

CASE STUDY: Brooklyn Public Library

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

September 2022

Introduction

Purpose of the case

The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), with funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), launched the Measures that Matter initiative in 2016 to examine, evaluate, and map the landscape of public library data collection in the United States. COSLA retained Mt Auburn Associates with Program and Policy Insight (the Mt. Auburn team) to pilot a research effort to provide insights into how to measure library activities related to workforce and business development. In addition to completing an extensive literature review, the core research for this project involved ten case studies of library systems across the U.S. The case studies examine the processes in play for designing and delivering workforce and small business development-related services, identifying the role of libraries in workforce and business development in their community, and, most importantly, understanding if and how public libraries share the story of their work related to workforce and small business support through the tracking of outcomes. These case studies represent a diversity of public libraries in terms of the size of the community, the structures of the library system, and the types of state support for a library's role in the workforce system. The Mt. Auburn team selected the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) for its innovative business support and workforce development programs and as an example of a library in a major city with a complex system involving many branches.

Overview of the case

BPL, which provides services to residents of the borough of Brooklyn in New York City, has a long history of seeing itself as a central institution in the economic lives of the borough's residents. Its focus on the needs of the business community goes back over 100 years with the establishment of the specialized Business Library in downtown Brooklyn. Over the past 20 years, it has deepened this approach with innovative programs such as the PowerUP! business plan competition, the recent establishment of the Business & Career Center (B&CC) in the newly renovated Central Library, the BKLYN Fashion Academy, and its Adult Learning Centers that provide a range of training and literacy supports for Brooklyn residents.

Beyond its specific programs, BPL has a culture that encourages staff to develop relationships with other city agencies and nonprofit organizations involved in workforce and business development and a deep culture of innovation, with institutional encouragement and support for developing new approaches and new programs among both the library leadership and the frontline staff.

The library is also developing a much stronger culture around the use of data for internal learning and improvement and reporting to funders. For the workforce and business development activities, this has meant attempting not only to track participation in programs but also to track the actual outcomes of that participation. Even with this growing data orientation, many ongoing challenges

make telling the story of how BPL contributes to the economic wellbeing of residents particularly difficult.

Methodology

During the first phase of this project, the Mt. Auburn team completed a literature review on libraries' role in workforce and business development and identified public libraries with interesting or exemplary models. In addition, the team developed a Theory of Change (TOC) that presents a framework for thinking about the public libraries' role in contributing to the economic wellbeing of residents. The TOC identified three distinct roles that public libraries play: standard, specialized, and community hub (see sidebar). This framework became an important element in the case study research. Working with an Advisory Committee, the Mt. Auburn team identified 80 public libraries to consider for case studies, developed criteria for site selection, and selected ten public library systems.

		Role of libraries in workforce and business development system	
		Workforce development	Small business development
Library Designed and Led Services	Standard services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to computers for resume writing • Help filling out applications or submitting resumes • Books and online information related to job search • Access to online training programs • Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to computers for tax, regulatory, and other forms • Books and online information on entrepreneurship, small businesses, specific industries • Access to databases for business plans and market studies • Access to technology for prototyping - 3D printer • Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources
	Specialized services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer literacy workshops and training • Career readiness workshops and training • Occupational training • Adult education and ESOL training • Digital navigation and one-on-one coaching • Designated career space • Facilitate job search support groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business plan development and other specialized workshops • Maker spaces, co-working space, media and technology space • Pitch contests and other specialized programs • One-on-one coaching or mentorship programs by dedicated small business staff • Entrepreneur networking events
	Community hub services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Stop Career Center location • Facilities for training providers • Training programs run with other partners • Host job fairs with partners • Trusted convener of community service providers • On-the-job training and internship placements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint programs and workshop with other small business service providers such as SCORE • Facilities for small business support organizations to meet clients and hold workshops • Trusted convener of community service providers

The first step in the case study process was to conduct baseline research on the communities in which the libraries reside. This baseline research included a demographic and economic overview of the market area that the library system operates within, an overview of the library system, an analysis of the state policy environment relevant to libraries and workforce development, and background information on the workforce development and business development ecosystem in the community. After gathering the baseline information, the Mt. Auburn team had an introductory phone call with the library system lead to further our understanding of the library and identify the internal and external stakeholders whom system leaders believed would be critical to interview.

In terms of the library system, the Mt. Auburn team interviewed library system staff, including leadership at both the system and outlet levels, library staff directly involved in workforce or business

development activities, and communication- and technology-related staff. The external interviews focused on stakeholders in the workforce and business development ecosystem in the library’s service area, including “partner” organizations engaged in active collaboration with libraries, organizations providing workforce or business development services in the region but not engaged in a formal library partnership, and other civic leaders.

The case study interviews were in-person as part of a site visit to each library system or completed virtually for those unable to meet in person. In the case of the Brooklyn Public Library, the Mt. Auburn team conducted 14 interviews. The team conducted 11 of these interviews onsite in Brooklyn during an April 28 and April 29, 2022 site visit and three interviews virtually over Zoom shortly after the site visit. Of the 14 interviewees, seven were library system staff, a number of whom worked directly in branches, one was from the workforce system, four were involved in small business development, and two were civic leaders. The Mt. Auburn team used semi-structured protocols to guide stakeholder interviews.

Community context

To better understand BPL's role in providing workforce- and business development-related services, it is necessary to understand the context within which it operates. This section looks at the library itself—its history, governance, and structure—and provides a demographic and economic profile of the borough of Brooklyn.

Library system

BPL is one of the country’s largest public library systems, with 850,000 active cardholders.¹ In addition to its Central Library, the system includes 60 branches (with the recent addition of the new Adams Street branch) and four bookmobiles. Many of the libraries are historic buildings, and 18 are original Carnegie libraries.

With many decades-old buildings needing repair, BPL has been in an unprecedented building and renovation mode. Some of the more significant projects include:

- BPL’s Central Library is in the midst of the largest renovation in its 80-year history. Phase I, which is complete, includes the Major Owens Welcome Center, New and Noteworthy, Civic Commons, expansion of the B&CC, and the restored Grand Lobby. Phase II will involve the refurbishment of the library’s reading rooms, an expansion of the Adult Learning Center, and a new teen space.

