

OVERVIEW

NC IDEA has partnered with NC LIVE and BLINC to launch a groundbreaking, statewide fellowship program that values librarians and empowers them to support the entrepreneurs and small business owners in their communities.

TO APPLY

The simple application is made up of 4 brief essay questions and some information about your role and library. You may apply for 1 cohort only.

APPLY NOW

Program Structure

Professional Development Experience

Cohort-Based

16 librarians learn together and become a supportive professional community for each other

2.5 Days + 8 Weeks

An immersive, off-site, 2.5-day skills-building program followed by 8 weekly 1-hour virtual meetings

Hybrid - 30 hours

- Hours #1-22: In-Person
- Hours #23-30: Remote
- All-Fellows Gathering: 1x/year

Fully Funded (& Nice!)

NC IDEA covers 100% of program costs, including food, hotel, & transportation to make the fellowship accessible to all

2025-2026 Cohorts

Western 2025 Cohort: Late Sept.

Central 2025 Cohort: Early Dec.

Eastern 2026 Cohort: Early March

Eastern 2026 Cohort: March 4-6, 2026



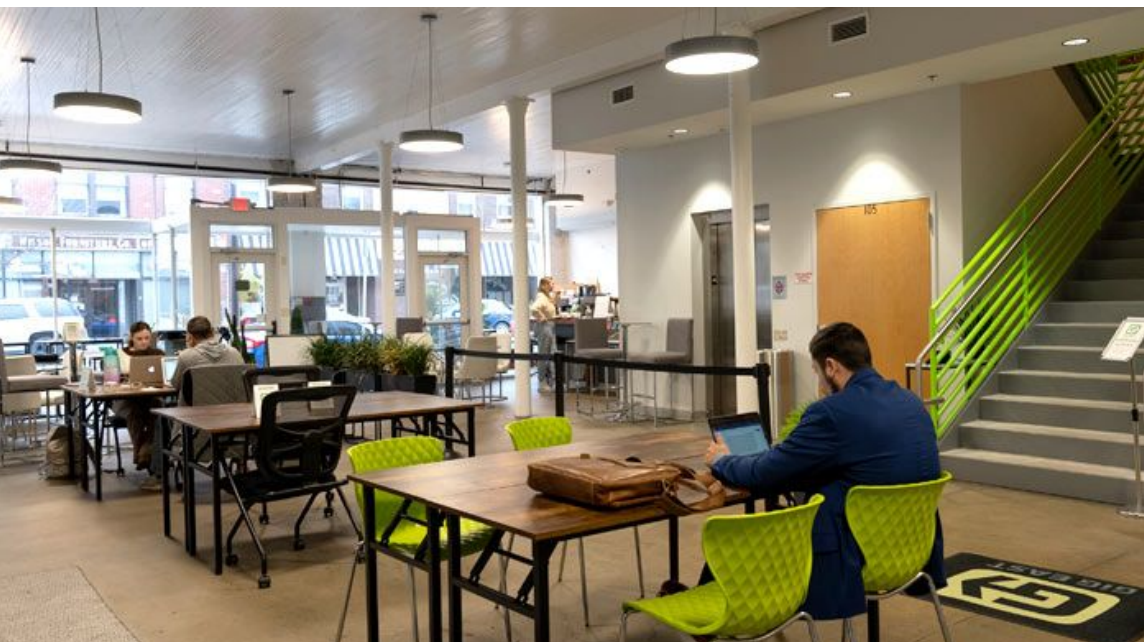
2.5-Day, In-Person Program - Wilson, NC

Gig East Exchange + Wilson Co. Public Library + The Harriss Hotel

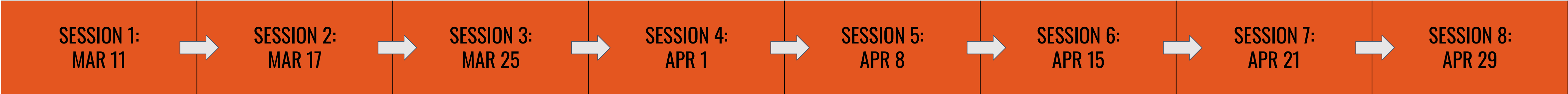
Wednesday: Welcome Dinner

Thursday: 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
+ Happy Hour

Friday: 9:00am - 4:30pm
+ Send Off



Follow-On Virtual Skills Building Sessions (1-hour, Zoom-based to support LBB projects and skills development):



Key Benefits for Fellows



Confidence

Library staff gain confidence in creating and implementing business services, programming, and community building efforts when they can “speak the language” of entrepreneurs and can direct patrons to the highest-impact resources.



Knowledge & Skills

Library staff strengthen their base of entrepreneurship knowledge. They hone their market research skills with NC LIVE tools. They learn how to capture and communicate the data that tells the story of their impact on the business community.



