

Libraries Build Business Initiative – Final M&E Report

January 2022

From 2020-2021, the American Library Association (ALA), supported by Google.org, conducted a pilot program to support libraries' efforts to foster greater small business success in their communities. The Libraries Build Business (LBB) initiative identified 13 participating libraries—each providing patrons with a range of small business resources, services, and programs. The ALA supported these efforts through funding, training, peer learning, and measurement support, with the intent of using the pilot to identify the most effective ways in which any library could support local businesses.

Cicero Group, an impact consulting firm, worked closely with ALA and the participating libraries to develop a shared monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework and system, build libraries' capacity to use data to prove and improve impact, and conduct ongoing data collection and analysis to understand the impact and effectiveness of libraries' efforts. This report summarizes the findings and results of this pilot from a measurement perspective.¹

Before reviewing the program and its results, it is important to note that the launch of the LBB pilot corresponded directly with the onset and ensuing effects of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. This led to severe delays in libraries' ability to design and then implement desired small business programming, not least because many of their facilities were closed for months at a time. It also decreased libraries' budgets and staffing capabilities, the overall volume of patron visits, and general demand for and interest in small business supports. While the pilot was still productive and provided needed services to thousands of individuals, and while all parties (Cicero included) regularly adjusted their approaches and efforts, the initiative was nonetheless severely challenged, resulting in limitations on the program's overall reach and impact as well as the effectiveness of the M&E system.

Despite the challenges presented by Covid-19, however, libraries in the LBB cohort achieved significant results. The initiatives that the libraries pursued were timely, relevant, and impactful for the communities that they served. Most notably:

- Libraries hosted 1,210 total events with 14,417 total attendees.
- 68% of survey respondents indicated that they were very likely to recommend their library's support for small business.
- Strong majorities say the library's support has increased their confidence (82%), motivation (88%), and feelings of success (52%) as a business owner.
- The initiative provides needed supports to those typically underserved by and underrepresented in small business activity—77% of survey respondents are women; and 64% are Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC).

PILOT OVERVIEW

The 2021 LBB cohort is comprised of 13 libraries from across the United States, ranging from urban to rural service areas (Figure 1), with dramatic size differences in terms of budgets (from less than \$1M to

¹ Additional information about ALA's and Cicero's approach to M&E for the LBB initiative can be found in the LBB Playbook.

over \$200M annually), number of full-time employees (3-800+), and population in each library system's service area (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Location of Participating Libraries

