



NATIONAL LEADERSHIP GRANTS FOR LIBRARIES

Sample Application LG-260267-OLS-26
Project Category: Planning

Montgomery County-Norristown Public Library

Amount awarded by IMLS:	\$192,629
Amount of cost share:	\$0

The Montgomery County-Norristown Public Library in Pennsylvania will plan for a partnership with MontcoWorks and regional business, nonprofit, and adult education organizations, to design a hub that brings together workforce services, small business and nonprofit support, and adult learning opportunities in one accessible location. The project will analyze community needs, engage employers and residents, and codesign a coordinated model with partners. Activities include an environmental scan, focus groups, space planning, and pilot testing. Expected outcomes of the project include blueprints, curriculum, and a public toolkit to guide future implementation, all of which will improve individual economic mobility and the broader local economy. Beneficiaries include job seekers, entrepreneurs, nonprofit leaders, adult learners, and organizations seeking streamlined pathways to career and business resources.

Attached are the following components excerpted from the original application.

- Narrative
- Schedule of completion

When preparing an application for the next deadline, be sure to follow the instructions in the most recent Notice of Funding Opportunity for the grant program to which you are applying.

Narrative

Introduction

The Montgomery County-Norristown Public Library (MCNPL) seeks **\$192,629 in IMLS National Leadership Grant – Planning Project funds**, to develop a framework for BRIDGES @ The Library: Business Resources for Innovation, Development, Growth, Enterprise, and Skills. This economic development planning initiative addresses a clear regional challenge: Montgomery County residents seeking workforce services, small-business or nonprofit development assistance, and adult-education opportunities currently navigate a fragmented and decentralized system. MCNPL, together with **MontcoWorks/PA CareerLink®**, the **U.S. Small Business Administration**, **Widener University SBDC**, **Women’s Business Enterprise Center**, **Norristown and Montgomery County Chambers of Commerce**, **Keystone Opportunity Center**, **Tri-County YWCA**, **ACLAMO**, **Montgomery Bar Association**, **1 Million Cups**, and the **Interagency Council of Norristown**, among others, will conduct a comprehensive planning effort to analyze needs and feasibility; solidify partnerships; and co-design a coordinated service model. The project will produce a fully developed, evaluation-informed blueprint for an integrated Business, Nonprofit, Adult Education, and Entrepreneurship hub to be implemented after the planning period. Intended results include: an environmental scan, needs-assessment report, architectural blueprint, operations framework, curriculum outlines, MOUs with partners, a pilot test of key service components, and a publicly accessible toolkit. This planning project is grounded in the established **Libraries Build Business (LBB) Playbook**, which provides the foundational model for MCNPL to adapt to national transferability. The resulting products will prepare MCNPL for future implementation while offering a replicable approach other libraries and workforce systems can adopt.

Project Justification

Residents in Montgomery County seeking career advancement, business development resources, nonprofit guidance, or adult-learning opportunities frequently encounter a fragmented system of services. Public libraries already serve as widely trusted, low-barrier access points where community members begin job searches, explore business ideas, or seek foundational education; however, the scholarly literature demonstrates that these services are often dispersed and difficult for users to navigate efficiently (Hoppenfeld & Malafi, 2015; Suchanic, Pond, & Perry, 2023). Research in rural and regional settings further confirms that patrons rely on libraries for business planning assistance, technology training, and market research but lack a coordinated framework for moving between these supports in a structured way (Mehra, Bishop, & Partee II, 2017).

Partnerships with Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), a crucial pipeline for entrepreneurial advising, are often informal and inconsistent, with SBDC practitioners reporting barriers to market-data access and a tendency toward unguided “information dumps” rather than coached, decision-oriented research (Feldmann, 2015). At the same time, access to statewide business databases varies widely across states, and entrepreneurs frequently underuse these high-value tools without structured instruction and applied guidance (Tipton & Au, 2021).