Library	Brooklyn Public Library
Service area	Brooklyn, NY
Population of service area	2,504,700
# of branches*	59
Administrative structure	Nonprofit
Operating revenue	\$153,512,306
Operating revenue per capita	\$61.29
Total paid staff (FTE)	1,092
# of adult programs**	35,375
# of internet computers	1,527
Computers per 1,000 population	.61
* Number of branches including central branch, but not including bookmobiles	
** Number of adult programs is estimated as the number of total programs that are not children’s or young adult programs.	
Source: PLS 2019 data	

¹ About Brooklyn Public Library. Brooklyn Public Library. Accessed June 14, 2022. <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/about>

- The Adams Street Branch, in the DUMBO-Vinegar Hill community, is the first new library built in Brooklyn since 1983.
- The Brooklyn Heights branch reopened in June 2022 after undergoing a complete rebuild. This rebuild was part of an innovative project involving the sale of the existing library to a developer for \$52 million, of which BPL earmarked \$12 million for the new build and committed \$40 million to fund needed repairs throughout the Brooklyn Public Library system. The mixed-use building is near completion, and residents have begun moving into the 36-story luxury condominium tower.

As a private nonprofit entity, a 38-member board of trustees governs BPL. The mayor and the Brooklyn borough president each appoint 11 trustees. These appointed trustees elect 12 additional board members to serve. The mayor, Brooklyn borough president, city comptroller, and speaker of the city council are ex-officio members of the board.

While not a city agency, BPL is still highly dependent on New York City for much of its annual revenue. Each of the three library systems in New York—BPL, New York Public Library, and Queens Public Library—receives city tax-levy funds for operational support as well as capital funds for maintenance of the branches the systems manage. Systems also receive capital funds to create new branches and/or specialized centers. In 2019, the city provided 81 percent of the total resources of the BPL.

In addition to city resources, BPL receives funding from the state and has secured federal grants to support specific programs. For example, BPL applied for and received a \$132,000 grant through the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program and a \$3,228,089 grant as part of the State Aid for Library Construction program. In addition, BPL has been very successful in tapping philanthropic resources to support its activities.

In 2018, BPL completed *NOW* → *NEXT*, a major strategic plan that set forth its mission, focus areas, and strategic priorities. Its mission statement is “*to ensure the preservation and transmission of society’s knowledge, history and culture, and to provide the people of Brooklyn with free and open access to information for education, recreation and reference.*” The plan is very clear that BPL needs to play a role in serving the workforce and business development needs of the borough’s diverse residents and businesses.

Community conditions

Brooklyn is a borough of the city of New York with a 2020 population of 2,736,074, an increase of 9 percent since 2010.² Brooklyn is part of the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Metropolitan Statistical Area. While New York City is the most populous city in the country, if Brooklyn were a freestanding city, it would be the third most populous city in the country. The city is almost equal parts white (36.8 percent) and Black (33.8 percent), with large Hispanic or Latino (18.9 percent) and Asian (12.7 percent) populations.

² 2020 Census Results. U.S. Census Bureau, March 3, 2022. Accessed June 14, 2022.

<https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/decennial-census/decade/2020/2020-census-results.html>

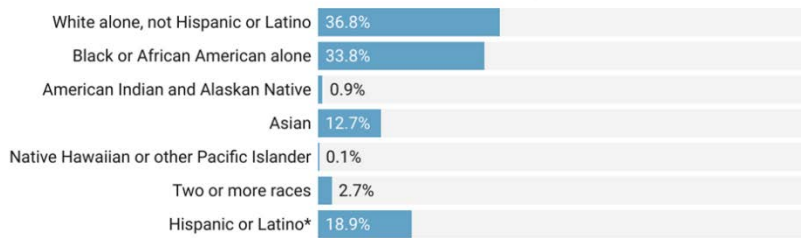
A group of Dutch farmers settled in Brooklyn in 1636, and it became a residential outpost for wealthy New Yorkers. The borough was a manufacturing and shipping hub in the 19th century, with massive industries including sugar refining, ironworks, petroleum refining, slaughterhouses, and manufacturing. After the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge, Brooklyn became part of Greater New York in 1898. Brooklyn’s role as a manufacturing center continued well into the 20th century until it began to decline in the 1950s. Brooklyn

Community Conditions	Brooklyn	United States
Unemployment rate	6.5%	5.4%
Persons in poverty	17.8%	11.4%
Median household income	\$63,973	\$64,994
In civilian labor force	63.6%	63.0%
HS graduate or higher (> 25 y.o.)	83.2%	88.5%
BA or higher (> 25 y.o.)	38.8%	32.9%
Foreign-born persons	35.6%	13.5%
Households with internet access	83.0%	85.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016-2020 American Community Survey, 5-year average, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

experienced a tumultuous period with considerable urban decline throughout the 1970s and 1980s. However, by the 1990s, the borough received a boon from young professionals and families looking for a more affordable alternative to Manhattan. The 21st century ushered in an era of reinvestment and development in Brooklyn, and with that has come neighborhood change and rising housing costs.

Racial and ethnic breakdown of Brooklyn



* Hispanics and Latinos may be of any race, and are also included in applicable race categories. Total percentages exceed 100%.

Source: 2020 Census - Created with Datawrapper

The people of Brooklyn elect a president to govern the borough, and Brooklyn has 16 representatives on the New York City Council. The mayor, borough presidents, and the city council all play central roles in negotiating the city’s budget priorities and ultimately approving the adopted budget, including for its three library systems.

Relevant systems

The state-enabling environment—the policies and practices of state agencies related to public library support and workforce development policies and priorities—influences each public library in a state. Moreover, each of the three public library systems operates within a very different local environment related to the workforce and small business ecosystems. This section reviews the state-level and community-level systems in which BPL operates.

