



February 2018 Volunteer of the Month: Business Resource and Innovation Center (BRIC)

The Business Resource and Innovation Center (BRIC) of the Free Library of Philadelphia is a core partner of Philadelphia VIP's LawWorks program, the city's only broad-based provider of critical legal support to the small businesses and nonprofits creating employment opportunities, generating tax revenues, and serving their communities.



BRIC embodies the Free Library's "start here" philosophy by offering on-site group classes, one-on-one appointments, resources, and referrals to small businesses, entrepreneurs, nonprofit professionals, and job-seekers and career-changers. The dynamic team comprises Library Coordinator Gillian Robbins, Small Business Librarian Caity Tingo, and Regional Foundation Center Librarian Caitlin Seifritz.

The LawWorks-BRIC partnership helps to fill a critical gap. Faced with the costs of startup, payroll, and customer development, new small businesses often reach a significant hurdle when they need business law services to formally incorporate or resolve other legal issues. Nonprofit organizations face similar obstacles, though without the prospect of generating income, and may be unaware of the legal intricacies involved in operating as an official charity.



Caity paints the picture vividly: "Our patrons don't have a graduate degree or years of experience in business management. They are folks with an idea and a passion, who need administrative and legal experience to make their vision grow."

Working together, LawWorks and BRIC provide advice and support to a hundred-plus small businesses and nonprofits each year. The stakes for the clients both organizations seek to serve are high. "We represent the underdog," Caitlin explains. "If you're a nonprofit leader and you make a legal mistake, that could be the end of your organization. Luckily, VIP is there to prevent that from happening and set you on the right track."

To that end, BRIC recruits clients for LawWorks legal clinics at which volunteer attorneys provide timely assistance on key issues. For example, BRIC connected the nonprofit organization Siloam, which provides mind, body, and spirit wellness programming for those living with HIV/AIDS, with a LawWorks clinic. Siloam's new Executive Director, Alberta Bertolino, was determined to update the nonprofit's employment practices and learn about its contractual obligations. Bertolino attended a LawWorks nonprofit legal clinic at the Free Library and, thereafter, applied for ongoing legal assistance. She was paired with volunteer attorney Frederick Sandstrom of Blank Rome LLP, who created a new employee manual to meet the organization's needs.

Siloam is one of many success stories made possible by the symbiotic relationship between BRIC and LawWorks. LawWorks has been a significant part of the library's programming. As Robbins notes, what LawWorks offers clients "is genuinely special and unique, and something that we could not offer ourselves."

LawWorks and BRIC also collaborate to build a shared knowledge base. When Gillian had a question about legal issues related to job interviews, she reached out to VIP Economic Development Coordinator Alison Merrick, who provided a comprehensive list of resources and contacts. To the BRIC team, "VIP is an invaluable resource, educating us so that we can support our clients," Gillian shared.

Similarly, VIP values the BRIC librarians for their willingness to go above and beyond for clients. "Caitlin, Caity, and Gillian are wonderful ambassadors and partners. As librarians, they do a terrific job connecting clients to resources, and they come up with creative solutions to provide the best possible experience for our small business and nonprofit clients," Alison observed.

BRIC is an innovative, dedicated partner and has gone above and beyond in answering the call to serve. VIP applauds and thanks BRIC for helping expand access to justice!