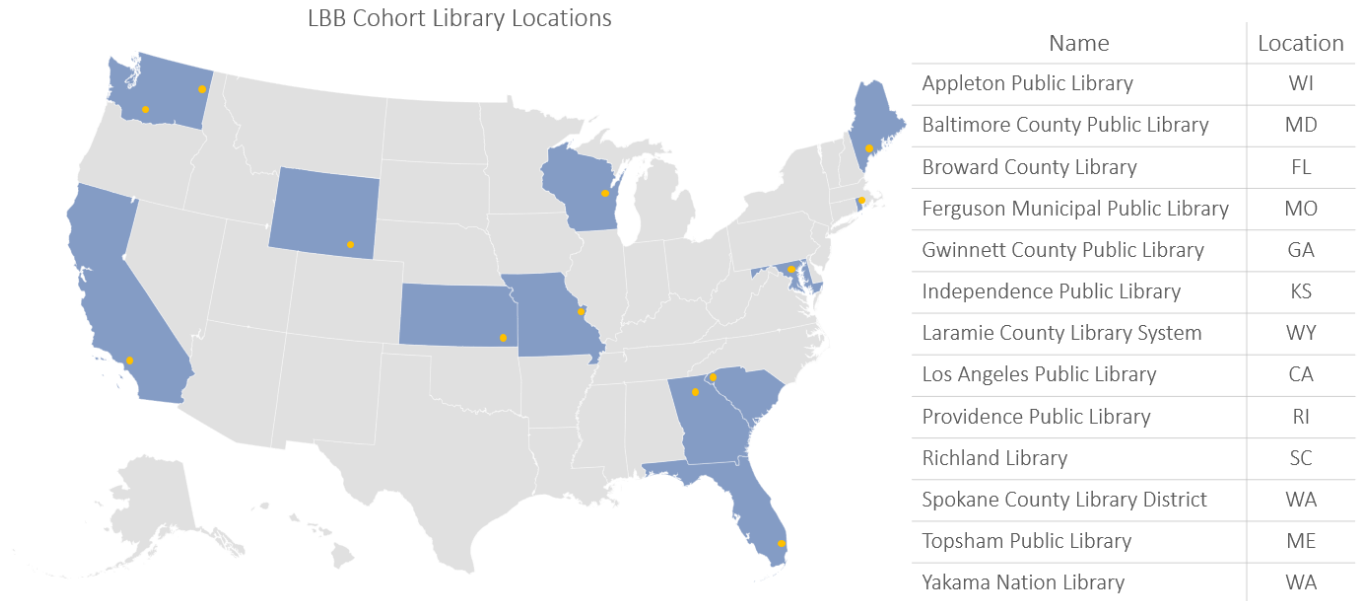
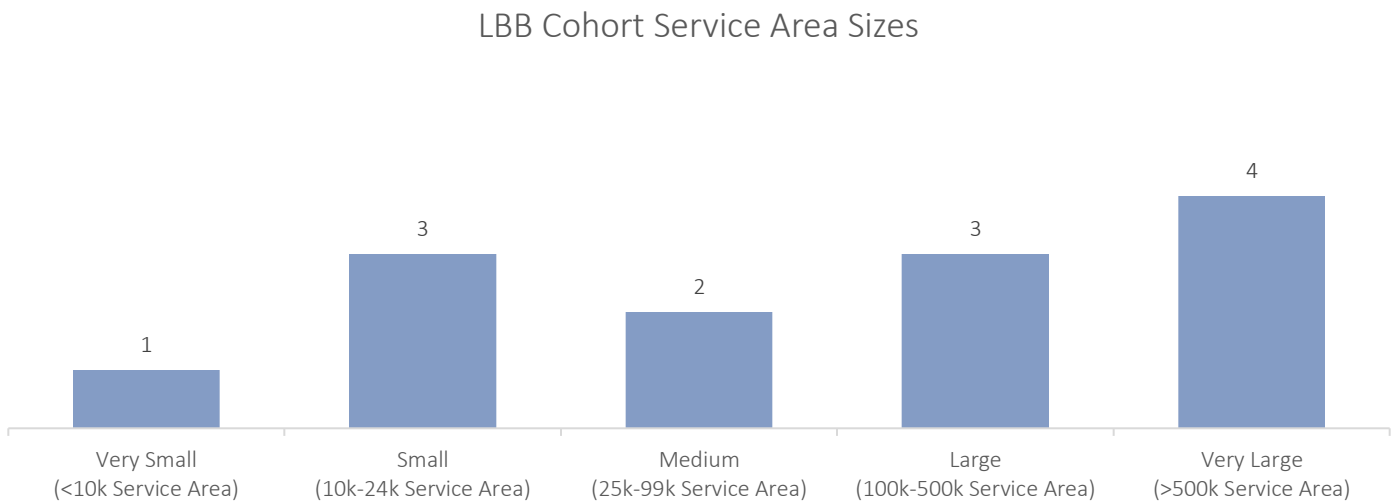


