



Job-Seeking in U.S. Public Libraries

Job Seekers Go Online

In the first decade of the 21st Century, classified job ads have gone the way of the mimeograph—nearly obsolete. Nearly three-quarters of job seekers now use the Internet to seek employment, in part because this is the only way to apply for many job opportunities. At the same time, millions of Americans lack home Internet access and/or 21st Century technology skills. One essential community institution is positioned to meet this growing need – your local public library.

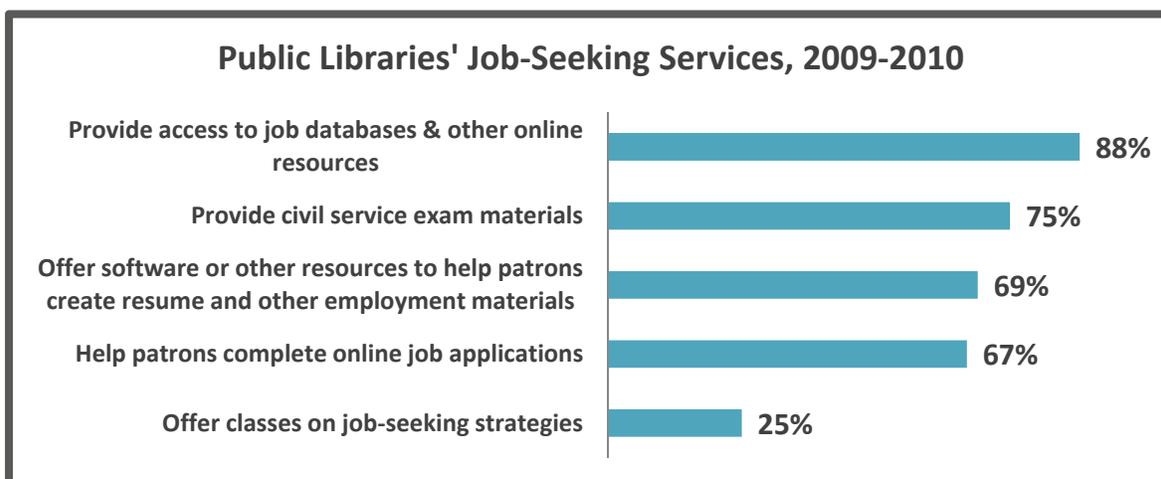
Public Libraries Are Community Technology Hubs

Over the past decade, America's 16,671 public libraries have made substantial investments in technology resources. Today virtually every public library provides computers and Internet access free of charge to the public. The number of computers available has doubled over the past 12 years; Internet connections have become faster; and WiFi has become commonplace in many libraries. In only four years, the number of public libraries offering free wireless access has jumped to 82% from 37%.

"The numbers of people that need services are larger than our capacity. The library is a natural partner – they are located in all corners of the county and have the space, computers and trained library staff we need." - Nancy Borrell, Director, DavidsonWorks (N.C. county workforce development board)

Libraries often are the **only** provider of free public access to computers and the Internet in their communities. According to the 2009-10 *Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study*, 67% of libraries report this is the case —which rises to 73% in rural areas. The vast majority of libraries also report patron demand for technology resources has grown in the wake of the economic recession.

Among the services most critical to library users and most in demand among the technology resources available in U.S. public libraries are those that support job-seeking and career development.





Library Staffs Provide Needed Assistance

Many people coming to the library are first-time computer users. At the library, they learn how to use a mouse, how to open an email account and how to do an online job search. Many library staff report they are scheduling one-on-one sessions with patrons to orient them to the broad range of skills to do research, find jobs or apply for government assistance.

Eighty-nine percent of libraries offer formal or informal IT training to library patrons. Classes include Computer 101, introduction to the Internet, resume help and introductory classes in office software products, including Word and Excel. The number of libraries that report offering classes in online job-seeking and career-related information grew 15% in 2009.

Challenges to be addressed

Growing community demand, however, can overwhelm library resources.

- Despite ongoing improvement in the number of Internet computers available to the public, seven out of 10 public libraries report they do not have enough computers to meet demand all or some part of the day.
- The most common reasons libraries are unable to expand computer access are cost (80%) and space (75%) constraints.
- Growing multimedia applications on potential employers sites—recruitment videos, podcasts, flash animation—also strain available bandwidth. While 79% of public libraries report offering Internet access speeds of 1.5Mbps (T1) or greater, nearly 45% say the connection speed is insufficient to meet patron needs some or all the time.
- The number one challenge affecting libraries' ability to help job seekers is a lack of staff to effectively help patrons. Almost 60% of libraries strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that the library does not have enough staff to aid patrons with job-seeking needs.

"More people are asking about computer classes, so they can learn skills for the new jobs they were searching for at the library. A lot of people have been laid off, or their business closed, and they haven't had computer experience over the past 20 years," said a suburban Arizona library director.

Looking to the Future

America's public libraries are first responders in a time of economic uncertainty and should be part of both national and community-level responses to supporting employment and economic development efforts. With sustained support and funding, public libraries are well-positioned to play a central role in local economic development efforts by providing the hardware, software, and technology skills training needed by those seeking new work and career opportunities.

For more information

This brief report presents selected findings from the *Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study*, available online at www.ala.org/plinternetfunding. The study is conducted by the American Library Association (ALA) and the Center for Library & Information Innovation (University of Maryland).