Network

Library staff expand their networks to include other business-minded library professionals, as well as key ecosystem partners who can help their libraries become dynamic hubs of entrepreneurial activity.



Support

NC IDEA’s exclusive, free suite of support for Fellows includes: direct assistance with collection development, curated book lists, and program designs including a business plan pitch competition for patrons.

What is the LEAF Experience Like?



Session Topics



In-Person Program Day 1

Breakfast & Intros

What's Your Why?

"Business" Is Not a Dirty Word

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Lunch

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How to Speak Entrepreneur
NC's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

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Tour of Local Business + Founder Q&A

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Happy Hour & Dinner

In-Person Program Day 2

Breakfast & Reflection

Sharpening Your NC LIVE Tools

Capturing & Communicating Your Impact

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Lunch

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How NC IDEA & Network Can Help
Starting Your LBB Project

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Closing

Send off

# Session Details (Day 1)

**“What’s Your Why?”** What brought you into librarianship anyway? This session will not only help participants begin to connect more deeply with each other, it will also tap into our values and professional passions as we imagine how North Carolina can become a national model for library-powered entrepreneurship.

**“Business” Is Not A Dirty Word** It’s not Amazon crushing small booksellers. Explore how library-based entrepreneurship strengthens local economies, empowers underserved and female founders, and knits together supportive communities.

**How to Speak Entrepreneur** Learn the most essential business terms and how to navigate early conversations with entrepreneurs, understanding their reality, needs, and challenges.

**NC’s Entrepreneurial Ecosystem** Start with an asset map of your community and expand outward to identify key entrepreneurial support organizations across the state for library patrons.

**Tour of a Local Business w/ Founder Q&A** Let’s get out into the world! Each LEAF cohort’s host city is home to unique entrepreneurial success stories: an ice cream shop, a nationally recognized coffee brand, a yoga studio... We’ll visit a location to learn more about the business and to hear directly from the founder(s) about their journey.



# Session Details (Day 2)



**Sharpening Your NC LIVE Tools** A reintroduction to Data Axle and ABI/Inform to help answer critical business questions with data – such as market size and ideal locations for brick-and-mortar stores.

**Capturing & Communicating Your Impact** Explore a toolkit and templates to document, measure, and effectively share your library's contributions to local entrepreneurship and economic development.

**How NC IDEA + Network Can Help** Discover NC IDEA's exclusive support for Fellows, including resources for collection building, essential reading lists, passive programming, and access to a statewide business plan pitch competition.

**Starting Your LBB Project** ALA's [Libraries Build Business Playbook](#) methodically reveals how to strengthen public libraries' role in supporting entrepreneurs and small business owners. Starting where you stand, map out how you will put the Playbook's 3-tiered approach to work in your building and your community with a single, focused project. This LBB project will be the focus of your efforts after the in-person summit.

# Outcomes

**Librarians feel empowered, supported, connected, and valued** in the work they do. They leave a business support conversation thinking, **“I love this.”** They share the story of their impact with each other and community stakeholders.

The **patron-founders who come to the library are uniquely equipped** to take their next business steps, connect to supportive networks, and succeed. The local library becomes known for **high-impact consulting**, not just “free help.”

**The Libraries Build Business Playbook** is operationalized across North Carolina, making our state a national model for how to drive equitable economic development through partnership between public libraries and entrepreneurial support orgs.

Alongside NC’s libraries, NC IDEA moves closer to its goal of **activating the entrepreneurial potential** of 100,000 North Carolinians.



# Session Facilitators & LEAF Supporters



Carlo Diy  
Program Manager, NC IDEA



Devon Waugh  
Instruction Librarian, NC LIVE



Ciera Williams  
Business Services Manager,  
Durham County Library



Morgan Ritchie-Baum  
Business & Social Science Librarian,  
Wake Forest



Nancy Lovas  
Entrepreneurship & Business Librarian,  
UNC Chapel Hill



Jana Bradley  
Senior Library Assistant / SBC,  
Durham County Library



Sarah Gransee  
Director of Library Development,  
State Library of NC



Megan Janicki  
Public Policy & Advocacy,  
ALA Deputy Director



# Growing Entrepreneurs at Their Local Libraries, One LEAF at a Time



# Application Timeline (Eastern 2026 Open Now)



| Cohort              | In-Person Skills Building Summit  | Application Window |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Western 2025 Cohort | Hendersonville, 9/24 - 9/26, 2025 | 8/1 - 8/24, 2025   |
| Central 2025 Cohort | Durham, 12/3 - 12/5, 2025         | 10/10 - 11/2, 2025 |
| Eastern 2026 Cohort | Wilson, 3/4 - 3/6, 2026           | 1/9 - 2/1, 2026    |



APPLY NOW

State Library of North Carolina's  
Director of Library Development  
Sarah Gransee offers her  
Official Letter of Support  
for the LEAF Program

*(share with your director/manager)*



**Q. What is NC IDEA?**

A. NC IDEA is a private 501(c)3 foundation whose mission is to help North Carolinians achieve their entrepreneurial ambition to grow high potential companies. NC IDEA proudly offers grant funding and support on the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Q. How did this fellowship program come about?**

A. NC IDEA has had small partnerships with libraries since 2018. But in building deeper connections with North Carolina's library community, it became clear that an exciting opportunity existed to launch LEAF in close collaboration with the State Library of NC and in official partnership with NC LIVE and BLINC.

