

Illinois Public Libraries Providing Access to Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs

Purpose: The Illinois State Library (ISL) will expand access for small businesses and entrepreneurs in 66 public libraries throughout the state by working with local Small Business Development Centers (SBDC), Service Corps of Retired Employees (SCORE), and other local business support entities in 2010 and 2011 in order to foster economic development in those communities. The project will allow public libraries to provide equipment, training videos and online resources that will support and enhance small businesses and entrepreneurs in Illinois.

Goals: The goals of the project are threefold:

1. Increase small business' and entrepreneurs' awareness of services a public library can offer;
2. Develop or enhance partnerships between local public libraries and business support entities; and
3. Create a statewide library-based business support service that could be accessed by small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Objectives: The objectives to achieve the goals of the program are as follows:

1. The public library provides the technology small businesses and entrepreneurs could use to achieve their goals;
2. Educational resources that businesses and entrepreneur could use for employee training and developing innovative ideas; and
3. A network of public libraries is established within a statewide framework that can tap the sources of business support entities;

Strategies: The project consists of three major components: equipment and software to support small businesses and entrepreneurs; training videos on subjects pertinent to businesses and stimulate entrepreneurial activities; and 66 public libraries throughout the State and branches of the Chicago Public Library that will participate in the program.

1. The equipment packages that will be distributed to the participating public libraries include a laptop computer, a video camera, a DVD player and a DVD projector specifically for use by small businesses and entrepreneurs. The participating libraries will have the option of making the equipment available for use on their premises, or make them available for check-out to individuals for planning and other business purposes. Each laptop will be loaded with software applications for developing a small business plan (Business Plan Pro Premier); business financial record keeping (QuickBooks Pro 2010); and marketing (Marketing Plan Pro). An individual could check-out the computer from the public library and take it to the local SBDC or SCORE for consultation sessions on planning, financing or other business-related issues; or work in the public library with the hardware and software. The video camera could be used by entrepreneurs and small businesses to create Web content for posting on social networks as a way to promote their products and services.
2. The DVD player and projector would be available for use in the public library or for check-out for small businesses for programming purposes, saving them the expense of renting equipment. In order to save small businesses the expense of acquiring programs to meet Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) training requirements, DVDs on violence in the workplace, sexual harassment, and office and general safety will be included in the business package and distributed to the participating public libraries. The DVDs will be added to I-Share, the Illinois statewide resource sharing and union catalog, thereby being available for business people throughout the state in both English and Spanish language versions.

3. Criteria to be considered in selecting communities to participate in the program will include the local unemployment rate, poverty level, proximity to a SBDC and SCORE and statewide geographic distribution. By considering the unemployment and poverty rates, the program could foster economic development in communities that are suffering during the economic downturn. There will be an online grant application form created for participating libraries to fill out and submit.

Design: ISL reached out to the business community in the state to design the program. Organizations consulted include local chambers of commerce, SBDC, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and human resources professionals. ISL also contacted public libraries in the state regarding the needs of small businesses and entrepreneurs that they serve. The intent of the program is to provide access to public libraries for small businesses and entrepreneurs by making equipment, training programs and software available that will help create and grow businesses.

At each of the participating public libraries, laptops, video equipment, software and training material will be deployed for use by small businesses and entrepreneurs. The package will consist of the items (or comparable items) as follows:

Equipment:

- Dell Latitude E6410 notebook computer
- Epson PowerLite 826W+ Multimedia Projector
- Sony DVD Player
- Flip Camcorder
- Headphone

Business Software

- QuickBooks Pro 2010
- Business Plan Pro

Marketing Plan Pro

Training DVDs

Preventing Sexual Harassment

Workplace Violence

Office Safety

ISL will retain ownership of the equipment, business software and training DVDs. The items will be placed on the ISL's inventory and put out on long-term loan to the participating public libraries. Each participating library will have the option to select an additional training video or software application that meets the specific needs of the small businesses and entrepreneurs they serve.

Management: ISL will oversee the efforts and activities that the participating public libraries offer to the small businesses and entrepreneurs in their communities. In the fall of 2010, a conference will be hosted in Springfield to review the intent of the program with a representative from each of the public libraries selected to participate in the program. The agenda of the workshop will include a review of the equipment that will be distributed, and a preview of the software applications and training DVDs. Representatives from the Springfield offices of SBA, SCORE and SBDC will be invited to participate and make presentations on building local partnerships. Also, public libraries that are currently involved in small business and entrepreneurial outreach in the Chicago collar counties and Central Illinois will be invited to explain their initiatives in order to demonstrate the types of creative and cutting-edge services public libraries could offer to help improve the business climate in their communities.

A Web site with a logo will be designed for the project and showcased during the conference. To establish a sense of cohesion among the participants, ISL will design a logo that participating public libraries will post to their Web sites. The logo will serve as an active link to a Web site established by ISL

specifically for this project. A window sticker version of the logo will be made so it can be displayed at participating public libraries and businesses. A major component of the Web site will be online resources on how to conduct patent and trademark searches, and a Web-based library resource for legal information. Participating libraries will be encouraged to establish links on their Web sites to business support agencies in their communities, such as chambers of commerce, SCORE and SBDC. ISL will coordinate press releases and media contacts to ensure the message about public library services to small businesses and entrepreneurs is reaching the desired audience. Throughout the 12-month grant period, ISL will conduct periodic virtual meetings with participating libraries to review the progress of the project.

To assist ISL with the administration of the project, a graduate intern from the University of Illinois in Springfield will be assigned to the project. The intern's duties will include assisting in conference planning; follow-up online meetings and conference calls among participants; monitoring activities in local communities; statewide promotional activities; inventory activities of equipment distributed to public libraries on a long-term loan basis; and grant reporting activities required by SBA.