

TETN Project

1. Approach

The “weEntrepreneuers” project fell within two aspects of the Cherry Hill Public Library’s strategic plan. The first pertains to the library as “a place of knowledge and inspiration for members of the Cherry Hill Public Library community”ⁱ. We strive to be a relevant support resource for all members of the community, including our businesses and entrepreneurs. The library is a regular host for events and meetings from various organizations, both for-profit and non-profits. This program was an extension of our current offerings by focusing on aspiring, nascent, and recently established businesses.

The second relates to the library’s ability to “effectively [communicate] the library’s services and value to the community”ⁱⁱ. This grant was an opportunity to further this strategic direction by educating local entrepreneurs about the programs, services, and materials that are available to the business community. It was a time to showcase the often hidden assets that a public library holds that can assist small businesses and startups in their earliest development stages. In relating these resources to the business community, we could demonstrate that the public library is for everyone.

As this was an entirely new field of outreach for us, our approach to the business community started off as overly broad. The idea of an entrepreneur fair felt like the right way to put support organizations in the room with the people who needed help starting or continuing their business. Andy Woodworth acted as the project lead of a three person team with reference staff members Sue Tomkiel and Linda Tilden providing research and at-event staffing support. Our timeframe was roughly three months in which to gather vendors, publicize through various channels, and execute the event.

2. Results

On July 30, 2014, the Cherry Hill Library hosted an Entrepreneur fair for the community. There were fifteen business support organization and business related entitiesⁱⁱⁱ that attended the event. We had a featured speaker, Alex Freund, who spoke on the topic of the importance of hiring the first employee for a business. This presentation attracted fifteen people to learn more about this important step. Overall, in the course of the two hour and thirty minute evening event, we estimated approximately sixty people entered and spoke to at least one organization.

In polling the participating organizations afterward, it was seen a modest success and a good “first time” event. In addition, most organizations provided helpful and constructive feedback about the event as well as indicated an interest in returning for future events.

With the grant funds, the library has purchased an iPad for the exclusive purpose of providing entrepreneurs with a portable platform to use for business meetings and presentations. We have purchased apps for such a purpose and will be advertising the item once we have finalized the setup. This will add a professional edge and organization to their meetings with customers and investors.

3. Replicable Program

One of the attending organizations was SCORE, a one-on-one business mentorship program. To summarize their organization mission, they match successful small business owners and managers with new and developing entrepreneurs to help guide them through the bumpy road of establishing their business. They provide advice and insights from the wisdom they have accumulated over the years.

We partnered with a member of SCORE, Bob Wolk, to offer a program which presented on whether starting a small business was right for someone. It was a Saturday program in which [x] people attended. Andy Woodworth has maintained his relationship with Mr. Wolk and looks to schedule him for another program on that or a similar topic in the near future.

Bob Wolk
SCORE Business Mentor
(215) 870-5728
topcareercoaches@gmail.com

4. Partnership

Financial support is a key element to the partnership for this grant. While we can provide space and staff time, the money allows us to go above and beyond in terms of organizing events, paying for quality speakers, and providing resources that would otherwise be outside the realm of our budget. With library budgets still being relative flat funded, the money allows us to provide programs and resources that would otherwise not be available.

5. Future Plans

At this moment in time, we wish to pursue our business outreach with programming and publicity. We'd like to use the grant to directly publicize how the library can help their small business as well as hire speakers to provide their business wisdom to attendees at no charge. We have not ruled out a second business faire, but it has not been developed past the idea stage. We believe that the best outreach will be through establishing and maintaining relationships with local organizations that have a great number of connections (such as Chambers of Commerce). In my estimation, the best strategy is to reach out and meet the community where they are: their place of business.

6. Other observations

- Local Chambers of Commerce can be excellent first contacts because they have done faires/conferences/meetings before and they can point you in the right direction for getting in touch with the local business communities. Also, they can help publicize any business-related events.
- Likewise, there are many governmental small business support organization who can come to the library and present, advise, and help out. Like libraries, they suffer from a lack of people knowing about their mission, resources, and help. Contact them too!
- Figure out what your end goal is first: do you want to host events? Offer space for people to meet? Provide resources? Sometime what you think you should be doing is not actually that once you start making contacts. Be flexible!
- Don't reinvent the wheel. The library can support existing programs by providing something as simple as space or time showing people what it has to offer. You do not need to build something from scratch when you can build on other's works.
- Someone else said it, but fail fast, fail often, and take lessons from everything.

ⁱ Strategic Plan for Cherry Hill Public Library, 2014-2016, pg. 10.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, pg 11.

ⁱⁱⁱ The following vendors attended:

The Camden County Regional Chamber of Commerce, LAEDA, US Small Business Administration, NJ Association of Women Business Owners, SCORE, PNC Bank, Republic Bank, NJ Small Business Development Center at Rutgers, Technology & Entrepreneur Talent Network, Camden County Improvement Authority, Cherry Hill Public Library.