

# Small Business Accelerator Program Update

*To: BC Library Directors*

*From: Sandra Singh, Director, Irving K. Barber Learning Centre*

*Date: August 4, 2009*

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## BACKGROUND

The Irving K. Barber Learning Centre (IKBLC) has been working for some time on a project called the *Small Business Plan Accelerator*. The idea was launched by the Centre's former Acting Director – Jan Wallace (Head of the David Lam Management Library, UBC Sauder School of Business) – and it was continued when I joined IKBLC as its new Director in November 2008.

The initial idea of the program was/is to build on the expertise of the Sauder School Business Librarians in the area of secondary market research and business planning information support. A *Small Business Accelerator* is essentially a research guide to help people who need to do secondary market research as part of their business planning process: who competitors are, what the market is like, etc. Jan initially envisioned that these guides would be used by public or college librarians as they work with entrepreneurs in their communities.

Aleha McCauley was hired early last fall as the IKBLC Community Business Librarian and she started to work on gathering the information necessary to create and host these guides.

## CONSULTATION

This past spring, Aleha started contacting people in a few communities to discuss her work and to see if she could get some feedback on the project idea and also her work to date. We wanted to check in to see whether such a service was needed and if the guides would be used by people and to also ensure we weren't duplicating an existing service. As a result of these conversations, Aleha and I started some community visits to meet with small business support providers in person to discuss the project.

Since then, either myself and Aleha together or Aleha alone has visited four communities, meeting with various businesses support providers, such as public and college librarians, economic development officers, Community Futures analysts, and other small business support providers. In two communities, small business owners were also present. In addition, several phone conversations have taken place with community economic development officers, government agencies and public and academic librarians in other communities, and IKBLC hosted a breakfast at the recent Beyond Hope conference in order to meet with and discuss IKBLC programming. As well, Aleha offered a session on secondary market research at Beyond Hope and was able to connect with librarians there and we discussed the program with one of the IKBLC Advisory Committee members, Eve Hope of Hazelton District Public Library.

Through these discussions, we have heard that such an information service would be helpful and welcome. We also received some useful constructive/critical feedback:

- we must be thoughtful in its technological development (e.g., many people have dial-up);

- we must be aware that people and librarians in rural communities generally don't use the business-oriented article indexes;
- we must also consider Community Futures, local/regional economic development offices, and other business support agencies as direct audiences;
- we must write the guides so that they are approachable (i.e., plain language) and the research looks achievable;
- we must provide materials to help libraries market this service to their communities, local economic development offices, and service providers; and
- we must ensure we provide training for service providers in how to use the guides and, if possible, offer the training in an ongoing way (i.e., either in-person training offered periodically or effectively designed web-based training).

Out of these conversations, a few other information-oriented ideas emerged:

- when it comes to business planning, sample business plans would be helpful;
- a directory of community business information providers and support services would be useful;
- connect the service to AskAway and also provide a point of referral for AskAway librarians for when a business-related question becomes too complex to handle; and
- when Aleha is visiting communities doing training for how to use the guides for service providers, she should also be available to provide a public training session through/with the local public and/or college library, either in the library or at the Chamber of Commerce.

We also noted that with fairly tight collections budgets, small libraries are often challenged with keeping some collections up-to-date.

Earlier this year, we also met (in person and through conference call) with representatives from several university libraries and public libraries to discuss the Accelerator program and business support services to the community generally. At the time, there was some tentative interest in working together on some project or service and, as a result of this meeting, VPL librarians are now working with Aleha on core business resource lists for public libraries and further discussions with VPL are scheduled for August.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Electronic Resource Licensing**

Jan Wallace and Aleha both noted that one resource in particular is very useful when supporting people working on business plans: *The Gale Business Plans Handbook* (<http://tinyurl.com/mp2cea>). This resource provides successful sample business plans for very specific business in the manufacturing, retail, and service industries in North America. When asked about the usefulness of such a resource, more than several community representatives expressed strong interest.

While licensing electronic resources for the province is generally beyond the IKBLC's operating budget, the PLSB was able to negotiate an excellent one-time price for the resource in electronic form. As a result, part of the Small Business Accelerator Program, IKBLC, supported by PLSB, will be purchasing perpetual access to *The Gale Business Plans Handbook* (all previous issues and the upcoming issue) for

all BC public libraries that do not already have a subscription to the Gale virtual platform.<sup>1</sup> This deal includes remote access and unlimited simultaneous users. More information about this resource will follow in the near future.

Gale was willing to extend beneficial pricing to include the BC academic libraries that do not already have subscriptions to the Gale Virtual Platform: The additional amount for this piece was \$8,400 USD (this offer is only good until the end of August). IKBLC is currently seeking private donation to support the Small Business Accelerator Program. If we are able to gain this financial support, we will extend the subscription to include the academic libraries.

### **Core Business Collection**

While visiting public libraries in several communities, we also noted the marked difference between size, scope, and currency of business reference collections. Understanding that the usefulness of the research guides Aleha is creating would benefit from some standardization of collections, we checked in with the IKBLC Advisory Committee's small public library representative on the idea of a core business collection. In addition, attendees at the recent Beyond Hope breakfast were asked what they thought of the possibility of IKBLC creating a core business reference collection for distribution to rural public libraries – something similar to the core legal collection provided by the Courthouse's LawMatters program. Some specific feedback provided during these discussions were:

- a list of core business resources, scaled for different sizes of libraries, would be helpful (it was noted that many small libraries would like to update their collections and could do so from their collections budgets, but a list indicating which materials to buy would be helpful.)
- if such a list is developed, an annual weeding list would be really useful;

Overall, there was a positive response to this idea and so, before discussing further, we are determining whether a donation to IKBLC may be available to fund such an initiative. Further feedback – either positive or against -- from public libraries on this idea would be helpful and welcome.

### **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Work on the Small Business Accelerator Program continues and a site launch is planned for December 2009 or January 2010. Any comments on the content of this update or ideas for improvement is always welcome and can be directed to either Aleha McCauley at [aleha.mccauley@ubc.ca](mailto:aleha.mccauley@ubc.ca) or Sandra Singh at [sandra.singh@ubc.ca](mailto:sandra.singh@ubc.ca).

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<sup>1</sup> *Libraries with existing subscriptions are Coquitlam Public Library, Greater Victoria Public Library, New Westminster Public Library, Vancouver Public Library, North Vancouver District Public Library, and Vancouver Island Public Library.*