

# **Brooklyn Public Library: PowerUP! Business Plan Competition**

## **Why this case matters**

It's easy to assume that entrepreneurship support requires a university campus, a private incubator, or a paid accelerator.

Brooklyn Public Library's PowerUP! Business Plan Competition is a counterexample. It shows what happens when a library takes entrepreneurship seriously as a public service: structured learning, coaching, and a community milestone that makes progress visible.

## **What the library built**

PowerUP is a library-run business plan competition designed to help local entrepreneurs move from an idea to a clearer plan and a stronger pitch.

Based on the Urban Libraries Council's profile and BPL's program pages, PowerUP includes: - required learning components (classes on business fundamentals, marketing, financial statements, and presentation skills) - meetings with business counselors - prizes and public recognition as a motivational capstone

## **What outcomes were reported (and what they mean)**

The Urban Libraries Council's case profile reports several outcome signals that are useful for sales and stakeholder conversations: - As of the profile's reporting period, the program reported "25 businesses" opened through the competition. - The profile also reports that "over two-thirds of top prize winners remain in business." - It notes "over \$160,000" in prize money distributed and "1,594 applications" during the reported window.

These are not generic "feel good" outcomes. They suggest three important things: 1) Libraries can attract sustained participation when the program has a clear structure and a public milestone. 2) When the learning is scaffolded, participants can produce tangible outputs that are good enough to compete and launch. 3) A repeatable program becomes part of the community's entrepreneurship ecosystem, not a one-off event.

## **Why it worked (operationally)**

PowerUP bundles four things that are hard to get from a single workshop:

### **1) A clear pathway**

Participants are not left guessing what to do next. The program expects them to complete a set of learning steps before the public moment.

## **2) Accountability without intimidation**

A competition can be stressful, but the “classes + counseling” design gives people support before they present.

## **3) A community milestone**

The awards moment creates urgency. It helps people finish the work and makes the program visible to partners, funders, and other community members.

## **4) Repeatability**

Because PowerUP is recurring, it becomes easier to staff, improve, and report on year after year.

## **Replication notes (how another library could start)**

You do not need to replicate PowerUP’s scale to learn from it. The transferable pattern is: - a structured series (even 3–6 sessions), - lightweight coaching or office hours, - a capstone (pitch night, showcase, or demo day), - simple outcomes to report (attendance, completion, submitted pitches).

## **How Value Lab can support this kind of program**

PowerUP’s strength is that it creates a pathway and a public milestone. Value Lab supports the same pattern by helping libraries: - keep patrons progressing between sessions (not just attending once), - provide structured guidance that produces tangible outputs, - and build simple outcome visibility that’s easier to report to stakeholders.

## **Sources**

1. Urban Libraries Council case profile: <https://www.urbanlibraries.org/innovations/brooklyn-public-libraries-powerup-business-plan-competition>
2. Brooklyn Public Library program page: <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/business/powerup>
3. BPL PowerUP anniversary page: <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/powerup/20th-anniversary>