State-level support: policies, funding, and infrastructure

State Library administrative agency

The New York State Library is part of the New York State Education Department Office of Cultural Education. The State Library serves three major constituencies:

1. The Research Library, which serves as the library for state government, is one of the largest research libraries in the U.S. The library also services individuals with visual, physical, or reading disabilities.
2. The New York State Talking Book and Braille library services individuals with visual, physical, or reading disabilities.
3. The Division of Library Development serves the state's libraries and is responsible for the distribution of more than \$140 million in state and federal aid for the improvement of library services.

As part of the State Education Department, a Board of Regents that oversees educational policy in New York State governs the New York State Library. The Board of Regents appoints the Regents Advisory Council on Libraries, which advises on library-related policies, including assisting with the development of the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Five-Year plan.

The state legislature authorized the establishment of nine Reference and Research Library Resource Councils, and Brooklyn Public Library is part of the METRO region council, along with the other boroughs in New York City and Westchester County. These councils provide support services, including continuing education, digitization services, access to electronic resources, information technologies, and advocacy to member libraries in the region. In addition, these nine councils comprise a statewide Empire State Library Network that provides further support for libraries such as resource sharing and professional development. Some of the state funding for libraries flows through these councils. For example, the State Library allocated \$5,514,315 of the \$6,213,213 in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to the councils for regional projects that advance digital inclusion, encourage library/museum partnerships, and expand student access to digital resources.

The 2018-2022 LSTA plan set out the State Library's priorities. One of the activities included in this plan of direct relevance to workforce development is:

*Strengthen partnerships among the State Library, the State Education Department's Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education, Department of Labor, public library systems and public libraries and others to improve, enhance and sustain workforce development, lifelong learning and literacy programs and services of New York's public libraries.*³

The New York State Library promotes libraries' engagement in workforce through Workforce Development at New York Libraries via Public Library Systems, a 2019-2022 Adult Literacy Library Services formula allocation program that helps public library systems work with partner organizations to develop and expand adult literacy programs with a focus on workforce development. As part of this program, each library system gets an annual allocation of funds based on a formula. The state-funded program allocated \$20,000 to BPL in the 2019-2020 fiscal year.

³ Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Program in New York State. New York State Education Department, 2018. Accessed June 14, 2022. <https://www.nysl.nysed.gov/libdev/lsta/index.html>

Chapter 563 of the Laws of 2021 consolidated the Adult Literacy Library Services funding into Public Library Systems' Coordinated Outreach Services Program funding. Many systems use Coordinated Outreach state funds for serving the unemployed and for workforce development tools and services. BPL received \$348,677 in Coordinated Outreach funding in the 2019-2020 fiscal year and \$425,347 in the 2022-2023 fiscal year under the new consolidated and expanded program.

State workforce system

The workforce development system in New York State involves a complex set of actors across multiple state agencies. Many resources related to workforce flow from the federal government through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB), which is the governance body for the workforce development and one-stop delivery system. However, a 2022 auditors study reported that the SWIB has been dormant for a number of years and that the lack of alignment and coordination among the more than 500 workforce programs offered by 22 different state agencies creates challenges in terms of addressing the state's workforce needs.⁴

Partially in response to the weakness in the system, both the previous governor and the current governor have prioritized system reforms. In 2019, under Governor Cuomo, New York State enacted the Workforce Development Initiative to create efficiencies using a Consolidated Funding Application to align workforce development priorities with regional economic development priorities. In 2022, Governor Hochul announced the launch of the New York State Office of Strategic Workforce Development to improve the state's workforce development system. This \$350 million investment will consolidate many different funding streams and provide additional support for employer-driven, high-skilled workforce training programs.

Adult literacy is another part of the state workforce system. The New York State Education Department supports 51 Literacy Zones that "provide a systemic approach to meeting the literacy needs of these communities characterized by significant poverty and deficits in literacy and English language proficiency."⁵

Local workforce and business development ecosystems

Workforce development services

Some federal workforce funding through WIOA also flows through the Workforce Development Board in New York City. This board comprises over 30 individuals representing the public sector, the business community, and nonprofit organizations. However, while this funding stream is important,

⁴ Labor Department. "Overlap, Duplication, Gaps, and/or Fragmentation in Workforce Development Programs and Services." Office of the New York State Comptroller, May 19, 2022. Accessed June 14, 2022.

<https://www.osc.state.ny.us/state-agencies/audits/2022/05/19/overlap-duplication-gaps-andor-fragmentation-workforce-development-programs-and-services>

⁵ NYS Literacy Zones. New York State Education Department. Accessed June 14, 2022. <https://nys-education-literacy-zones.org/>

the city has a large and disparate set of organizations that support some type of workforce development activity. A recent report, *Follow the Money*, by Invest in Skills New York City, a coalition of workforce training advocates, estimated that New York City had 75 funding streams from federal, state, and city sources across 21 city agencies doing various forms of workforce development work.⁶

Perhaps most relevant to job seekers is the city's Workforce1 Career Center system that helps residents identify jobs, acquire basic skills such as resume writing and interviewing, and access career training. While the centers were previously in facilities across the city, it is currently a virtual system where residents can connect via the web for one-on-one assistance. Adult literacy programs are also an important part of the workforce system in Brooklyn. The New York City Department of Education's Office of Adult and Continuing Education supports multiple Adult Learning Centers throughout the city.

Business development services

Like the workforce development system in New York City, the entrepreneurial and small business support system has many actors. New York City's Department of Small Business Services, which supports seven Business Solutions Centers across the city, is the major program to support small businesses. There are also a large number of nonprofit business support organizations in Brooklyn. A recent study on the small business ecosystem by Next Street and Common Future noted that the system *"lacks coordination within and across all five boroughs needed to best serve the city's small businesses. There is no central coordinator or resource to help small businesses navigate offerings from BSCs, capital providers, anchor institutions, philanthropy, and other stakeholders."*⁷ Interestingly, this report did not include any of the services of any of the public libraries in New York in its overview of the small business support ecosystem.

