

Equity In Focus: Public Library Business Services Through the Social Justice Lens

Poster presented at the 2020 Georgia Libraries Conference by Jennifer Price, MLIS

Abstract

The practice of Social Justice enables equal opportunity for each member of society across issues like wealth, education, and healthcare. Small businesses and nonprofits navigate these issues with their respective missions. As more public libraries adopt dedicated business services, the moment for the public library's role in Social Justice literacy arises. This poster presents Social Justice alongside public library business services to show how entrepreneurship and equal opportunity are connected and how library staff can help business services users understand their roles in Social Justice.

Introduction

The mission of Social Justice is equal opportunity for each member of society. In this age of social enterprise, small business and nonprofit entrepreneurs share this mission. How can public libraries support these social changemakers? Business services in public libraries afford free access to an array of start-up and development tools. Socially-minded enterprises can look to local libraries for an array of print and electronic references and even training to cultivate social change literacy. Market research, grant writing, and business planning are examples of practices that could behoove any entrepreneur interested in equalizing community healthcare access, food security, employment opportunity, and more. Whether fully fledged or integrated, library business services carry the potential for social change, are growing in demand, and deserve evaluation. Equally important is having the Social Justice conversation at your library. Organizations like Exponent Philanthropy suggest that having a common vocabulary around such topics is beneficial.

Conclusions

In fall 2019, the American Library Association became the steward of a \$2,000,000 grant from Google, enabling libraries to apply for funding to support business services. Library business services are on the radar! For library staff who support entrepreneurs who drive Social Justice, buy-in from library leadership is critical and so are these steps:

- Develop a common vocabulary around Social Justice.
- Review professional literature about public library business services and look at other models.*
- Decide how Social Justice through business services aligns with your library's mission.

Resources

Public Library Business Programs:

- Free Library of Philadelphia BRIC
<https://libwww.freelibrary.org/programs/bric/>
- Middle Georgia Regional Library BANC
<https://bibblib.org/banc/>
- Naperville Public Library NaperLaunch
<https://www.naperville-lib.org/research/business-investment>

Professional Literature (Core titles)

- Embedded Business Librarianship for the Public Librarian by Barbara Alvarez
- Making Sense of Business Reference by Celia Ross

References

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