The proposed BRIDGES @ The Library: Business Resources for Innovation, Development, Growth, Enterprise, and Skills center directly addresses these issues by operationalizing the *Libraries Build Business (LBB) Playbook*, which outlines tiered service models, partnership mechanics, and a monitoring-and-evaluation (M&E) framework that align entrepreneurship support with workforce and lifelong-learning pathways (American Library Association [ALA], 2022). Our local need is corroborated by frontline observations (patrons cycling between ESL/GED®, job search, startup, and nonprofit queries) and partner feedback (clients failing to reach CareerLink/SCORE appointments due to navigation, time, or transit barriers) and is consistent with the evidence base cited above (Hoppenfeld & Malafi, 2015; Mehra et al., 2017; ALA, 2022; Suchanic et al., 2023).

Building on Existing Models

The proposed BRIDGES @ The Library builds directly on the evidence base in the scholarly literature and operationalizes the practices recommended by the LBB Playbook. BRIDGES @ The Library introduces a fully integrated, co-located model in which library research services, CareerLink tools, SBDC/SCORE advising, nonprofit development guidance, and adult-education instruction are situated within a single, coordinated hub. This design complements findings by Hoppenfeld and Malafi (2015), who highlight the expanding role of libraries in entrepreneurial engagement but emphasize the continued need for structured programming and systematic service delivery.

By implementing a unified intake and referral workflow, the project directly addresses gaps identified in both urban and rural studies. For example, Suchanic et al. (2023) show that public libraries serving entrepreneurs act most effectively when they function as “on-ramps” and conveners within local entrepreneurship ecosystems- roles strengthened by clear service pathways and formalized partner participation. Similarly, Mehra et al. (2017) call for toolkits that help libraries communicate and coordinate small-business services more cohesively, an approach embedded in the BRIDGES @ The Library’s operational plan.

The project also directly responds to the partnership challenges documented by Feldmann (2015) through scheduled on-site SBDC/SCORE advising, joint curriculum design, and a transition from “information dump” interactions to applied market-research consultations led by trained business librarians. This approach is further strengthened by the database-access landscape described by Tipton and Au (2021), who emphasize the importance of helping entrepreneurs interpret subscription-based resources effectively.

The design also incorporates the LBB Playbook’s tiered service framework “respond,” “build,” and “sustain” ensuring patrons can progress from basic inquiries to advanced planning and long-term development (ALA, 2022). This alignment ensures that BRIDGES @ The Library does not merely replicate existing programs, but synthesizes established practices into a comprehensive and replicable model suitable for county-level implementation

Who will benefit and how

Job seekers and career changers. BRIDGES @ The Library will streamline the process of moving from basic computer skills to résumé development, interview preparation, training exploration, and job placement—all services documented as core functions of modern public libraries (Hoppenfeld & Malafi, 2015). Co-location reduces the friction that often results in incomplete follow-through on career-development steps.

Entrepreneurs and small businesses. Entrepreneurs will receive guided access to subscription-based databases, structured research consultations, and dedicated coaching. These are supports shown to strengthen business decision-making and operational planning (Tipton & Au, 2021; Suchanic et al., 2023).

Nonprofit leaders. The library’s research capacity and training infrastructure can be directed to nonprofit formation, governance, fundraising research, and evaluation—needs that closely mirror entrepreneurial supports and are readily accommodated within LBB-style service models (Hoppenfeld & Malafi, 2015; ALA, 2022).

Adult learners (ESL, ABE, GED®). Co-locating adult education with business and workforce resources helps learners apply new competencies immediately, for example, using digital-skills coursework to support job searches or applying math skills to basic budgeting, an approach consistent with findings from rural library research (Mehra et al., 2017).

Partners and the field. CareerLink, SBDC/SCORE, and adult-education providers benefit from increased reach, consistent referrals, and shared evaluation data. The library field gains a

documented, replicable model aligned with both the peer-reviewed literature and the strategic framework of the LBB Playbook (ALA, 2022; Suchanic et al., 2023).