Library workforce and business development services

Overview of the library's approach

BPL has a very robust set of programs related to workforce development and small business development, as well as a strong set of relationships with other organizations in the borough involved in providing workforce and entrepreneurial services. BPL leadership also plays a significant role in broader civic and economic development activities in their communities, participating in many efforts to improve the economic lives of residents.

BPL has had a specialized business library in downtown Brooklyn to serve businesses since 1943 and has now added many other services for job seekers, individuals looking to advance their careers, and entrepreneurs through its B&CC in the renovated Central Library. This center offers co-working space, meeting rooms, and computers and has staff with specialized knowledge of the many

⁶ Jobs First NYC. "Follow the Money: Understanding New York City's Workforce System Funding." JobsFirstNYC, September 16, 2021. Accessed June 14, 2022. <https://jobsfirstnyc.org/latest/invest-in-skills-workforce-development-funding-map/>

⁷ Next Street & Common Future. "New York City Small Business Ecosystem Assessment." Next Street, Fall 2020. Accessed June 14, 2022, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/12exV-GKKf8WxdYlyQ1GqsbiHRVI7YxdD/view>

programs available both within the library and through other service providers, including job and career counseling, personal finance workshops, and business plan classes.

Another distinct element of BPL's approach is the Adult Learning Centers located at the Central Library and in four library branches. These centers, supported primarily by federal, state, and city funding, provide a range of basic education classes, case management, and some specialized occupational training.

One particularly exemplary characteristic of BPL is its focus on innovation. Its internal incubator program provides support to library staff interested in piloting programs. BPL has developed two very successful initiatives to support entrepreneurs, PowerUP! and the BKLYN Fashion Academy, which emerged from the system's incubator effort.

New workforce and small business support programs often arose in response to larger economic challenges in New York City. For example, after 9/11, the city provided some special funding to support BPL's economic and workforce work, and, similarly, after the 2008 recession, with a new focus on the workforce challenges of Brooklyn residents, the city turned its attention to the potential role of the public libraries.

Workforce development services

Standard services

The focal point of efforts to address the workforce needs of Brooklyn residents is the Business and Career Center, which, after its rebuild, relocated to the Central Library in May 2021. The librarians in the center are available to provide patrons with access to the numerous collections related to finding a job, identifying a career, and accessing training and support services. Job information resource librarians also provide resume, cover letter, and career assistance. Career resource staff have a relatively deep understanding of the city's workforce system and the available training opportunities. As a result, they often refer patrons to programs and services that other organizations in the city provide.

Central Library workforce services staff also offer some of the same services at some of the branches within the system and have trained branch staff so they can better serve neighborhood residents looking for assistance on their job search or career pathway.

BPL has always had a large reference library with books and resources that are useful for job seekers and those interested in advancing their careers. With the growing recognition of the number of individuals who want to access resources remotely, BPL's focus has shifted to building its virtual resources and databases. Among the many special resources available to cardholders are:

- *Brainfuse JobNow* provides live, online coaches who assist in resume/cover letter preparation and help patrons prepare for job interviews.
- *LearningExpress* supports those looking to improve core academic skills, pass standardized tests, prepare for college, join the military, obtain occupational certification, find a job, change careers, become a U.S. citizen, and much more.
- *LinkedIn Learning* offers more than 16,000 online courses in seven languages, hosted by expert instructors with real-world experience.

- *Mometrix Academy* is an online learning management system that helps jobseekers upgrade their skills and study for certification exams to help secure employment.

Specialized services

In addition to the standard services, librarians provide a wide range of workshops through the B&CC and at the local branches. Library staff host workshops on job interview basics and cover letter basics. There are also workshops and assistance on using computers and work-related software. The job information resource librarians, specialized staff who are part of B&CC, offer drop-in and virtual assistance at the Central Library and a number of branches.

Community hub services

BPL is also a community hub, working in partnership with many other organizations to serve the workforce needs of residents:

- *Adult Learning Centers:* There are five Adult Learning Centers, one at the Central Library and one at each of four branches. These centers provide basic literacy and ESOL classes, classes for high school equivalency, and specialized training programs, including food handler certification and virtual medical billing. BPL's ESOL Literacy Zone also partners with other organizations in the community on events such as the Career & Community Resource Fair for Non-Native Speakers. Most of these programs are in partnership with other providers and receive support through city and state funding. For example, BPL partners with the Brooklyn Education Opportunity Center for the ESOL and ABE classes and CUNY Kingsborough for the food handler training. In addition, the Adult Learning Center employs case managers who work to help patrons achieve their goals.
- *Bard Microcollege:* BPL has partnered with Bard College, a private liberal arts college in Annandale-on-Hudson, to establish an undergraduate program aimed at nontraditional students, including those who experienced incarceration, homelessness, or foster care. The library location is one of three microcolleges; the other two are in Harlem, New York, and Holyoke, Massachusetts. The program operates at the Central Library, and funding is primarily through philanthropic grants. Library leadership sees its role as more than providing a location for the college, believing that students “benefit from Brooklyn Public Library’s collection of four million materials, state-of-the-art technology, Business and Career Center, art exhibitions and cultural events, and countless other programs.”⁸ The college, which is free to students, grants a two-year associate degree.

Small business development services

Standard services

Since 1943, the Business Library has supported the needs of businesses and individuals by providing free access to business and investment resources. The Business Library was centrally located in downtown Brooklyn but moved to the Central Library in 2021 to become part of the B&CC. The new B&CC has a collection of resources relevant to both existing businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs, including many online databases with information on markets, industries, competitors, target populations, and subscriptions to leading trade magazines.

⁸ Bard at Brooklyn Public Library. Bard Microcollege. Accessed June 14, 2022. <https://microcollege.bard.edu/brooklyn/>.

Unlike the case of workforce-related services, most of the support services related to business development functions are at the Central Library in the B&CC. While, as noted, many branch staff have undergone training and can provide support for the job seeker, this is not true in terms of business support, where the branch staff are much more likely to refer any inquiries to the B&CC.

Most of the resources for businesses are available remotely, and often a patron will go to the B&CC to learn about the resources available and then access them at home or their branch library.

