cost effective tools and services. Access to 3-D printers would be my first choice.”

Makerspaces are not created in a vacuum – get feedback

“I recommend not making decisions about the makerspaces in a vacuum. Engage your community and local business owners. Partner with local chambers of commerce, educational institutions, the New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program (NJMEP), New Jersey Business and Industry Association (NJBIA), Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey (CIANJ), and even your local arts community. A steering committee or advisory panel of those that your library serves will help you create a makerspace that reflects the needs of your community.”
Don Newman, NJ Business Action Center, Department of State
A workforce development perspective on our equipment

The hardware is not important; what is important is to provide opportunities to support problem solving around the use of a 3D printer. The real innovation will be in the design of a program to solve a problem. He was pretty clear that libraries providing coding and other STEM training to K-12 is a good thing. I asked him if this is something that will continue in the future - he said that coding/programming skills will be needed in the future (I didn’t ask him this but my guess is that he sees the 3D printer as a good tool to help students learn to program). He did say that if you want to support business use of 3D printers, you will definitely need more than one - he has 50 in his space.

Notes from interview with Dennis Bone, Director of the Feliciano Center for Entrepreneurship at Montclair State University & chair of New Jersey’s State Employment and Training Commission, 4/17/2018.

ON PROGRAMMING

We know how to do programs

- We do this all the time
- Questions to consider about programming
  - What kinds of programs should we offer?
  - Who does the presentation?
  - How do we publicize those programs
- “…work with NJSBDC, SCORE, Women’s Business Center to bring the classes they already offer around the community. What would be beneficial is if the libraries in partnership with the local organizations offered a segment or intro when a networking event is happening on what resources the library has to offer the SBO.”
  NWSBDC

Do research first and then program

“Partner with your local chambers, business associations, NJSBDC’s extra and ask that they include your event on their website, email blasts, etc….I also emphasis the importance of knowing your constituency. The most important factor in obtaining an audience for your program is making sure the program itself is relevant to your community.”

Don Newman, Director of Small Business Advocacy, NJ Business Action Center, Department of State
How one library did research

"Before any programs were planned, MCPL business specialists went out and talked with small business owners and entrepreneurs in the Kansas City area to find out what they most wanted to learn more about when it came to business.

"I spent six months asking small business owners and entrepreneurs what they felt they needed help with," said MCPL business specialist Morgan Perry. "Overwhelmingly, they said marketing. After that, I wanted to see what other business resource organizations were offering and look for holes in the community that we could fill."

"The result is a suite of programs that explores business from the ground up, including a program series called Business Basics, which covers the subjects of start-up planning, marketing, branding, social media, attracting customers, entrepreneurship as an encore career, best practices and even the business of nonprofits."

From the Programming Librarian Blog:
Libraries Mean Business When It Comes to Entrepreneurs
October 12, 2015
Sara Peterson-Davis, Community Programming Specialist, Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence,
http://www.programminglibrarian.org/blog/libraries-mean-business-when-it-comes-entrepreneurs

Incorporate partners into your programming

“I think if the libraries were to form a strategic alliance with the County and local chambers and MeetUp groups, with regular (monthly or twice a month) training sessions with a webinar option this would be tremendously helpful. It can take a few years to really ramp up and get the word out about a quality program so you can’t do the training once a year. I would even suggest a topic per month rotated with marketing perhaps as a staple every month (so at least two topics). Sometimes businesses cannot make early morning meetings and prefer evening so I would suggest varying the times between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Logistics is secondary, but can impact turnout."
Meghan Hunscher, Morris County EDC

Work with other libraries and partners when programming

“...don’t compete with your other area libraries, act cooperatively so you each help cross promote the programs.”
Don Newman, Director of Small Business Advocacy, NJ Business Action Center, Department of State

“We’d like to emphasis the need for libraries to work cooperatively to sponsor and promote the programs. If several libraries in the same general area are offering the same workshop they’re competing for registrants, resulting in cancellations.”
Joyce Olshansky, Taxation University & Outreach, New Jersey Division of Taxation

SOME PROGRAMMING COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM RESPONDENTS
Rana Shanawani, Executive Director, Women's Center for Entrepreneurship

I’m not sure if there is a budget for this, but the biggest thing I hear from clients, is that they need expert assistance in marketing via social media. If someone could be hired as a consultant to work one-on-one, someone who has had great success and could customize social media for clients, that would be tremendous.