In sum, BRIDGES @ The Library addresses a well-documented, locally felt problem: fragmented access to workforce, learning, and enterprise supports by grounding an integrated solution in the LBB Playbook and the peer-reviewed library entrepreneurship literature. The result is a professional, navigable model that advances economic mobility for residents while contributing a transferable blueprint to the national field (Hoppenfeld & Malafi, 2015; Mehra et al., 2017; Tipton & Au, 2021; Suchanic et al., 2023; ALA, 2022).

References

- American Library Association. (2022). *Libraries Build Business Playbook*.
<https://www.ala.org/advocacy/workforce/grant>
- Feldmann, L. M. (2015). Small business development centers and libraries: A survey. *Reference Services Review*, 43(3), 369–378.
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- Mehra, B., Bishop, B. W., & Partee II, R. P. (2017). How do public libraries assist small businesses in rural communities? An exploratory qualitative study in Tennessee. *Libri*, 67(4), 245–260.
- Suchanic, E., Pond, M., & Perry, M. (2023). The role of public libraries in urban entrepreneurship. *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*, 16(3), 267–276.
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Project Work Plan

Montgomery County–Norristown Public Library (MCNPL) proposes a 24-month planning and model-development project (August 2026–July 2028) to design, test, and prepare for implementation of a Business, Nonprofit, Adult Education, and Entrepreneurship Hub named BRIDGES @ The Library (Business Resources for Innovation, Development, Growth, Enterprise, and Skills).

Grounded in the principles of the ALA Libraries Build Business Playbook, the project emphasizes relationship-centered service, catalyzed entrepreneurship, mentorship networks, and outcomes-based evaluation. At the same time, the initiative strengthens formal alignment with Montgomery County’s workforce development infrastructure.

A central partner in this effort is PA CareerLink® Montgomery County, the county's designated American Job Center. Through MCNPL's collaboration with the County's local workforce development board MontcoWorks, PA CareerLink® Montgomery County will integrate Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)-funded career and training services into BRIDGES @ The Library's design and pilot phases.

The formal launch of BRIDGES @ The Library is planned for early 2028 following completion of planning, evaluation, and dissemination activities funded through this grant.

Through this partnership, PA CareerLink® Montgomery County will:

- Provide access to WIOA-funded career and training services for eligible Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth
- Share real-time labor market information to inform curriculum design and sector alignment
- Participate in co-design sessions to ensure workforce pathway integration
- Support employer engagement strategies connecting entrepreneurs and businesses to talent pipelines
- Collaborate on shared intake, referral, and tracking systems aligned with American Job Center standards.

This partnership ensures that BRIDGES @ The Library strengthens and extends the county's one-stop workforce delivery system rather than duplicating services. By embedding workforce access within a trusted public library setting, the project reduces barriers to entry and expands participation.

Phase 1: Project Initiation and Environmental Scan (Months 1–7)

MCNPL and MontcoWorks will collaborate to conduct a comprehensive environmental scan of the business and workforce system ecosystem in Montgomery County. Activities include:

- Review of national library-based entrepreneurship and workforce hub models
- Analysis of Playbook-aligned best practices in mentorship and inclusive outreach
- Mapping of regional workforce, small business, nonprofit, and adult education services
- Identification of duplication, service gaps, and access barriers.

PA CareerLink® Montgomery County will contribute labor market information and system mapping data to ensure alignment with high-demand industry sectors and WIOA priorities.

Our deliverables will include an environmental scan report, a workforce and service alignment map, and an evaluation framework to determine success of BRIDGES @ The Library programming.

Phase 2: Stakeholder Engagement and Needs Assessment (Months 6–9)

MCNPL and MontcoWorks will collaborate to conduct a robust needs assessment to ensure that BRIDGES reflects community priorities. Committed partners currently include Small Business Administration, SCORE, Widener University Small Business Development Center, Women’s Business Enterprise Center, Norristown Chamber of Commerce, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce, Keystone Opportunity Center, TriCounty YWCA, Montgomery Bar Association Central Montgomery County Business and Professional Women, ACLAMO, 1 Million Cups and the Interagency Council of Norristown.