Figure 2: Library Size by Population Served



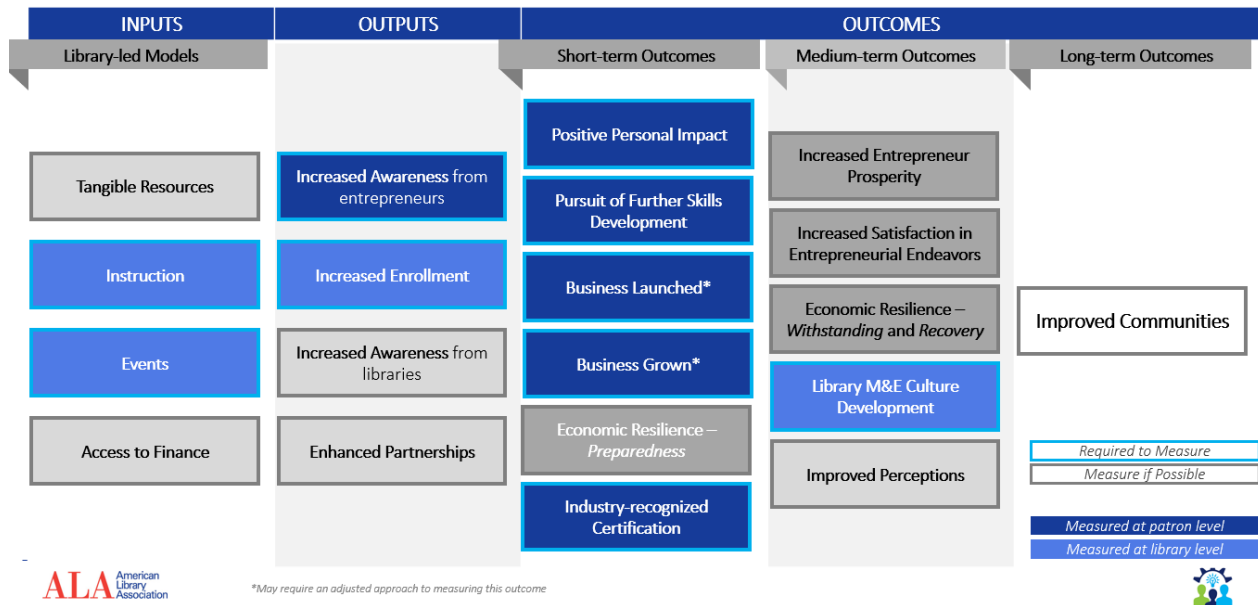
IMPACT FRAMEWORK AND M&E METHODOLOGY

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a fundamental tool in helping to inform the development and growth of a library’s small business initiatives and to increase impact for patrons. It begins with a structured framework that outlines a standardized set of outcomes and outputs as well as consistent methods for measuring the effect of programs and initiatives.

Central to this effort is a Theory of Change. The Theory of Change framework contains three different sections: inputs, outputs, and outcomes (short, medium, and long-term). Inputs refers to the tangible implemented initiatives by the libraries and their partners. Possible inputs include instructional workshops, networking events, and providing co-working spaces. Outputs are the immediate effect of the inputs and the results that they generate. For example, the output of an instructional workshop could be an increase in the awareness of library-led services for entrepreneurs. The outcomes exhibit what real impact the output has and why it matters. In this case a possible short-term outcome of increased awareness is library-led programing is pursuit of further skill development, eventually leading to a longer-term outcome of increased entrepreneur prosperity.

Understanding LBB’s theory of change (Figure 3) involves reading it from right to left, starting with the ultimate, long- and near-term outcomes that a program or initiative aims to achieve as well as the programmatic inputs and outputs designed to drive those results. In partnership with ALA, Cicero set out to measure a series of short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes that were generated from the LBB Initiative. These outcomes are directly related the LBB library cohort’s impact on the patrons and small businesses in their respective communities, as well as the development of related organizational capacity and cultural elements associated with the design, delivery, and implementation of effective small business programs.

Figure 3: LBB Theory of Change



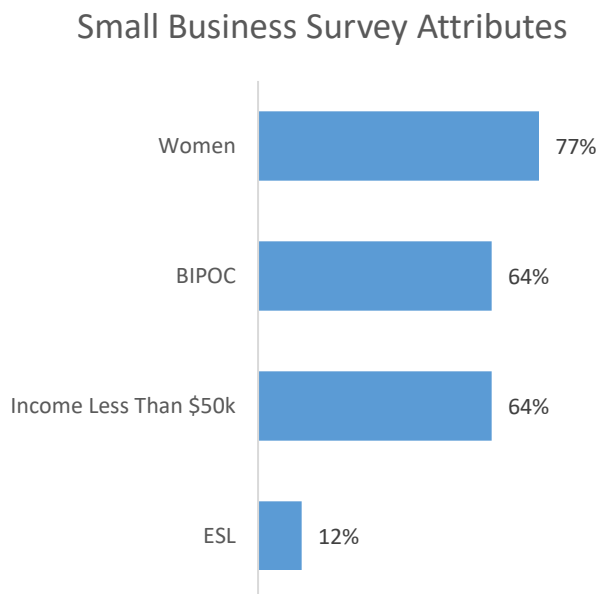
To establish both a baseline and ongoing monitoring against the individual and organizational outcomes described in the LBB Theory of Change, Cicero developed and deployed two data collection instruments. First, the LBB Reporting Form is a library staff survey administered each quarter (September 2020-December 2021) to assess changes for participating libraries regarding programs and services, impact, organizational capacity, and other topics.

Second, the Small Business Survey was administered to library patrons who accessed the libraries’ small business services and resources. The libraries in the LBB cohort circulated the Small Business Survey to all patrons enrolled in small business programming at the beginning and end of the program to track how patrons have improved over the course of their time with the program. The results from both surveys helped ALA and participating libraries understand the resources that libraries need to successfully conduct their programs and to gauge how the culture of M&E has grown within each library.

OVERVIEW OF SMALL BUSINESS OUTCOMES

This section details the outcomes for individual library patrons—small business owners—measured in the Small Business Survey. Overall, we received 367 responses to the Small Business Survey from October 2020 to December 2021. The vast majority of these responses came from three participating libraries—Baltimore County Public Library (38%), Richland Library (22%), and Broward County Library (20%). Nearly all respondents said they received instructional resources (education programs, learning sessions, classes, workshops, etc.) from their library; more than a quarter received help accessing additional business funding.

Figure 4: LBB Participant Attributes



The LBB program’s engagement with patrons regarding small business support clearly demonstrates that the initiative (and likely libraries generally) provides needed services to typically underserved individuals. For example, 77% of survey respondents are women, and 64% are Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color (BIPOC). In addition, 64% of respondents stated that their annual household income is less than \$75,000.

