

EMBEDDED BUSINESS LIBRARIANSHIP FOR THE PUBLIC LIBRARIAN

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Introduction

LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS OFTEN FALL INTO POSITIONS, roles, or library practices that we did not foresee. After all, the nature of public libraries is to adapt our library collections, functions, and priorities to the needs of our community. That being said, we all need support and guidance—that is where this book comes in. *Embedded Business Librarianship for the Public Librarian* was written to introduce those who are completely new to this type of librarianship to the mission, purpose, and practice of embedded business librarianship in public libraries.

The first chapter introduces you to “Embedded Business Librarianship,” as well as understanding the distinction between outreach and embedded librarianship. Embedded business librarianship means that a librarian leaves the physical library space and becomes integrated within the business community and its dialogue. An embedded business librarian not only cultivates awareness of the

library's resources and expertise, but also is a valued contributor to the business community's conversation.

Before becoming embedded in the business community, it is imperative to understand the scope of the business landscape. The second chapter will describe the recommended research to conduct, including major industries, business size and expenditures, and emerging trends to understand the breadth of the business community. This will allow you to develop an idea of the needs, goals, and opportunities in your public library's business community.

After doing background research about the business community, it can often be confusing and intimidating for librarians to make initial steps to reach out to these organizations, businesses, and professionals. A five-step process will be outlined in the third chapter. This will provide you with the action plan that you need to become embedded in the business community.

Small business owners, professionals, and job seekers are the main groups of the library's business community. It is important for the embedded business librarian to understand the goals of each unique group, as well as to learn the best way to approach and engage them. Finally, the fourth chapter will offer recommendations for forming sustainable partnerships with each group.

In addition to networking in the community, the embedded business librarian will design and deliver engaging, educational, and informative opportunities that will bring the business community inside the library. Additionally, creating a coworking environment is vital for business community collaboration. Suggestions for how to proceed will be described in the fifth chapter.

The embedded business librarian role often requires that the librarian become a liaison between the public library and business and career organizations in the community. The purpose of the liaison role is to ensure proper communication between the library and its patrons and the business community. An outline of potential organizations to partner with, as well as an overview of incorporating the liaison part of the embedded business librarian role, will be outlined in the sixth chapter.

Sometimes librarians shy away from working with the business community because they may not have a business background or a support network with fellow librarians. A focus on recommended books, blogs, news sources, online training, and joining or forming a librarian support group will be detailed in the seventh chapter.

In the eighth and final chapter, we will connect all of the elements of becoming an embedded business librarian and building transformative connections in your library's business community. When we combine these elements together, you can see the true value and impact of this role.

1

Embedded Business Librarianship

IN THIS CHAPTER, WE WILL LEARN

- The essentials of embedded business librarianship, including its goal, why it's important to your library and community, and how it differs from providing outreach
- How embedded business librarianship impacts community-business relationships
- The best way to use this book for developing your embedded business librarianship role

Are you the business librarian at your public library or do you happen to be the one that everybody in your department refers to when they need help with business research? Are you a librarian who promotes the library within the community at events or other functions? Maybe you are a manager who realizes that your library needs to improve its relationships with the local community, specifically the business community. Perhaps you fill none of these roles, but you want to build strong connections with local business owners,

professionals, and job seekers. Whatever the case may be, welcome to *Embedded Business Librarianship for the Public Librarian*.

For some, this may seem scary and for others exciting. There may be some readers who are uncertain, while others cannot wait to get started. Whatever you are feeling at this point, we will walk through the entire process of becoming an embedded business librarian together. Throughout this book, we will discuss the ideology and process of becoming integrated in the local business community, as well as the importance of building relationships that will transform your library's relationship with the members of your local business community. By the time you have finished reading this book, you will have a fresh perspective on what it means to be truly embedded with the local business community, as well as the role that you and your public library will have for sustaining meaningful relationships with that community. So, let's get started.