Engagement strategies will include:

- Countywide digital and paper surveys targeting entrepreneurs, nonprofit leaders, adult learners, job seekers, employers, and workforce participants
- Six facilitated focus groups representing diverse constituencies, including small business owners, nonprofit executives, English language learners, rural residents, and adult education learners and providers
- Key informant interviews with economic development leaders, workforce administrators, and community college partners.

Quantitative survey data and qualitative findings will be analyzed by the evaluation consultant and project team to identify priority service gaps, barriers to access, and equity considerations. Findings will directly inform program design, staffing models, intake processes, and partnership agreements.

Our deliverables will include a needs assessment report and a prioritized service framework.

Phase 3: Hub Model Development and Co-Design (Months 11–19)

During Phase 3, MCNPL will engage **Corbett, Inc.** as the architectural and design consultant responsible for translating the project’s service model into a functional space plan for BRIDGES @ The Library. Corbett will participate in co-design sessions and review findings from the environmental scan, needs assessment, surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder engagement conducted in Phases 1 and 2. Using this input, Corbett will develop a series of design concepts that reflect community priorities, workflow requirements, and partner needs. Their work will include planning dedicated zones for business advising, nonprofit support, adult-education instruction, workforce services, meeting rooms, and collaborative learning areas. Through iterative design reviews with project partners, Corbett will refine these concepts into a comprehensive architectural blueprint that aligns physical space with BRIDGES’ intended service pathways. This blueprint will guide future capital planning, furniture/technology selection, and implementation activities as MCNPL prepares for full launch in 2028.

This phase will also include:

- Development of a coordinated service model integrating business advising, nonprofit technical assistance, adult education pathways, and workforce referrals

- Creation of curriculum outlines for entrepreneurship workshops, nonprofit governance training, and adult career advancement programming
- Design of intake, referral, and data-sharing protocols
- Drafting of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with core partners
- Development of a sustainability and funding framework.

The work during this phase will articulate governance structure, staffing roles, program tracks, technology infrastructure, accessibility standards, and evaluation metrics.

Our deliverables will include an architectural blueprint, a draft operations manual, curriculum guides, signed MOUs, and a sustainability framework.

Phase 4: Pilot Implementation and Refinement (Months 19–20)

MCNPL will implement limited pilot programming to test key elements of BRIDGES prior to full launch. Pilot components will include business advisory clinics, nonprofit capacity-building workshops, and adult education pathway sessions. A prototype intake and referral system will be tested in collaboration with workforce and economic development partners.

Formative evaluation tools such as pre/post surveys, attendance tracking, participant interviews, and staff debrief sessions will assess program effectiveness, accessibility, and operational feasibility. Findings will inform refinements to staffing plans, curriculum design, scheduling, and partnership coordination.

Our deliverables will include a pilot evaluation report, a revised operations manual, and a refined service model.

Phase 5: Dissemination and Launch Preparation (Months 20–24)

In the final project phase, MCNPL will finalize the framework for BRIDGES and prepare for mid-2028 implementation. Activities will include:

- Hosting a regional symposium for libraries, businesses, economic development organizations
- Producing a publicly accessible toolkit
- Submitting conference proposals and professional publications
- Finalizing implementation budgets and operational timelines.

The symposium will share findings, lessons learned, and practical tools for adaptation in diverse communities. All project materials will be made available online under open-access licensing.

Our deliverables will include a replication toolkit, symposium proceedings, a public implementation guide, and a final evaluation report.

Project Management and Staffing

The project will be co-led by Karen J. DeAngelo, Executive Director of MCNPL and Jennifer Butler, Executive Director of MontcoWorks, who will serve as Project Directors and provide strategic oversight, compliance monitoring, and partner coordination. A full-time Library Project Manager (to be hired) will oversee daily implementation, partnership coordination, reporting, and scheduling. Jennifer Butler and Jane Stein, Research and Performance Officer at MontcoWorks, will design and manage the evaluation process. The Library Project Coordinator and MontcoWorks leaders will facilitate stakeholder outreach and focus groups.