Across this group, utilization of and engagement with the libraries’ small business services varied—38% use the resources often or very often, 37% only access the resources ‘sometimes,’ with a quarter indicating they rarely or never use such resources. Furthermore, while 36% said they attended related events often or very often, 28% said they rarely or never attended such events.

These respondents ultimately provided positive feedback for the support they received from their libraries. In fact, 68% of all respondents are ‘promoters’—strongly likely to recommend their library’s support for small business.

With nearly all patrons (87%) completing the survey either during or after the time they received support from their library, strong majorities felt confident, motivated, and successful as business owners. Impressively, well over half agreed or strongly agreed that the library’s services *increased* the degree to which they felt confident, motivated, and successful. More specifically, as a result of their respective library’s small business support services and programs, 82% of participants indicated that their confidence as business owners increased, 88% of participants indicated they feel more motivated to pursue their business ideas, and 59% feel successful as business owners.

Figure 5: Small Business Supports

Types of Small Business Support Received

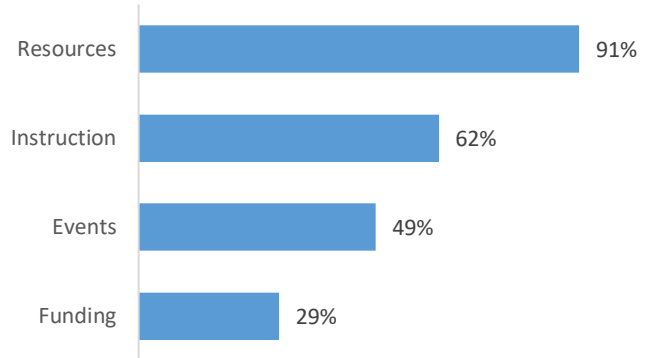
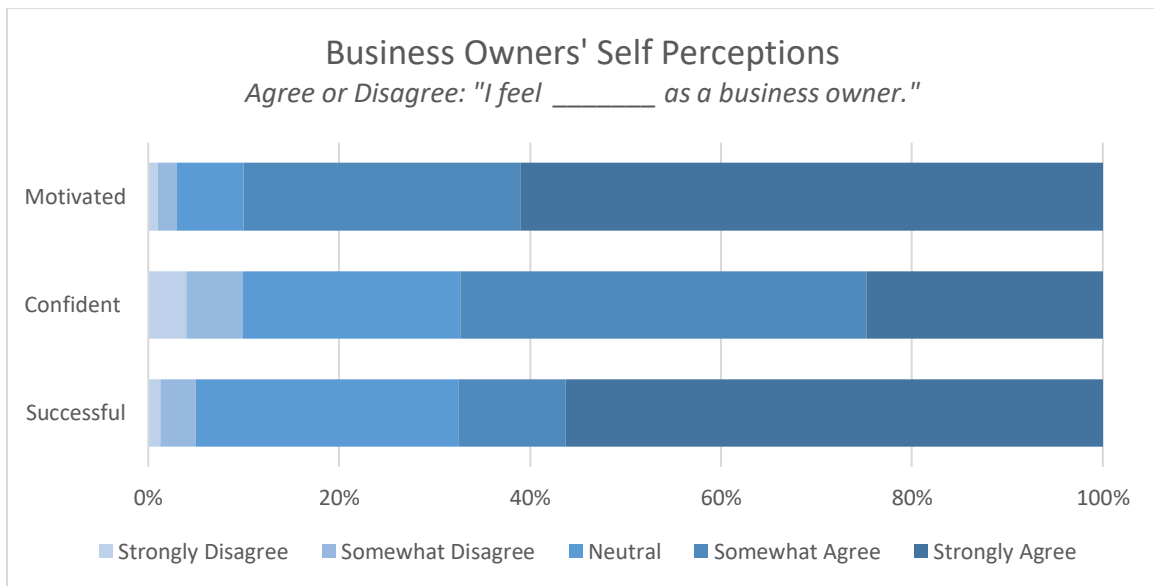
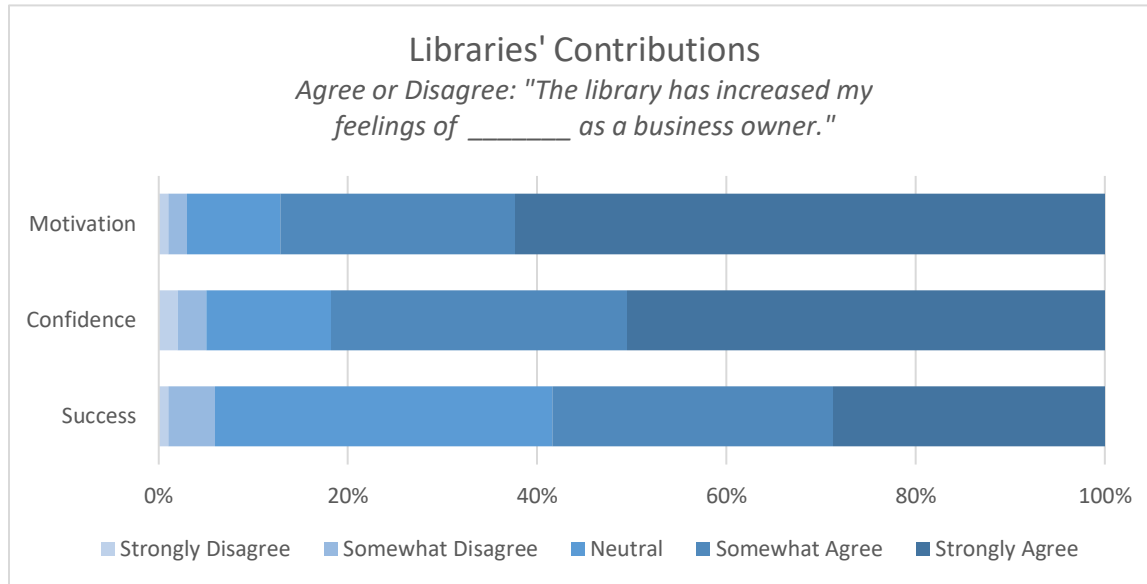