Peter Susberich, New Jersey District Office, SBA

The biggest problem I have noticed with SBO’s is that they may know how to do the physical work required for their businesses but lack the business management skills, financial literacy and financial accounting that is vital to a successful business. Programs geared towards how to start a business are just as important as learning how to maintain a successful business. Having a good accounting system and management plans are great resources to SBO’s.

- This is another niche we can occupy
- Respondents thought guides to those were useful

Guide on International Business from the RU Dana Library
Cooperate on Guides

• A suggestion: libraries of all types should cooperate on creating, sharing, and promoting guides to information resources at various levels of government – federal, state, county, and local. These guides should be shared with business organizations (chambers of commerce) and with organizations who help businesses (SBA, SBDCs, EDCs, SCORE).

Create guides to all sorts of stuff

• Develop guides to resources, services, spaces, tools...
• In doing so make sure not to duplicate what others have already done (SBA’s “Resource Guide for Small Businesses”)
• Work together to customize others’ work so that the guides can be useful at the local, county, and state level.

Don’t forget the catalog

• Another project to consider is to create catalog records pointing to business-useful and free resources and to promote those resources. For an example of how this might work – several respondents said that offering classes on using QuickBooks would be very useful. Perhaps as a supplement to such a program (or a resource for those who cannot make the program) we could create catalog records pointing to two Union County Economic Development Authority videos on how to use QuickBooks.

• Quickbooks 101 Watch our introductory video
• Quickbooks 201 Watch our introductory video

WEAKNESSES
• Too many things to do; too little time
• Not all of us are experts on business resources nor do we have the time to become so
• We are not embedded in groups that help shape programs to help small businesses and economic development*
• We have not taken advantage of building partnerships with groups who provide direct service to small businesses

OPPORTUNITIES

There are many organizations with whom we can partner

• SCORE
• College / University business programs
• Business focused centers in colleges/universities*
• SBA
• SBCD’s
• EDC’s
• Local and county chambers of commerce
• NJIT and UCEDC PTACs
• Trade associations
• New Jersey Business & Industry Association
• Commerce and Industry Association of New Jersey
• New Jersey Manufacturing Extension Program
• The ethnic and women’s chambers and organizations**
• Business Incubators***
• Shared email lists
Suggestions on ways to partner with our partners

• “...work with NJSBDC, SCORE, Women’s Business Center to bring the classes they already offer around the community.”
  NWSBDC
• Work with partners to identify presenters for your events
• Work with partners to publicize your events and theirs

One specific suggestion on partnering

“I think if the libraries were to form a strategic alliance with the County and local chambers and MeetUp groups, with regular (monthly or twice a month) training sessions with a webinar option this would be tremendously helpful. It can take a few years to really ramp up and get the word out about a quality program so you can’t do the training once a year. I would even suggest a topic per month rotated with marketing perhaps as a staple every month (so at least two topics). Sometimes businesses cannot make early morning meetings and prefer evening so I would suggest varying the times between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Logistics is secondary, but can impact turnout.”
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How one library did this

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Mid-Continent Public Library, Independence, Mo.*

Building partnerships take time

“Laura Metzler, Business Librarian, at the Cecil County Public Library, Maryland. Cecil County’s library system has developed a great relationship with its business community and has done wonders for encouraging entrepreneurship in their region.”

“I think it is paramount that you develop key partnerships. This was not necessarily easy for us to do at first. I met multiple times with the Office of Economic Development and literally had to take my computer and show them how to access Reference USA, Demographics Now, Lynda.com, Gale Courses and the Small Business Resource Center. I gave their employees a tutorial of how to use them and even had testimonials/success stories of patrons that used our resources to start their business. I did this for the chambers of commerce in our county, too. Once they saw that we were a key player, we were taken seriously and a lot of doors started to open.”**
AFTER THE S(W)O(T), WHAT IS THE FIRST THING WE SHOULD DO?

RESEARCH YOUR COMMUNITY!!

“I can’t emphasis enough the importance of having programs that reflect the needs of your community. Listen to the SBO through advisory boards, informational round tables and whatever method you find is useful in obtaining relevant information before making decisions on how you will spend your resources.”