EMBEDDED BUSINESS LIBRARIAN

First things first: what exactly is an embedded business librarian? Whether you use the title “Embedded Business Librarian” or some other job description is immaterial; the philosophy and ideology of this role are what matter the most. An embedded business librarian is a library professional who is rooted in his or her public library's business community. To be rooted in the public library's business community means that this role will become *part* of the business community instead of remaining separated from it. An embedded business librarian strives to be an equal partner in the business community and have an equal voice. Small business owners, professionals, and job seekers see the embedded business librarian as a peer, colleague, and fellow business community member instead of an outsider who solely represents the library.

The ultimate goal of the embedded business librarian is to become integrated in the business community as much as possible, and not be viewed strictly as “the library” or “the librarian.” This attitude and

relationship will guide how you function in this position and will affect the activities that you participate in, the committees that you join, the projects that you work on, and the way that you and others see librarians and the library. Ultimately, this will impact the role and services that the library provides to the business community.

OUTREACH VS. EMBEDDED LIBRARIANSHIP

Being an embedded business librarian is significantly different than outreach. Everybody defines outreach differently, but often outreach can be thought of as a library professional stepping away from the reference desk and into the community as needed. Sometimes this means setting up a booth at a local farmer's market, or doing a presentation at the high school before the summer reading club begins, or speaking to the town or village about a library initiative, like "foods for fines." In each of these instances, the purpose is typically to remind or inform people about their local library and to *promote* the library. This is perhaps the greatest difference between embedded librarianship and performing outreach.

To begin with, embedded business librarianship is not necessarily about promoting the library, although the library is certainly promoted within the process. Instead, embedded business librarianship means that you are part of the business community's conversation, not separated from it, so this could entail leaving the library and going into the business community several times per week. Embedded business librarianship means that instead of going to community functions to give sound bites about the library and why people should support the library, or presuming to know how the library can support them, you will be attending meetings, joining committees, and networking in ways that emphasize the library's desire to learn and understand the business community as a peer. This will certainly be a mental shift for many libraries and will probably involve a conversation with library management about the functions and expectations of this role.

Both outreach and embedded librarianship are laudable efforts for public libraries. Indeed, any time the public library makes efforts outside its own walls is a success. Depending on the staff size of your library, outreach may seem more accessible than an embedded business librarian role. However, you can certainly implement embedded philosophy into an outreach model. The core concept is to make a concerted effort to be genuinely integrated in the business community.

THE CASE FOR EMBEDDED BUSINESS LIBRARIANSHIP

For those of you who are uncertain, you may be wondering why we even *need* public librarians to be embedded in the business community. After all, shouldn't the business owners, professionals, and job seekers be coming into the library—not the reverse? You may be wondering, “Do we have enough staff to properly cover the desk in addition to sending them out into the community?” Make no mistake: embedded business librarianship is an important role for the public library.

According to the Small Business Association's Office of Advocacy, there are 27.9 million small business owners that accounted for 64 percent of “the net new jobs created between 1993 and 2011.”¹ Furthermore, there are nearly 18 million independent workers, or “solopreneurs,” and this growing number shows no sign of slowing.² Additionally, the Great Recession proved to library critics that libraries are needed more than ever—just ask the 36 percent of patrons who used the library in 2012 for job search assistance.³ Although this number has gone down to 23 percent (which is a good thing), there is still strong support for the public library to provide business resources and workshops. In fact, 52 percent “of all Americans 16 and older say libraries should ‘definitely’ create programs for local businesses and entrepreneurs.”⁴ Clearly there is data that expresses the need of the national business community for library services.

So, what does this mean? Since some job seekers already come to the library, does that mean that we do not need to reach out to them?

Since there is a clear interest in business workshops at the library, should we just send out a few friendly e-mails to local business owners and hope that they'll stop by? Should our library create some programs, promote them on social media and in the library newsletter, and feel that we did enough? Hardly.

In fact, what the data given above means is that it is the perfect climate to go outside the library and into the community and meet the business owners, professionals, and job seekers where they are and build relationships with them. It is important not to seize this moment as just an opportunity to boost program attendance and door count numbers, but instead to put energy into forming and sustaining meaningful connections. The data above is just a small fraction of evidence that shows how receptive the business community can be to the library becoming a part of the lives of business owners, professionals, and job seekers.