Figure 6: Respondents’ Perceptions as Business Owners



Despite the wide range of support that small businesses received, however, a majority still indicated that they would struggle to properly support their employees during periods with major disruptions. More specifically, 8% of respondents indicated that they agree their business provides enough support to employees so that they do not have to worry about being able to meet their personal expenses, and 11% of respondents indicated that their business would be able to handle a major interruption to its sales.

Figure 7: Libraries' Impact on Business Owners' Self-Perceptions



Ultimately, these survey results illuminate the ways in which libraries were able to generate these outcomes (i.e., the benefits/outcomes they were driving) through receiving direct supports from libraries (resources, instruction, events, and funding), driving revenue growth within their businesses, and engaging with their library's small business programs.

LBB LIBRARY COHORT OUTCOMES

This section will provide a detailed overview of the results from the LBB Reporting Form survey, which was administered every quarter from September 2020 to December 2021. These results will cover the library breakdowns, operating statuses, resources that they provided, types of events that they hosted and total number of attendees, the growth of M&E culture within their libraries, and the small business supports that they offered.

Library Breakdown

As noted previously, there was substantial variation in the number and activity of employees and volunteers in Q4 2021 and previous quarters. Most notably, Laramie County Library System, despite being categorized as a medium-sized library, had over 100 volunteers and almost 1,800 volunteer hours. The large and very large libraries in the cohort also reported wide ranges of employees and volunteers, indicating that library service area size did not necessarily correlate with size of staff.

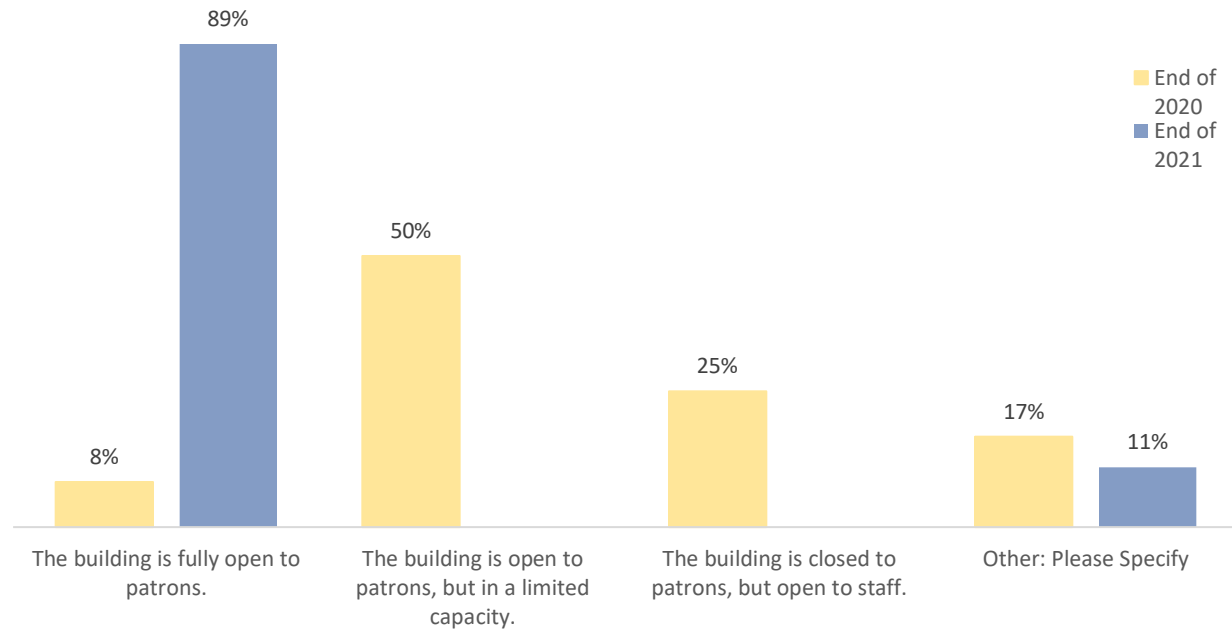
Service Area Size	Average Budget	Full-Time Employees	Part-Time Employees	Volunteers	Volunteer Hours
Very Small	\$905,000	6	7	33	175
Small	\$627,000	5-6	1-6	2-12	62-260
Medium	\$6,168,000	38-43	33-70	70-144	1,060-1,783
Large	\$17,212,000	3-287	2-87	0-76	0-1,047
Very Large	\$99,272,000	62-832	70-352	0-550	0-9,206