**Q. Is this really free? What's the catch?**

A. Yes, NC IDEA covers the full cost of programming, hotel, food, and transportation for all participants. There is no catch. If you're a good fit for the LEAF Program, you're already committed to improving your library and how it supports your community's local businesses. The LEAF Program asks you to stay committed to these efforts and supports you along the way.

**Q. Who can participate?**

A. The fellowship is designed for library staff and librarians who have between 1-5 years of library experience. Most participants will have a focus in business services or adult services. They may be the "point person" for business questions at their branch or may be interested in growing their skills and knowledge in that direction. However, any eligible library staff member may apply, regardless of where they are in their career journey. Please note, it is a requirement to be employed by a public North Carolina library (UNC and NCCCS do qualify) at the time of participation.

**Q. What are the attendance requirements?**

A. Participants must be able to attend the entirety of the 2.5 in-person program days. For the cohort's follow-on virtual meetings, a participant can miss no more than 2 of the 8 total sessions. Missing more will prevent a participant from becoming a LEAF Fellow.

# FAQ (continued)



**Q. Are there limitations on the number of people who can apply from any given library?**

A. No.

**Q. Can I apply again if I'm not offered a Fellowship spot the first time around?**

A. Yes. We encourage you to apply again. You can only apply for one cohort at a time but there is no limit to the number of times you can submit an application.

**Q. Can my dietary restrictions be accommodated?**

A. Yes, our fellowship facilities can accommodate dietary restrictions. Please indicate any dietary restrictions in the application.

**Q. I have physical limitations. Will that be a problem?**

A. Venues for the fellowship are ADA-compliant, accessible facilities. Please indicate your accommodation needs in the application.

**Q. Can I bring my spouse/significant other/child?**

A. No. Our short time together for the in-person skills-building summit will focus on building relationships with participants only.

**Q. Is there a dress code?**

A. Conference attire is recommended.

**Q. How many participants will be in a cohort?**

A. There is a limit of 16-20 participants per cohort.

**Q. Will I be sharing a room/bathroom?**

A. No. You will have your own private room at the hotel.

# FAQ (continued)



## **Q. How is the LEAF Program different from other trainings or conferences?**

A. The LEAF Program is unique in that it brings together individual libraries, business ecosystem partners, and statewide library organizations to operationalize the ALA's [Libraries Build Business Playbook](#) across North Carolina. Also, as a fellowship program, LEAF especially emphasizes authentic relationship building, interactivity, rejuvenation, fun, and showing appreciation for librarians' essential impact on society by intentionally making things nice for your 2 days together. You deserve that.

## **Q. What is expected of participants after the in-person, skills-building program? And what support will be offered?**

A. After the in-person program, you'll be expected to attend the weekly virtual follow-up sessions on Zoom (1 hour each week for 8 weeks). During that time, you'll be working to bring your LBB Project to life at your library and you'll reinforce your overall skills in business librarianship. NC IDEA staff will offer regular "office hours" to help keep you moving forward. Later in the year, an optional, in-person, all-Fellows gathering will convene the full LEAF community to celebrate and build on wins. As new cohorts form, past Fellows will have the opportunity to serve in mentor roles.

## **Q. Is there a fee?**

A. No. However, transportation costs will be reimbursed rather than covered up front. You/your institution will need to pay for gas and vehicle use initially. NC IDEA will collect information from you afterwards in order to process travel reimbursements (calculated using the federal reimbursement [rate](#)).

## **Q. Do I need a letter of recommendation?**

A. No. The simple LEAF application is designed to be finishable in a single session. However, if you're offered a place in a LEAF cohort, your supervisor's approval is required for participation.

## **Q. Do I have to apply for a cohort in the area where I work/live?**

A. No! You are free to apply for whichever cohort fits your schedule and travel availability. If you're interested in a later cohort, simply wait for the application window to open.



# FAQ (continued)



**Q. Will there be a formal certificate or recognition upon completion of the fellowship program?**

A. Yes. Certificates will be awarded after completion of the full fellowship program, including the weekly virtual sessions.

**Q. Do you have anything formal I can share with my supervisor?**

A. Yes. Feel free to share these slides with your supervisor as well as [this official letter of support](#) for the LEAF Program from Sarah Gransee, Director of Library Development at the State Library of North Carolina. Reach out to Carlo Diy, NC IDEA Program Manager, with any information requests or other needs. [cdiy@ncidea.org](mailto:cdiy@ncidea.org)

**APPLY NOW**