

Libraries Build Business



grant from the American Library Association to advance their work supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs and developing the Employment and Business Entrepreneur Center at the library. The Topham Public Library Employment and Business Entrepreneur Center provides a comprehensive and coordinated series of programs, drop-ins, informational opportunities, and collection enhancements in collaboration with partners, including the Maine Career Centers, New Ventures Maine, the Southern Midcoast Chamber of Commerce, and Topham Economic Development. Topham Public Library provides access to technology and the Internet to the community including low-income and rural patrons, trying to evolve and grow its small businesses. Partnering

with experts and connecting people is what

For example, Topsham Public Library used information from Project Outcome reports coupled with their standard collection statistics in a grant request to an independent foundation to demonstrate the impact their book discussion groups have on the Topsham community and the need for further funding. In the grant request letter, Susan directly mentions Project Outcome survey results: “From ‘tweens’ to seniors, 77% of the attendees reported that they learned something that was helpful. 67% intend to apply what they learned.” Susan tied evaluation to the demonstrated impact funding would have on programs. Ultimately, Topsham received this grant.

Susan also presented survey results of summer reading and book discussion programs to Topsham’s Town Select Board and the Library Board. According to Susan, “Survey comments and the number of people who were satisfied with the programming helped explain why the programs were important. Numbers became expressive

when coupled with Project Outcome survey data.” Susan saw the “aha” moments on their faces. The Project Outcome survey results made the numbers real to members of both Boards.

Setting Yourself Up to Successfully Evaluate Your Business Programs

According to Susan, integrating evaluation from the beginning of your programs is key. Having staff buy-in is crucial to the success of your evaluation, especially in a small library. As Susan stated, “explain to your staff that evaluation is just another tool in your tool belt to understand your library programming and patrons.”

Having different staff administer surveys may eliminate survey bias and take some pressure off staff who developed or delivered the programming. In Susan’s experience, “People feel when you hand them a survey, that because

TIPS, TRICKS, AND ADVICE

1. **Don’t survey patrons too often.** One advantage of Project Outcome is that the surveys are short and concise. Build them into your programming from the beginning, so that you are surveying pre- and post- program series, for example, or at some other time that makes sense for your library.

2. **Utilize**