Operating Status

At the end of 2020, only one library in the cohort reported being fully open to patrons. Fortunately, the situation has changed dramatically – as of December 2021, 89% of libraries are now fully open, with one more making its resources available through appointments only.

Figure 8: Library Operating Status

Library Operating Status in 2021

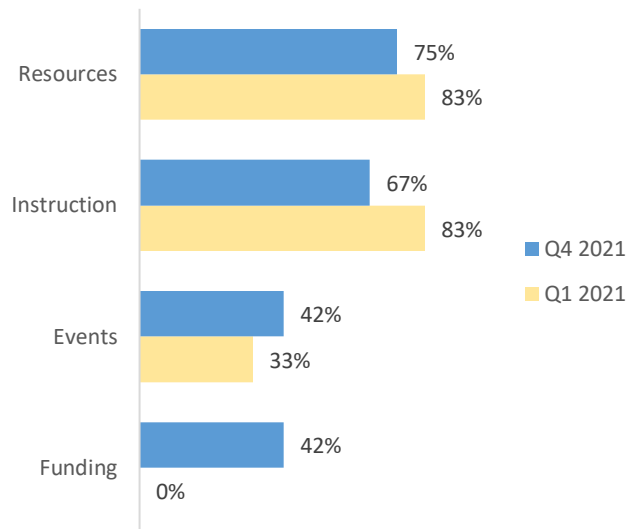


Types of Small Business Support Offered

Through their small business programming, libraries offered a wide range of programs and support from Q1 of 2021 to Q4 of 2021². As of December of 2021, 67% of libraries offered instruction regarding small business management. In addition, a strong majority of libraries reported providing small business resources (e.g., books, manuals, databases and other technology) as well as hosting events (e.g., networking, showcases, business plan competitions, etc.).

Forty-two percent of libraries offered support for funding, representing a significant improvement over the beginning of 2021. This may indicate that libraries have re-allocated more funds towards small businesses, representing some economic recovery in the wake of COVID-19. Libraries who do not currently offer funding could consider, for example, focusing some of their efforts on connecting entrepreneurs to grant resources, SBA resources, etc. to help them gain better access to capital.

Figure 9: Small Business Supports Offered



Resources

The pandemic had greatly affected not only the libraries’ small business programs, but also the type of resources they were able to offer through their buildings’ existing services. Since 2021, with nearly all libraries fully open to patrons, libraries have continued to offer databases for small business use, public computers, printers, small business print resources, and more.