Specialized services

BPL designed and administers two innovative business development programs that have been very successful at supporting entrepreneurs in the borough:

- **PowerUP!:** This program offers entrepreneurs classes and individual counseling in addition to visibility and financing. To participate in the competition, businesses must meet with a business advisor and attend at least three PowerUP! webinar classes. Competition winners receive monetary awards. The library also offered a specialized competition, *PowerUP! KREYOL Business Plan Competition*, targeting Haitian entrepreneurs (see sidebar).
- **BKLYN Fashion Academy:** The Fashion Academy emerged from a library staff person's idea, and BPL piloted and supported the program through its internal incubator program. The Academy is an intensive program for designers to prepare them for launching fashion businesses. Individuals accepted into the program attend several classes and labs and participate in a final fashion show. BPL partners with BK Style Foundation, FABSCRAP, Fashion Week Brooklyn, Made in New York: Fashion, Material for the Arts, Microsoft, and Mood Fabrics.

PowerUP!

PowerUP! is a business competition for entrepreneurs in Brooklyn that BPL started in 2003. The program's genesis was partially in response to 9/11, a challenging economic period. It was an effort to expand awareness of BPL's resources to a broader set of residents, specifically those in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods. BPL concluded that a business plan competition aimed at aspiring entrepreneurs was an effective strategy to support the economy and promote BPL's resources. To implement the program, BPL has built solid partnerships with a range of organizations serving small businesses in Brooklyn.

To join the competition, an entrepreneur must get a library card, utilize the library's resources, and connect with one of the business counselors from partner organizations. In addition, competitors have to attend four one-and-a-half-hour workshops on topics like the basics of creating a business plan, market research, and finance. A class on library research familiarizes entrepreneurs with the range of business-related resources available at BPL. After a rigorous review process, finalists present their ideas to a panel and the competition awards prizes of \$20,000 for first place, \$10,000 for second place, \$5,000 for third place, and \$1,000 for five merit winners.

BPL has also run a specialized competition, PowerUP! KREYOL, which targeted Haitian entrepreneurs and received funding through the Department of Small Business Services Immigrant Business Initiative, a New York City agency. This special program ran for three years.

Since 2003, BPL has supported 9,275 individuals with more than 1,200 business plans and awarded more than \$500,000 to Brooklyn entrepreneurs. Among 2021 participants, 25 percent were immigrants/foreign-born, 72 percent were women, and 72 percent had never owned a business.

One of BPL's partners noted of the program, "It forces entrepreneurs to get clarity on what they're doing. It forces them to put together a business plan. And then, for the finalists, it's an amazing platform for them. And I think it showcases the diversity of entrepreneurs but also the diversity of the types of businesses that are out there in the community."

Community hub services

BPL has developed strong partnerships with a number of small business assistance providers who run small business support programs. Prior to COVID, some of these partners provided counseling services to clients onsite at the library. These partners include SCORE NYC, City Bar Justice Center's Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project, and Start Small Think Big. BPL also provided meeting space for the Women's Business Center (WBC). In addition, BPL has promoted the activities of the WBC and provided space for the WBC's Start Smart series.

Service administration

Staffing and management

The Business & Career Center and the Adult Learning Centers oversee most of the workforce and small business services. These activities are both under the Adult Learning Department at BPL. One factor that differentiates the two departments is that B&CC staff are primarily librarians, whereas staff at the Adult Learning Centers are more likely to be instructors who specialize in ESOL or teaching for the high school equivalency exam.

Central staff are responsible for managing the Adult Learning Centers, but each of the five learning centers has a site manager, an office associate, and a literacy advisor who basically run the centers. In addition, there are part-time instructors and volunteers.

The Business & Career Center has a supervisor and three job information resource specialists. The staff's role is to visit specific branches and provide one-on-one help to patrons who need assistance in their job search. They also offer classes at the branches for patrons to learn a specific skill related to their job search, such as how to prepare for a job interview, or inform job seekers of the resources available at BPL. The B&CC also has staff who can provide information on PowerUP! and the BKLYN Fashion Academy.

System support and role

BPL has strong central, system-wide staff who serve system functions and provide services to the branches. As noted, staff working as part of the system-level B&CC visit some branches to provide resources to job seekers and deliver training and support to branch staff. The Adult Learning Department manages the Adult Learning Center staff at the system level.

One core component of the system structure is BPL's Strategy Department. This department has about ten staff people and is responsible for collecting and analyzing data, updating the strategic plan, and managing major initiatives in the institution. In addition, it has an internal incubator, which BPL designed to promote innovation within the institution.

Other community-oriented services at the system level include a new Outreach Services Department. This department has focused some attention on housing and eviction issues and other matters related to economic wellbeing.

Branches have their own administration, priorities, and service models. Some branches are more interested than others in the business and workforce services available through the system staff. A system staff person is responsible for Neighborhood Services, which is at the branch level.

Funding

In addition to the general support for the staffing and facilities that flow through the general funding streams of BPL, mostly from New York City, many of the workforce and small business support programs receive outside public and private resources to support their work. For example, some of the resources for addressing workforce-related services at the library emerged as a result of federal funds that the library received after the 2008 recession. The city passed through some of this funding to libraries for additional computer terminals and laptops at specific library locations where there was a high need to provide technology access to communities. The state of New York also provided support to public libraries through a variety of funding streams. For example, New York State's Empire State Development provided a \$500,000 grant in support of the B&CC at BPL. The Adult Learning Department receives a significant amount of federal, state, and city funding related to literacy programs. Both PowerUP! and the BKLYN Fashion Academy have received grants from banks, foundations, and other private donors.

How they determine what to offer

The internal incubator program that is part of BPL's Strategy Department provides funding to frontline staff to test ideas before the library incorporates them into practice or replicates them. For example, the BKLYN Fashion Academy started as a pilot. Once BPL deemed it successful, based on the level of participation and interest, it continued as a BPL project partially supported by library resources and partially through outside funders.

The BPL leadership encourages system and branch staff to use data to help them determine what services to provide. To assist branches in determining what types of services to offer, the system staff involved in data collection provide support on how to use secondary data, such as the Census, and the system-wide collected data. Leadership also encourages branch staff to reach out to neighborhood groups to get a better understanding of local needs.

