

# BRASS Public Libraries Briefcase

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## Creative Entrepreneurship in Youth Programming

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## Vernon Area Library Kid Market



Vernon Area Library

How many of us struggle to organize and plan financial literacy programs for school aged children at our libraries during Money Smart Week? It's a common struggle and the proverbial hot potato in public libraries across the country every spring. In late 2018, during the planning stages for the spring 2019 programming calendar, staff at the Vernon Area Library in Lincolnshire, Illinois put their heads together and came up with a plan to mix foundational business and entrepreneurial concepts with a community driven large scale event.

Kid Market is a low cost high impact program that, with a little extra staff time and project management, might just be *the* event that future business leaders look back on as the defining moment in their trajectory into business or entrepreneurship.

In December, months before the start of Money Smart Week and right before winter break at our local schools, we made a digital application available via Google Forms. We promoted the event and encouraged kids to apply via existing targeted newsletter email lists, digital backpack materials sent to our contacts at local schools, a newspaper article in the local paper. Our pitch went something like this:

*“Is your kid a maker? or a marketer? Sign up to be part of the first-ever Vernon Area Library Kid Market this spring. Participants will receive 6 weeks of business coaching and a Farmers Market-style public event at the library to sell their wares. Details and application: <http://vapld.info/kidmarket>”*

Through our existing relationships with schools, local media, and the inter-departmental library partnerships (Community Engagement & Programming, Youth Services, Integrated Communications), we saw a flurry of interest from kid entrepreneurs and their parents in our community. We welcomed 23 kids to this fledgling program in February.

The structure and project framework for Kid Market allows participants to work on their own timelines. Sometimes schedules make attending programs difficult, not with Kid Market. All lessons and communication is done virtually until the day of the Fair. Over six weeks, our 23 junior entrepreneurs proceeded through business e-school, with lessons on topics like production and inventory, pricing and profit, marketing and promotions.

Each week they would receive an email lesson built using the library’s Constant Contact subscription. We aimed to mix business concepts and life skills such as; time management, communication, budgeting, and managing real money. We made it a point to include links to library resources and trusted sources such as; digital and physical resources, and stories from other local kid entrepreneurs building their businesses and succeeding at it.

As the Business Librarian and their primary contact for the program, I was able to develop a working relationship with these budding entrepreneurs. I gave them personalized feedback on their weekly homework and made suggestions for the development of their idea. The philosophy being that, in addition to ushering them through the process, they would develop and understanding, love, and trust for libraries that they would employ for the rest of their lives.



Vernon Area Library

Prior to day of the final event we mapped out table assignments and designed and assembled Kid Marketers SWAG. Our button maker, branding, and a little hot glue helped us create a take home gift for the kids and identified them as a seller at the big event. We bought trays of cookies and even had library tote bags to hand out for Fair visitors to carry their new purchases.

Nearly 400 guests attended the market day, which featured a variety of products including slime, fidgets, paintings, and more. We staggered Kid Marketers arrival and set up times to manage stress the day of the event. Visitors at the Market Day found out about the event through our newsletter and through direct invitations and networking via Kid Marketers. By placing the onus on the sellers, the success of the Market was based on the work and energy they put into having their friends and family visit their shop on the day of the event.



Vernon Area Library

We sent out an evaluation survey for participants and their parents a week after the event. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Parents were so proud to see their children own a concept and work through it over the course of a series of weeks. Kid Marketers were glad to have been given the opportunity of a market day where there was an eager audience for them to talk with and sell to. Some constructive feedback included interest in the event being around the holiday season, mimicking a holiday craft fair. Others were interested in more on-site opportunities to get to know other shop owners and to develop their product and build together.

Should other libraries be interested in developing a similar program for their patrons, it is important to consider librarian time and capacity when it comes to 1-on-1 feedback. Because the program is primarily digital, a schedule and a rhythm to delivery was important. If participants expect new lessons on Monday, it is important that you stick with it. If feedback is something you choose to incorporate, be sure to set aside the time it will take to reply and discuss concepts with all Shop Owners.

Kid Market is an inclusive program intended to engage young library users in the concepts surrounding entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and the development of soft communication skills. By incorporating established modes of library event promotion, existing partnerships, and the strengths of staff from all over the library, Kid Market highlights the vitality in the twenty-first century library services.