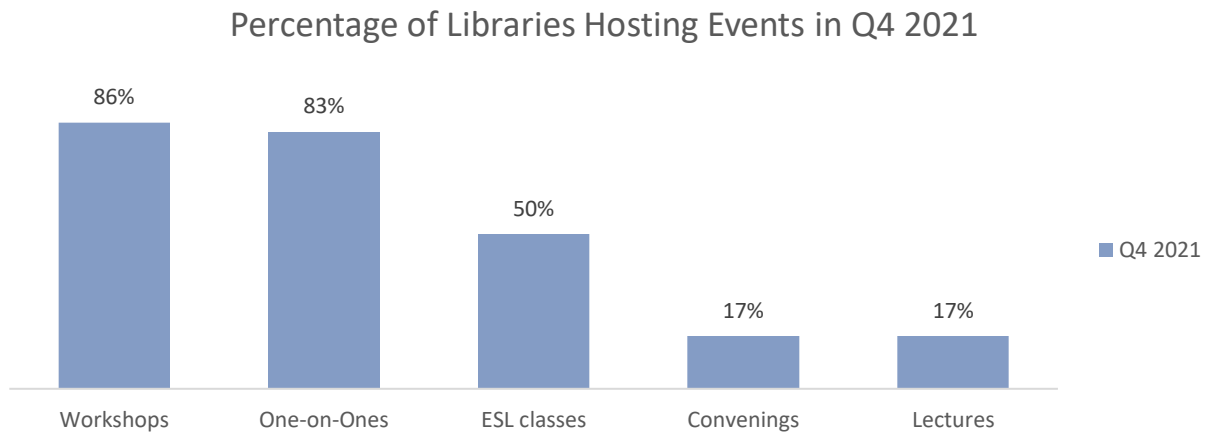
Although libraries’ resources remained largely the same in Q4 of 2021, some respondents did indicate that they restarted certain services, upgraded their technology and databases, and attempted to reach patrons with internet to offer services. More specifically, one library indicated that they “upgraded their Owl meeting camera to the Pro Version and added books to the Business Center”. Another library also noted that they were “waiting on an electrician to finally install outlets for devices such as their 3D printer, laser engraver, and large printer”.

Events

In Q4 2021, 86% of library respondents in the cohort hosted events to support and promote small business success. These events included a range of activities, the most common of which were workshops and one-on-ones. In contrast, fewer libraries in the cohort offered ESL classes, lectures, and other convenings in 2021.

² Small Business Supports were not measured in Q4 of 2020.

Figure 10: Small Business Events



From Q4 2020 to Q4 2021, libraries collectively hosted 1,210 small business support events, with a total attendance of 14,417 patrons. Most specifically, libraries hosted 169 workshops, 259 one-on-ones, 709 ESL classes, 54 convenings, and 19 lectures with the highest attendance numbers from workshops and ESL classes. It’s incredible to see that LBB cohort members were able to reach almost 15,000 patrons with their events alone!

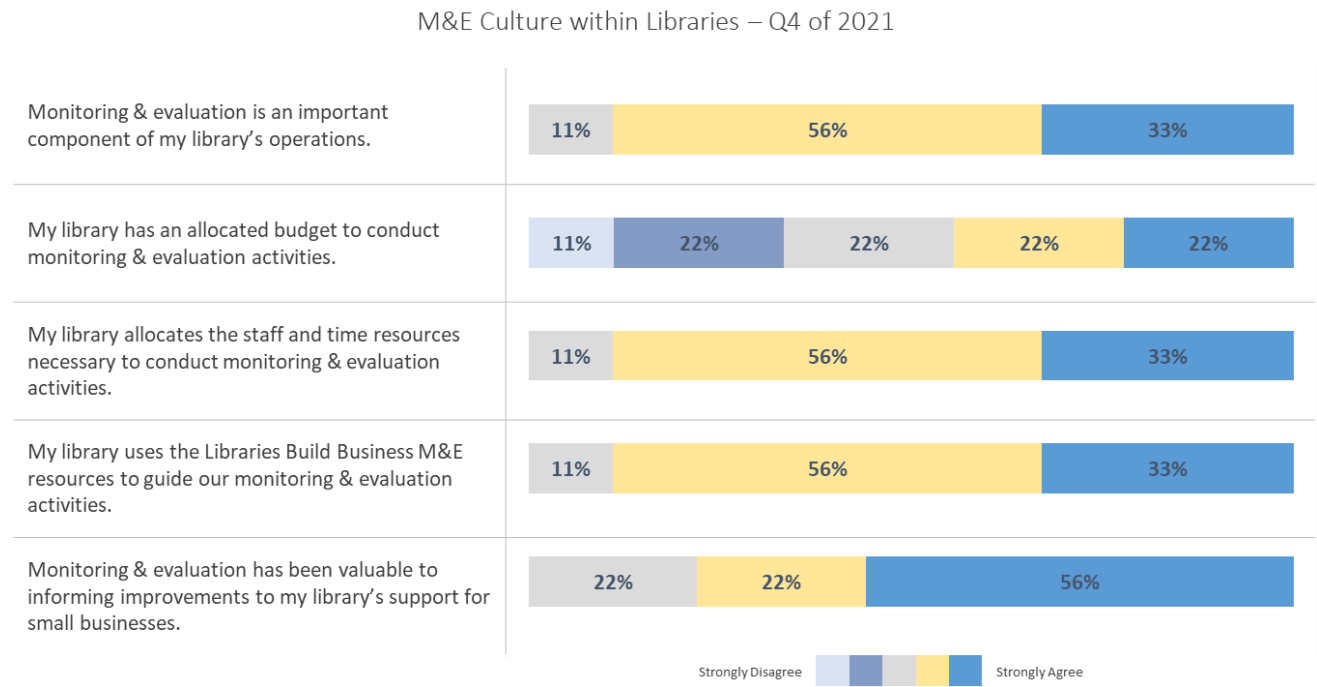
Event Type	Total Number of Events (Q4 2020-Q4 2021)	Total Number of Attendees (Q4 2020-Q4 2021)
Workshops	169	4,484
One-on-Ones	259	273
ESL Classes	709	8,623
Convenings	54	732
Lectures	19	305
All Events	1,210	14,417

