Problems: Lower attendance over the past 5 years in Small Business Workshops at library offered by the Chamber, SCORE, and SBDC. Creating curriculums, Powerpoints is a time consuming task for business partners too. The amount of time it took to make room reservations, multimedia setups for the classroom, for one size fits all classes was work for a busy reference librarian. All that for mediocre return on “engagement” on those high investments. Engagement occurred during the Q&A period at the end. Newer platforms such as Lynda.com exist now that enable people to take whatever skill building classes they might want in the comfort of home. The turnkey classes that the partners wrote were filled with organizational histories which are not as engaging. Classes were far from the index tables / computers, so if you wanted to do reference with them you would be carrying the laptop or reference sets down. The classroom was in premium meetingroom space that competes with area nonprofits and government. Area business community partners compete against library for attendees if classes that they already offered at their organization, with fees, were putting partners at a disadvantage if they have a fee based model, asking them to do classes here for free.

Methods: 1) Intrigued by a thread on BUSLIB-L about trends in Higher Education for Entrepreneurship: someone was seeking a list of conferences in April 2017. I read all the conference proceedings for trends. One trend was a move away from one-size-fits-all classes and into more of a “speed coaching” format. It is no surprise, since Lynda.com and many other sites exist now to provide easy online learning.


3) Soon, I apprised the Chamber of Commerce and other local business assistance organizations about the idea. Instead of asking them to “curriculum” as in the past for butts-in-seats classes, ask their reps to do ad hoc speed consulting here in a monthly 2 hour “clinics” setup, and to also take librarygoers who see the flyer in house. No appointments are made by the library but if any of the organization reps want to channel their consulting into that space that is fine too. Used the term “speed coaching” to them.

4) Put together google docs, meetup group events, facebook events about it, keeping uniform style.

Results: First the bad news then the good news. 38% fewer people are attending. But the good news: We are taking in 10% more fun detailed small business REFERENCE questions since it started last September. 90% less work is involved in the meeting room setup. Proximity is 100% closer to computers and reference sets needed to for hands-on instruction. The flyer for this program is fun to take to SCORE or SBDC events. 20% easier to promote, because assistance seekers are more enthusiastic when they learn that it’s monthly, perennially. Yes a librarian is always here but inviting in at least one other partner to share space with entrepreneurs creates a sense of “urgency” or time limitation gets people to commit better than just an open ended. We added a format and structure later when ‘drop in’ was felt to be too unstructured.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP CLINIC
Jill Adams, Librarian