

Public Libraries Briefcase

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Public Libraries Briefcase is a quarterly column written by members of the BRASS Business Reference in Public Libraries Committee.

libraries. At the most basic level, public libraries provide information and space—both are valuable to potential partners. For example, Taxation University, the training and outreach unit of the New Jersey Division of Taxation, was able to increase the number of business workshops they offered in 2017 by over 500% by partnering with public libraries.

While there are many opportunities for partnerships, I discovered that public libraries had varying degrees of success when attempting to leverage them for future benefits. For example, some libraries might view a SCORE event as an outside organization using library space. Others might seize the chance for collaboration—marketing business databases and services as well as upcoming events to attendees and organizers. The difference came down to which librarians saw the bigger picture and fully understood the value that the library brings to business as well as business brings to libraries.

Eventually, I formulated guiding principles to direct how I saw my role at the New Jersey State Library, both in terms of the value I could bring to public libraries and the ways I could connect to business organizations, business owners, and governmental entities:

This event was intended to bring focus to the important role of libraries supporting businesses and entrepreneurs in their communities. Often, the needs of businesses can be intimidating to library staff members who do not feel they have the experience or expertise to offer assistance. Each aspect of the summit, from the keynote to the breakout sessions and partner tables, was designed to empower attendees and increase their skill set to better reach their business communities.

The day began with a keynote by Barbara Alvarez, author of *Embedded Business Librarianship for the Public Librarian*. The points she made were echoed throughout the day during breakout sessions, but focused on how librarians are more than qualified to assist businesses, no matter their skill level.

- True embedded librarianship develops over time and requires continued effort
- Outreach presentations should not be the extent of communication to businesses
- Librarians are entrepreneurs in their organization and should view businesses services through that lens
- The rewards of embedded librarianship can be significant

Participants then attended breakout sessions led by volunteers from the NJLibsGrowBiz Steering Committee. Each program slot included a session that was more “basic” for the beginner and one that could be considered more “advanced.” Topics included business reference, outreach, and working with nonprofits.

During breaks and lunch, attendees were encouraged to visit the NJLibsGrowBiz website at www.njlibsgrowbiz.org.

website, and plan a business-focused program for the New Jersey Library Association Annual Conference. I am looking ahead to another Summit in 2020 with speakers from the business community to share their needs directly with librarians, but the design of the event will be based upon suggestions from the Committee.

In addition to the reasons I mentioned earlier, I also selfishly designed the Summit and Committee to assist me in my work: when I meet with government officials and business stakeholders at the state level, I want to confidently refer them to their local public library. I want to know that they can then refer their constituents, clients, friends, and family to the library and know for sure that if they go to the reference desk for business resources, they will be satisfied with the results. Of course, with over 400 library locations in New Jersey, and such an array of communities with their own needs, I know not every public library will be able to answer business questions or provide outreach at the same level. But when the debate continues about whether New Jersey is “business friendly,” in terms of libraries, the response should be a resounding yes.