M&E CULTURE WITHIN LIBRARIES

In response to questions related to M&E, libraries reaffirmed the importance of integrating M&E into their operations and activities. As of Q4 of 2021, almost all (89%) libraries agreed M&E was an important component of their operations, but only 44% of libraries indicated that they had the budget necessary to conduct M&E. Furthermore, 89% agreed that their libraries allocated the appropriate staff and time resources for M&E. Lastly, 89% of respondents also agreed that M&E has been valuable for informing improvements to their library’s support for small businesses, and 78% of libraries indicated that they use LBB M&E resources to guide their M&E activities. While these survey results suggest that the culture for M&E within libraries remains strong, they also reveal that the utilization of the LBB M&E resources could be improved, especially in the wake of the winter COVID-surge. As libraries continue to implement their

small business programming, and as the M&E activities continue to become refined and more streamlined, utilization of the LBB M&E resources is expected to grow in 2022.

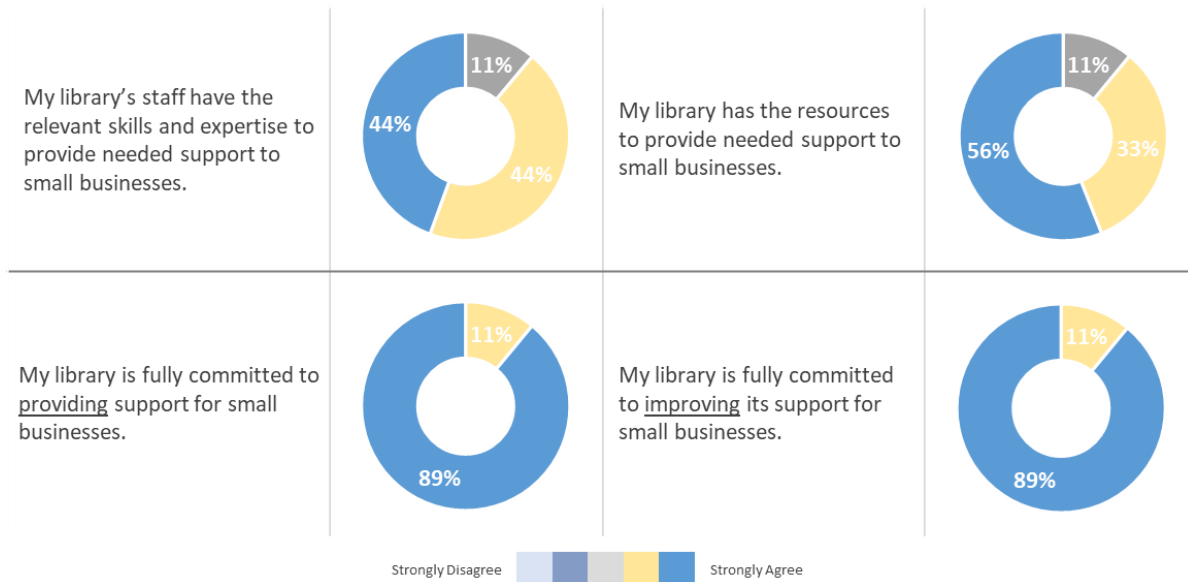
Figure 11: Role and Importance of M&E for LBB Libraries



SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Despite all the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as of Q4 2021, all libraries have indicated that their staff have the relevant skills and expertise to provide support, their libraries have all the necessary resources to support small businesses, and they are fully committed to providing support and improving its support for small businesses. This is consistent with what libraries answered in the previous quarters.

Figure 12: Libraries' Capacity to Support Small Businesses



CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, the LBB initiative met the goals set forth by ALA and Google.org. Through the joint efforts of Cicero and ALA, libraries have seen an increased M&E capacity and learned to embed a culture of M&E within their staff and communities. By hosting a wide range of programming, libraries in the LBB cohort were still able to reach almost 15,000 patrons in their communities. Ultimately, the impact of these M&E initiatives has been documented in the ALA Playbook, Project Outcome, LBB website, and beyond. Our hope is that these resources will continue to live on and be utilized by many libraries and benefit many small businesses across the country.