Take a moment to consider how much of your library's community is impacted by job growth, small business success, and employment. When a small business owner is making progress with help from the library, when a professional receives the information that they need from the library for an important company presentation, and when a job seeker learns from the library how to tailor their job search, their own well-being, as well as the well-being of their friends, family, colleagues, neighbors, and surroundings are greatly impacted. Moreover, the feeling of genuine support and championship that the business community has because of the library's embedded involvement could just be the push they need to move forward with a new initiative or project. In essence, when the public library invests in building relationships with the business community, it is investing in the livelihood, well-being, and future of all of its citizens. As public library professionals, this should not be optional, but a core mission for us.

While statistics may point to the value of libraries among small business owners, professionals, and job seekers, this certainly does not capture the entirety of the business community's relationship with the public library. There are still plenty of people who view their local public library as outdated and obsolete. On the other hand,

there is often great reverence for the library because people respect what the library represents: education, literacy, and opportunity. Yet many people do not really know *how* the library could fit into their lives, particularly their professional lives.

When members of the business community are informed of the resources, workshops, technology, or other ongoing engagement projects at the library, they are often amazed and intrigued, and are prompted to learn more. This appreciation becomes greater when librarians develop meaningful relationships and work with business-people on committees and socialize with them in networking groups. In essence, this appreciation can turn to mutual advocacy.

No longer does the library have to tout its own accomplishments and worthiness, because now other people can do that for the library. Anyone knows how much more valuable it is to have peers vouch for an organization than it is to have the organization vouch for itself. To use a business analogy, people often tell job seekers that when they are networking they should not necessarily be asking others for interviews and job leads, but rather should ask others how *they* can be of service *to them*. In turn, when someone does learn of a job opening or promotional opportunity, they are happy to return the favor to the job seeker who has already been of service to them. This holds true for how the library will integrate itself into the business community: we will demonstrate how the library is relevant to the business community by supporting its members, who in turn will support and understand the library on a deeper level.

THE MAIN GOAL OF EMBEDDED BUSINESS LIBRARIANSHIP

Every community and library has specific goals for how they want to improve connections with their business community. And through the embedded business model, relationships will indeed change and new opportunities will be created or discovered. That being said, the overall goal for this position is a consistent focus on learning and

understanding the business community on a meaningful level, as well as positioning the library as an organization that is part of the business community. As library professionals, we tend to assume that because *we* view the library as relevant and an integral part of the community, that others must also. But the truth is, many people view the library as irrelevant.

However, embedded business librarianship is not self-serving. It comes from a true and honest attempt to really understand, learn, and be an equal partner with the business community. This means stepping back and listening—not just telling the business community what you think they want or should hear. It also means demonstrating the library’s care for the business community, not just saying it. Embedded business librarianship recognizes that you do not know or have to know all the answers to the issues or struggles that the business community may face, because you are going to work with them toward a solution, not try to *be* the solution.

As you increase your interactions and engagement with the business community, you will undoubtedly discover that they very well may be the same people who serve on local charitable committees and school boards and local government. You may find that you already see them in the library, but as community members, not as business members. Essentially, when you develop relationships with the business community, you are developing relationships with the entire community.

GETTING STARTED

Before getting started, it is time to have a clear conversation with the management team at your library about the expectations for this role. If you come from a library that expects deliverables from every event, workshop, demonstration, or speaking engagement, this will be an especially important discussion. Support from colleagues and management is crucial, especially during the beginning when so much of this is experimental, and you need to see where your library fits into the equation.

When you are embedded in the business community, your outcomes will not always be consistent, especially in the beginning. You may attend functions where you feel that you did not make an impact or you did not make a connection, and your library needs to support your role with an understanding that it is not intended to boost programming statistics, reference questions, or door counts. While it is true that this will happen *in time*, many marks of success are going to be aspects that you cannot put onto paper but you will notice regardless. An example of an improvement that you cannot necessarily quantify is when you go to events or committees in the community and people start referring you to others and speaking positively about your role or the library's opportunities.

That being said, depending on your library's management and board philosophy, you may need to come up with ways to quantify this new role without impeding its progress. Some examples:

- How many events did you attend monthly?
- If you speak at an event, how many people have you reached?
- Report news, trends, and data that you are learning in this new role and how these relate to the larger community and the library.