Marketing of services

Because BPL has developed such strong relationships with partners, much of its outreach is through these partner organizations. BPL's partners promote the library's services and, in turn, believe that the cobranding of their services with BPL is an essential part of their own outreach strategy.

Another significant method of outreach involves convening partners. Business & Career Center staff hosted a convening with 60 to 70 different organizations in Brooklyn involved in small business support. The 2021 virtual meeting was a great networking event for participants and also a way of introducing the services available in the new B&CC to a wide range of organizations. Finally, staff at both the system and branch levels make presentations at community boards, resource fairs, and workshops that other civic organizations offer.

Even with a strong market and outreach approach, it has been a challenge getting residents and businesses in the borough to fully understand the availability of rich resources and support systems at BPL. As one of the staff noted, *"It is a constant struggle to let the public know that the library is more than where you bring your child for story time."*

Aspirations

The B&CC at Central Library is relatively new, and there is an aspiration to make the center an even stronger hub for services in the community. Other organizations have been exploring with BPL, *“How can we leverage that space as a community space for entrepreneurs and for other organizations?”* One small business support organization is thinking that instead of going back to having one office where small business owners would come, it could pivot and meet clients at the library and the branches.

There is also an interest in having the branch libraries better understand the needs in their community and focus even more on building relationships with other community stakeholders. The idea is that the branches could do more outreach to community boards and community-based organizations in their community and play a more integral part in the efforts to address neighborhood challenges.

Library system’s role in the community’s workforce and small business development systems

Library collaboration with ecosystem partners

In the workforce system, the Adult Learning Department has developed robust relationships, particularly with the organizations involved in adult literacy and training. B&CC staff also conduct considerable outreach to organizations in the community that are helping residents access jobs and start businesses. For example, B&CC staff have close relationships with Workforce1, the career center network serving Brooklyn.

There is also an emphasis on extending these relationships beyond the system level. BPL strongly encourages branch staff to build relationships with neighborhood organizations. It is common for branch staff to meet with local providers, such as homeless shelters and community-based organizations. The borough’s community districts, with their appointed boards, are also an effective hub for learning about local resources and conducting outreach in terms of the services BPL has to offer.

BPL has also forged particularly strong relationships throughout Brooklyn with organizations that support entrepreneurs and small business owners. As one of its partners noted, *“Our relationship with BPL is unique because there are so many different ways that we engaged with them.”* Many relationships with actors in the small business support system were a result of PowerUP!. Examples of the relationships include:

- System staff have a strong relationship with the Women’s Business Center. BPL staff sit on the WBC advisory board and provide advice, feedback, connections, and resources. WBC staff partner on PowerUP! and serve as counselors on how to write a business plan. There is also a robust referral process, with BPL sending patrons to the WBC, and the WBC sending its clients to BPL to use the databases that are relevant to businesses.
- Start Small Think Big, an organization that connects small business owners with free legal services, marketing support, and financial consulting has a close relationship with BPL and is looking actively at new opportunities to partner with the library.

Library's position in the greater ecosystem

BPL plays a relatively important role in both the workforce-related ecosystem and the small business support ecosystem in Brooklyn. In fact, BPL has been acting as a convener in both systems—bringing together other organizations that are providing workforce and small business services so that there is a deeper understanding of the contributions of various actors and a reduction of duplication and inefficiencies. For example, BPL's Adult Learning Department has been bringing together some of the key actors in the borough who are providing adult literacy, high school equivalency programming, and ESOL-type programming. Organizations involved in PowerUP! also reported that the program not only supports local entrepreneurs but, in bringing together so many of the support organizations as partners in the competition as judges and mentors, it also plays a significant role in raising awareness of who is providing services in the borough and has strengthened relationships across organizations.

- *Evidence of filling system gaps:* In many ways, it is through access to computers that BPL plays the most significant role in filling gaps, particularly in the workforce system. This became clear during the pandemic when many other providers realized that lack of access to a computer and the internet was a significant challenge for many job seekers in the borough. In addition, the basic classes and assistance that BPL provides in job search skills and resume writing are not readily available through other workforce providers. Other local organizations recognize that the library is filling a significant gap. For example, when a public housing development in Brownsville received Jobs Plus funds, it referred residents to the local library for help in resume writing.

So I think PowerUP! is well known. I feel like I know a lot of the other organizations that support startups and small business. And they have been, I think, probably all of them have been invited to have a role in the activities and the process. There's a lot of judges in the first round that look at the hundreds of business plans that are submitted and then talk about it and we'll whittle it down. And that's an activity of both getting to a small number of potential winners, but it also is an activity of getting the community ecosystem of people in the small business ecosystem together. That's how I view it.
- *Evidence of expanding system reach:* Because BPL has so many branches and residents view it as a trusted institution, there is evidence that BPL is often the first service provider for many individuals seeking employment or interested in starting a business. Library staff noted that many patrons come first to their closest branch library to seek information and assistance. By providing direct services to individuals who may not access workforce services through other avenues, it is expanding the system's reach to more residents. Another way in which BPL expands system reach is through the “navigational” role it plays, referring patrons to local resources that are available to serve their specific needs, whether in occupational training, entrepreneurial support, or identifying employment opportunities. As stated by one of the workforce organizations in the community, “I think people funnel into the library because it's a library, and maybe they know that it's a place to start, and then they're pushed externally like a hub and spoke.” A small business provider in the community noted that people know about the library, and so they often start there, and then the library staff refer them to other providers in the community. This person reported, “Without that, it will be a very disconnected small business ecosystem.”

Unfortunately, the role that BPL plays in the larger system, while recognized by organizations within these systems, is not widely understood or appreciated by political and civic leaders. Evidence is all anecdotal, with no tracking of referrals or the number of individuals accessing library computers for their job search.