Don Newman, Director of Small Business Advocacy, NJ Business Action Center, Department of State

Find out what SBOs need and partner with others to meet those needs

“Classes, mentoring and networking with other small businesses are all great activities for SBO’s to stay current with the trends. Organizations like the SBA, SCORE, SBDC, PTAC and the libraries offer expert counseling, training opportunities, and mentorship that are either free or low cost. The SBA even offers an Emerging Leaders Program that is free for small businesses that are ready to take their business to the next level by offering expert counseling, networking, and executive training through a seven month course.”

Peter Susberich, SBA
How to engage your partners

“The best way is engagement with business owners and leaders in your community and listen to them. I would consider putting together an advisory board which would consist of volunteer from the business and educational community to discuss community needs. The goal would be to hear from a mix of business owners and professionals so you have a cross section of industry sectors, and business size and maturity (startups to established businesses). You want a board that to the best of your ability reflects the community, if a community has limited industrial businesses and is heavy in retail or service businesses that should be reflected in the advisory board.

“I would start by engaging:
Chamber of Commerce | Community College | Local Department of Labor Business Representative Regional Director of the Small Business Development Center and/or SCORE | Downtown or Main Street Business Associations (If the community has a Main Street) | Municipal or County Economic Development Officers

“I would recommend having some brain storming sessions to discuss the needs and input on possible programs or services. Once the library has drafted a plan solicit comments from the advisory board and then after the plan is implemented as them to evaluate results.”
Don Newman, Director of Small Business Advocacy, NJ Business Action Center, Department of State

 Libraries can also play a role in local economic development

“...public libraries today are deeply involved with people, technology, and quality of life. Public libraries have tremendous reach geographically and virtually. Within the U.S. there are over 9,000 public libraries providing services in over 16,000 branch facilities and through the Web. Nearly every one of these locally-funded organizations offers collections and programs that support early literacy, workforce readiness and small businesses. As such, they are an important and dynamic part of the community’s learning infrastructure which supports local economic development.”

https://community-wealth.org/content/making-cities-stronger-public-library-contributions-local-economic-development
Some examples of what libraries do

- Early literacy
- Adult Literacy
- STEAM for K-12
- Computer Literacy
- Resource for jobseekers

These are programs focused on career and workforce readiness

There is a need for programs for adults

...hears a lot from employers is that young employees lack what he calls “employability skills,” such as coming to work on time; what to wear at work; how to be an asset to your organization (I’ve heard them called “soft skills”). He said he thinks the best way to provide training in those skills is in a safe place, like the public library - i.e., a place where people know each other. He also said that literacy skills are another set of skills that libraries play a role in developing. As for “higher end” skills, he said that libraries play a role in offering workshops to bring people up to speed on how to use digital devices, etc.

Interview with Dennis Bone, Feliciano Center for Entrepreneurship & chair of New Jersey’s State Employment and Training Commission.

Remember to work with partners

“Work with the Morris County School of Technology and high schools. See if they have programs that they need space for. Train them on available resources so that as they grow in the workforce they can be ambassadors for libraries. We can work with them on a branding campaign around how libraries are cool and useful to their generation. Like maybe have a marketing campaign and call it something with a different name to say this is not your parents library.”

Meghan Hunscher, Morris County EDC

Stuff not elsewhere classified
Find ways to allow some librarians in your group to become experts for the group

“There are many databases useful for businesses for research; Reference USA, D&B Hoovers, Export.gov, Wisertrade.com, etc. Access to these sites is important, but many are not user friendly and the average user will get frustrated trying to navigate the user interface. Having access to the databases is important but it is equally important that the reference librarians are knowledgeable on the interface with these databases and can provide guidance to the business user.”
Don Newman

Not all businesses are alike

• “A SBO in an urban area might have different needs than the SBO in an agricultural community. There will be significant overlap, but a local library needs to adjust their tool box to reflect the unique needs of the community. This is especially true when resources are scarce and the goal is to maximize the “bang for the buck.””
Don Newman

You can also categorize businesses by number of employees, stage of growth, B2C or B2B, NAICs, etc.
Consider offering workshops for different types of business

For example, Rana suggested a workshop on this topic: “How to develop a growth plan.”