If you need to speak to the board about this new role, an emphasis on what you are learning and the relationships that you are developing can complement any of the above statistics.

Another mistaken belief is that you may feel you need to be a business expert to get started in this role. That is not true. While it can certainly be helpful to have a business background, an interest, curiosity, and desire to learn more about business are the most important assets of the role. We will discuss how to boost your business knowledge through continuing education in a later chapter, but rest assured that the most important aspect is your knowledge of your library and your own eagerness and desire to make a difference. If a library professional possesses these qualities, there is no reason that he or she cannot be an embedded business librarian.

HOW RELATIONSHIPS WILL TRANSFORM

Depending on how often your library has already positioned itself in the community, you may be treading on brand-new territory. Regardless if you already have a solid business relationship foundation or your library is a complete novice, you will no doubt feel awkward and out of place in the beginning of this role. There may be times where you will feel tongue-tied, confused, or just simply like you do not belong. However, you will absolutely develop confidence and a sense of who you are and how the library fits into the conversation with business members.

In moments of doubt, it helps to reflect on the reason why you are the embedded business librarian. When you focus on building relationships from a genuine belief that you want what is best for your library's community and you want to add value to people's lives, it keeps you driven, focused, and motivated, particularly during the beginning period when you are still trying to adapt.

As you continue in the embedded business librarian role, you will go from an outsider who has to be clued into the goings-on in the community to one who is aware of the latest developments, trends, and events. Instead of hosting a table at the community event, you may be on the committee for organizing the event; instead of attending a business "Lunch and Learn," you may be invited to speak at the lunch. Instead of going to a local speaking engagement, you may have been one of the people to help select the speaker. Instead of introducing yourself at village merchant meetings, you will be able to update everyone on trends at the library and stay abreast of trends in the community. You will also learn how the library can host ongoing projects, events, and platforms that directly serve the business community.

The bottom line is that you can expect relationships with the business community to transform from transactional to interactional.

Q & A**How should I use this book as a guide?**

This book was written with the purpose of introducing people who are new to this type of librarianship to the core tenets and practices of being embedded in the business community. It will discuss how you can do preliminary research, make connections with the business community, and build upon those connections in ways that will make the library an integral organization to the business community in ways that are realistic and sustainable.

The book has detailed step-by-step instructions, as well as recommended practices for increasing engagement and developing courses and programs for your business community. The chapters are comprehensive and the more you try, the more confident and directed you will feel.

Keep in mind that this is a learning process and there will be many trial-and-error experiences that come along with this role. Once you have positioned yourself in the business community, you will be able to make the role into one that is unique and specific to your library and its community.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO GET STARTED!

You might feel pressured to do everything at once, so don't be afraid to start small. Recognize that this is a process and will take time. Even if you feel that you are not making progress, you have not failed—and will not fail—because you are serving your community to the best of your ability. So have patience with yourself and with the community. Encourage yourself to learn new technology, trends, relationship interactions, and everything else that comes with your role.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The embedded business librarian's main objective is to become an equal partner and colleague with members of the business community.

This means that you will not be seen as an outsider who occasionally comes into the business community to promote the library's services. Instead, you will become a consistent voice and peer. As we go through this book, we will discuss methods by which you can put this philosophy into practice. In the beginning, it may feel more like outreach, but that can be a natural progression to becoming embedded. We will also discuss how you can organize the library's services and programs to reflect the relationships that you build in the business community. When you have relationships with business owners, professionals, and job seekers based on a genuine desire to work together, your entire role and the practices of the library will be impacted.

LET'S SUM IT UP

- Embedded business librarianship is about becoming an equal voice and partner in your library's business community.
- Being embedded is different than outreach because you will be developing long-lasting relationships.
- When the library cares about the economic growth of its community, it shows that it cares about its citizens and their livelihoods.
- The ultimate goal of embedded business librarianship is a consistent focus on learning and understanding the business community on a meaningful level, as well as positioning the library as an organization that is part of the business community.
- Discuss with your management team new ways to track your success and the outcomes in this role.
- Relationships will transform from transactional to interactional.

- Use this book as a guide to getting started, but don't be afraid to make adjustments or try new initiatives according to your library and community needs.

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