Pandemic response and recovery

Overview of library services during the pandemic

Like most libraries, BPL closed in-person operations completely in the first part of the pandemic. In response, BPL continued to shift and prioritize spending on eBooks and other virtual services and provide some of its programs online. In addition, understanding the WiFi needs in the community, where BPL was already the largest free WiFi provider in the borough, it kept WiFi on 24/7 and allowed people to access the internet from just outside the buildings. The library also established Bklyn Reach, extending WiFi access to 300 feet at six branches, installing outside furniture for users, and providing signal-boosting antennas in most branches.

Approach to workforce and business development services during the pandemic

After BPL buildings closed in the early months of COVID, it took a few weeks for staff involved in workforce to begin to offer virtual services. Once offered, virtual attendance dropped, and BPL recognized that in moving to virtual services, it was overlooking anyone who did not have a computer at home. During this period, staff said there was a sea change in whom they were serving. Many more patrons already had a job and were interested in a career change. On the other hand, conducting virtual workshops on issues such as resume writing during the pandemic opened up the service to all residents of the borough, not just those who could go to one of the physical locations to attend a workshop. BPL is now reintroducing in-person resume and career assistance at a few branches.

With the libraries now fully open, the new Business & Career Center is available again to patrons. The B&CC now provides those working remotely with a new option. In a city where most apartments are very small, having workspaces at the new B&CC has taken on more importance as the pandemic has changed the work environment.

The Adult Learning Centers had been experimenting with some online learning prior to the pandemic, and it made the transition to working virtually much easier for them. In addition, realizing that many of their clients did not have internet access or computers, they were able to use some federal and nonprofit funding support for hotspots. Staff realized that was insufficient; they also needed to offer training on how to use the computers. According to the center staff, *“Once people got the hang of it, especially on the high school diploma side, the number of participants went up dramatically.”* This was not true of the ESOL students, who found the online classes much more challenging.

Learning from the pandemic

One of the areas of learning was the recognition that some patrons who became accustomed to working virtually would probably not come back for in-person services. Some patrons have ready access to a computer and basic computer literacy. On the other hand, a subset of patrons still needs workforce-related services and does not have this capacity; they will continue visiting the library in

person. As a result, BPL's focus now is on how to provide services both in-person and online with the same staffing configuration.

BPL staff have been somewhat surprised that demand for workforce-related services continued to be low even after the resumption of in-person services. BPL staff have learned that there is some complexity in terms of who needs services at different points in an economic cycle and that a number of factors could be reducing interest in seeking a job or upgrading a skill. Thus, BPL is making a greater effort to better understand the nature of the demand for in-person versus virtual services. It is now seeing a return of demand for in-person resume and technology help and is frequently operating at full capacity in terms of the library's drop-in resume help.

Finally, the pandemic has accelerated the focus on online resources. BPL is now spending much more of its resources on eBooks and virtual resources and cutting back on investments in journals and books in their reference sections.

Tracking and measurement

The library system's approach to tracking and measurement

BPL has one staff person at the system level who leads the data collection process and who supervises one other full-time staff person. These two staff people focus specifically on collecting data for the system, analyzing the data, and providing support to staff in the system and the branches on how to use data for learning. There has also been a particular focus on helping branch staff use Census and other data to better understand their neighborhoods and design programming aligned to community needs. One BPL staff commented in regards to the overall approach to data, *"We have changed the culture, period. It took us over ten years."* While there has been an increased focus on data, the system-level data staff depend upon the different departments to provide data and do not focus specifically on any outputs or outcomes associated with special programs.

The more intensive data collection efforts are at the program level and driven by funder requirements. In particular, public funders require the Adult Learning Centers to keep close track of who is receiving services and participants' progress in terms of skill attainment and employment outcomes.

There is also evidence that BPL staff use data as a tool for learning and refining their approach to achieve better outcomes and also to be able to document their successes for funders. One exemplary practice is the effort by the director of adult learning to set specific population-level targets in terms of the number of Brooklyn residents who have a high school degree and then document the number of individuals who have obtained a high school degree through the services of the Adult Learning Centers.

Specific components of the data collection processes at BPL include:

1. *General data collection for state and national reporting:* The two system-level data staff, using the platform Tableau, keep track of the basic data such as programs, circulation, and WiFi use that BPL tracks per public funder requirements. The department sees itself as building the data, creating visualizations of the data, and working with BPL staff to ensure they understand how to use the data.

2. *Information requests at the reference desk and Business & Career Center:* BPL has software that categorizes all email and chat reference requests, but not questions asked in-person or on the telephone. There is no deliberate process to capture individuals asking questions at the reference desk, though B&CC staff record the number and type of questions they answer on a daily basis. There is no attempt to capture the referrals BPL staff make to other service providers in the community.
3. *Outputs related to specialized and partner services:* BPL staff who provide direct services to patrons track the number of people they serve. As part of this effort, staff track when and for how long the service was provided. This tracking is primarily for internal use in terms of scheduling or planning.
4. *Usage of specialized online resources:* BPL can get data on how many patrons have accessed some of the available online learning tools. For example, for the current fiscal year to date, staff know that patrons accessed LinkedIn Learning 73,000 times. (This is not the number of patrons since one patron could have logged on multiple times.) Each of BPL's vendors has its own way of keeping track of who uses its services and how they use the service.
5. *Outcomes related to services:* BPL data staff do not track outcomes but will provide assistance if one of the departments is interested in fielding a survey or some other type of outcome tracking process. The Adult Learning Centers, however, do actively track outcomes as funders require tracking of certain data on participants, for example, the use of TABE tests (Tests of Adult Basic Education) to assess where participants are at the beginning of their training and then at the conclusion. The Adult Learning Centers submit these data to the New York State Education Department. Funders also require that the Adult Learning Centers, after the completion of some of their programs, determine whether or not the participant obtained employment by matching the participant's social security number with New York State Department of Labor wage data. As part of the State Literacy Zone initiative, case managers in the Adult Literacy Centers maintain an internal database with case notes and input data on class attendance and outcomes in the state's ASISTS database (the Literacy Assistance Center's web-based data management system for New York State adult literacy programs). Case managers consider the case notes private and do not share them with other staff. The other BPL programs in which there is a deliberate effort to track outcomes are PowerUP! and the BKLYN Fashion Academy. BPL staff administer regular surveys of the entrepreneurs who have participated in the program. In addition to surveys after class completion and an evaluation survey at the end of the program, BPL staff follow-up with a survey two years following the competition. The surveys have had a mixed response rate. (See appendix for survey tool.)
6. *Anecdotal evidence of outcomes:* Patrons often email and report to BPL staff about how library services have helped them obtain employment, advance their careers, or start a business. While individual librarians might keep an informal record of these stories, this is not consistent, though the librarians often keep emails that indicate a patron's satisfaction or outcomes and use these to share positive stories with funders. For the PowerUP! and BKLYN Fashion Academy, the staff have an alumni network, which affords them a better sense of some of the outcomes that participants have achieved over time.
7. *Tracking by partners:* Funders require many of BPL's partners to track outputs and outcomes. For example, the Small Business Administration provided funding to WBC, and WBC tracks participant attendance and demographic characteristics. In addition, it surveys individuals who have used its services over time. Another partner shared that since it has transitioned to more