Core partners including workforce development agencies, small business technical assistance providers, nonprofit support organizations, and adult education institutions will participate in advisory and implementation roles. Quarterly advisory committee meetings will ensure ongoing stakeholder input and accountability.

Evaluation and Demonstration of Impact

Evaluation will include both formative and summative components. Formative evaluation will guide continuous improvement throughout planning and pilot phases. Summative evaluation will measure:

- Increased coordination among workforce, business, and education partners
- Increased participant knowledge, confidence, and access to services
- Demonstrated feasibility of a scalable, library-based Hub model
- Strengthened cross-sector collaboration

Data collection methods will include surveys, interviews, attendance tracking, partnership metrics, and comparative baseline analysis. The Final Evaluation Report will document outcomes, lessons learned, and recommendations for replication.

Project Results

Intended Results and Deliverables

The primary result of this planning project will be a fully developed, pilot-tested, and evaluation-informed BRIDGES model ready for launch in mid-2028. Deliverables include:

- Environmental Scan Report
- Needs Assessment Report
- Architectural Blueprint
- Operations Manual
- Curriculum Guides
- Toolkit
- Symposium Proceedings
- Final Evaluation Report

Collectively, these deliverables provide both an implementation-ready model for MCNPL and a transferable framework for other libraries.

Addressing the Identified Need

The project addresses fragmentation in workforce development and business support services, limited nonprofit technical assistance, and barriers to adult education access. By situating coordinated services within a trusted public library, BRIDGES @ The Library reduces access barriers, increases visibility of available resources, and fosters cross-sector collaboration. The planning process ensures that the model is grounded in local data and stakeholder input.

Adaptability, Generalizability, and Usability

The Toolkit will include customizable templates, partnership agreements, curriculum outlines, staffing models, evaluation instruments, and budgeting frameworks. Materials will be designed for adaptation by rural, suburban, and urban libraries. Documentation will clearly distinguish between essential components and flexible elements to support scalability.

All materials will be disseminated digitally in accessible formats and shared under open-access licensing to maximize national impact.

Project findings will be disseminated through:

- A regional symposium in the final quarter of the grant
- Presentations at state and national conferences
- Professional publications and webinars
- A publicly accessible online repository of tools and reports

Dissemination strategies are designed to reach public library administrators, workforce agencies, economic development organizations, and policymakers.

Sustainability

Sustainability strategies include formalized MOUs with workforce and economic development partners; integration of BRIDGES @ The Library staffing into MCNPL's operating budget; pursuit of diversified funding sources (county, state, philanthropy, and earned revenue); and institutional adoption of policies and procedures developed during the grant period.

Planning grant results will directly inform final space configuration, staffing models, budget projections, technology investments, and operational policies. By the conclusion of the grant period, MCNPL will have secured the commitments necessary to launch BRIDGES @ The Library and sustain its long-term impact.

Bridges @ The Library Project Timeline

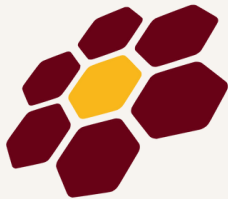
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8
Project Initiation and Management Plan	■	■	■					
Environmental Scan & Community Needs Assessment		■	■	■	■			
Stakeholder Engagement			■	■	■	■		
Target Audience Research				■	■	■		
Data Analysis & Evaluation Framework				■	■	■	■	
Model Development					■	■	■	■
Strategic Partnerships & MOUs						■	■	■
Dissemination (Symposium)							■	■
Implementation Readiness								■

Initiation

Planning

Execution

Closing



A strategic partnership between
Montgomery County-Norristown Public Library and MontcoWorks
to integrate workforce, nonprofit, adult education, and
entrepreneurship to better serve Montco residents.

