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Contact Information:

Emily Becker, Assoc. Director of Communications
Mid-Continent Public Library
ebecker@mymcpl.org | 816.503.4187



‘Pitch Competition’ Invests in More Local Entrepreneurs

Library and Kauffman Foundation to Award Cash Prizes, Showcase Local Business Talent

Kansas City, MO – Starting this week, Mid-Continent Public Library’s Square One Small Business Center is once again [accepting applications](#) for another “Shark Tank-style” pitch competition, giving local entrepreneurs the chance to secure funding in support of their unique and innovative business ideas. Six finalists out of the applicants will be selected to make their final pitch at the 2026 Pitch Competition & Small Business Showcase on September 24 at the Auditorium at Woodneath Library Center (8900 NE Flintlock Road, Kansas City, Mo.). Funded by the Kauffman Foundation, the top three winners—selected by the panel of judges—will walk away with cash prizes of \$5,000, \$3,000, and \$1,000.

During Square One’s most recent Pitch Competition, [local vegan ice cream shop Scream Queens](#) came in first place, taking home the grand prize of \$5,000, which owner Zoe Mays used to invest in equipment and ingredients needed to expand the business’s presence at the Overland Park Farmers Market this summer.

“Participating in the MCPL Square One Small Business Center Pitch Competition was a game changer for me and my small vegan ice cream business, Scream Queens,” said Mays. “Just having the opportunity to prepare for the pitch was instrumental in moving my business forward. Thinking deeply, crunching numbers, and organizing my thoughts about the past, present, and future of Scream Queens made me feel more confident in my business concept and better prepared for future challenges.”

To qualify for the Pitch Competition, applicants must make less than \$100,000 a year, be able to attend the Showcase on September 24, and reside in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Intended for both established and aspiring business owners alike, competitors do not have to be a legal business entity to apply.

[Applications must be submitted by July 19 on the Square One website.](#)

During the Showcase, competitors and other business owners who have worked with Square One, or attended a program in the past, can set up a booth about their services for fellow attendees to explore. In preparation for the Showcase, Pitch Competition finalists will have the opportunity to attend a series of

Square One programs to enhance their pitches, including Perfect Your Pitch and How to Rock Your Business Booth.

In September 2025, MCPL's Square One held its first Pitch Competition, and Rasheedah Villarreal, founder of [Social Emotional Yoga with Mrs. V](#), came in first place. Her prize money was used to expand her program, which works to build resilience and emotional regulation, particularly among youth.

Learn more about the 2026 Pitch Competition and Small Business Showcase, including how to submit your business idea, at mymcpl.org/Square-One.

This initiative was made possible by a generous grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

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About Mid-Continent Public Library

Founded in 1965, [Mid-Continent Public Library](#) is the largest library system in the Kansas City metropolitan area, operating 34 branches and two Library-To-Go locations and serving approximately 850,000 people in Jackson, Clay, and Platte Counties. MCPL is an award-winning library system that strives to enrich citizens and communities through expanding access to innovation, information, ideas, and inspiration. Connect with the Library on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).