virtual services during the pandemic, it has developed a more formal application process. Through this process, it can track referrals from its partners, such as BPL. From its perspective, it wants to prioritize providing assistance to the individuals whom partner organizations are referring.

Outcome measurement challenges

BPL staff reported a large number of challenges in being able to more systematically track the outcomes of the library's workforce and business development activities:

- ▶ *Patron privacy:* BPL's commitment to keeping patron data confidential was the primary challenge in any efforts to track the outputs and outcomes of its programs. As one staff person remarked, *"As a library, we respect people's autonomy and privacy, and we are about helping them learn something, and our job is done once we have conveyed that information."*
- ▶ *Trusted institution:* Libraries are trusted institutions that value learning without regard to the outputs and outcomes. They promote learning and exploration as a value in itself, and some BPL staff see measuring outcomes conflicting with this value.
- ▶ *Staffing capacity:* It takes significant time to input, analyze, and use data. Some of the workforce programs that have outside state or city funding have a part-time staff person whose job is to track individuals enrolled in the programs. Putting this task on the already burdened reference librarians who are working with patrons is a considerable challenge to implementing more data tracking across the system.
- ▶ *Intervention attribution:* Attributing outcomes to BPL's role in referrals is difficult to trace back to the library as an individual may be on a pathway with multiple interventions. BPL may have started them on that path but cannot take credit for the entire outcome.
- ▶ *Multiple data sources:* BPL uses multiple data platforms, some of which the funding agency requires. For example, while the main data platform is Tableau, the Adult Learning Centers use Salesforce, and their funder requires that they enter data in ASISTS. As reported by the library staff, *"This is one of the more painful parts of working in libraries because sometimes you make a referral, and unless everybody is using the same platform, you don't always hear back."* This makes it very difficult to track referrals across the system.
- ▶ *Data collection during registration may be a deterrent to participation:* Adding data to the registration process can provide more information on who is attending workshops and receiving assistance, but as one of the staff commented, *"Our concern, in that case, is about not wanting to make the registration process so intimidating that it discourages registration."*
- ▶ *Different methods for collecting metrics:* Each vendor tracks usage differently, complicating the tracking of use of online resources and making it difficult to look across all platforms to assess library patrons' usage of online training and workforce-related resources.

Interest and feasibility of implementing new outcome measurement systems

BPL staff had mixed responses concerning openness to collecting more information on patrons who were using workforce and business support services.

- One staff person thought it was acceptable to ask patrons if they would consider providing more information on the services and outcomes if BPL offered something in return, like a greater level of services and support.
- One staff person suggested that staff could make better use of focus groups to get some anecdotal information on outcomes and promote internal learning.
- There is interest among some staff to have the library use one data system across all departments. Currently, only two departments use Salesforce to track outputs and outcomes and share referral and case notes. Staff report most of the data to the central data department using Excel spreadsheets.

Observations

Some observations about the role of public libraries in workforce and business development emerged from the Brooklyn case:

- ✓ **Having a strong champion for outcome measurement in the library may help build a culture of measurement and tracking.**

It takes a long time and a deliberate approach to change library culture to understand and use data for learning. BPL had a senior leader who had attended an American Library Association training on outcome measurement and, as a result, was committed to efforts to further improve how BPL tracked its outputs and outcomes. In addition, there was a recognition in BPL that library staff needed to better understand why they were tracking data and develop new capacities for collecting data in their departments. Without internal leadership, these efforts might not be as far along.

- ✓ **Having a highly successful initiative that involves multiple partners is a potentially effective pathway to creating better awareness of the library's resources and its role in the community.**

In many ways, the success of PowerUP! and the BKLYN Fashion Academy has done more to influence how residents and small business support organizations view the library than any outreach could achieve. By asking other organizations in the community to partner with them on these efforts, the library staff have forged deeper relationships, and other organizations see BPL as playing a critical role in contributing to the economic wellbeing of Brooklyn residents. The partnerships contributed to the success of these initiatives; this success, in turn, deepened the understanding of the library.

- ✓ **Receiving funding from state and federal programs that mandate data tracking could be a driver to getting libraries to track outcomes more consistently.**

Libraries may be more likely to track outcomes when a funder is involved in a program and asking for more intensive tracking. The experience designing and developing tracking systems related to these initiatives can be a first step in thinking more broadly about how the library could measure the outcomes of other workforce or business development programs.

- ✓ **Developing innovative and effective workforce and small business activities at the public library may be more likely if businesses and philanthropy in the community are willing to support these efforts.**

All BPL's workforce and business development activities receive considerable funding from sources beyond the general support of city government. At BPL, state funding for workforce and business

development activities has been a significant source of resources. In addition, businesses in the borough, such as banks, as well as local philanthropy, have been essential in supporting specific programs, such as PowerUP! and the BKLYN Fashion Academy. Without these outside funding sources, it is less likely that BPL would be able to implement the full range of services focused on job seekers, those looking for career advancement, and aspiring entrepreneurs.