

America's Libraries

Essential Partners in Workforce Development & Career Services



As the nation begins its economic recovery, people are seeking opportunities to build skills and find employment. Digital inclusion will play an especially important role, as pandemic-related job losses have compounded an already growing economic divide and trends toward an increasingly digital economy. America's 117,000 libraries are poised to respond to these rapidly changing community needs with expanded services and strengthened workforce collaborations.

Leverage Public Libraries' Career Services Infrastructure

As during the Great Recession, this trusted network of library locations with expert staff, public technology, and information resources must be leveraged and maximized to advance equitable economic recovery and long-term prosperity. A 2010 Training and Employment Notice issued by the Department of Labor outlines library advantages and benefits to job seekers, which have only grown since then, including:

- **REACH:** accessible technology-rich locations that vastly multiply the reach of American Job Centers with more convenient hours open, family-friendly programs and services, and outreach and trust within low-income and communities of color. Rural libraries are often the only point of free access to technology, high-speed broadband, and diverse digital and print collections.
- **EXPERTISE and RESOURCES:** with staff trained to identify and enable access to the most relevant resources for people at all stages of educational and employment readiness, libraries add "high touch" to "high tech." From English Language Learning to GED prep to online job searching and software training, libraries are well-placed to empower the **estimated 48 million people (or one-third of the U.S. workforce) who lack foundational digital literacy skills** gain needed competencies for 21st Century jobs and careers. Many libraries also provide access and learning pathways toward achieving high school and post-secondary industry credentials.
- **SUSTAINABLE, FLEXIBLE COLLABORATION:** explicitly named as American Job Center partners and eligible providers of adult education and literacy services in the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, libraries nationwide continue to deepen their connections to workforce partners to improve local referrals and provide complementary services.

"Embedding access to the One-Stop Delivery System in the public libraries helps us bring employment and training services closer to where businesses are located and where job seekers live."

—Jaime Cruz, Workforce Connections executive director in Southern Nevada

TAKEAWAYS for decision makers

- **Integrating libraries as part of economic recovery and workforce initiatives** increases entry points and improves service delivery for those most marginalized in our communities, including workers of color disproportionately impacted by Covid job losses.
- **Enabling public libraries as workforce Connection/Access sites** would vastly expand the reach of American Job Centers (AJCs).
- **Investing in library staff and professional development** can improve referrals to AJCs and improve jobseekers' and adult learners' access to cost-effective digital literacy skills building.

Expand Innovative Library Practices

Libraries already serve as a lifeline to connect unemployed and underemployed job seekers, adult learners, and incumbent workers seeking their next career opportunity. Innovative library practices should be replicated and expanded to extend opportunities to more Americans. Examples include:

📍 Co-located job centers in public libraries. From southern Nevada to Pennsylvania, many public libraries have embedded workforce staff and services within their facilities, improving public access and easing connections among family-friendly library career services and specialized workforce resources. In other cases, public libraries host mobile workforce staff on a by-appointment basis with a particular focus on connecting our most rural residents with workforce opportunities. “We have 2,000 square miles in the county, including actual wilderness. Libraries are a fundamental partner,” said Mary Houston, Snohomish County (Wash.) Workforce director.

📍 Career navigation and information services. Libraries are increasingly facilitating active career exploration and planning for in-demand occupations, in addition to brokering access to on-demand electronic resources for job seekers and learners. The Nevada State Library has enabled the College of Southern Nevada to offer the first-ever **dialysis technician training** using 3D and virtual reality. The training is embedded within the **Nevada CareerExplorer** program, which is available through all libraries in the state and supports library staff as career navigators to assist patrons making career transitions.

📍 Access to post-secondary training and credentials. A growing number of public libraries also are exploring ways to help their patrons earn portable, stackable credentials in high-demand sectors. The national **Skilling for Employment Post-COVID** initiative by the Public Library Association and Microsoft Corp. with access to IT help desk certification, among others, and the Advanced Manufacturing certification program in development by the Pikes Peak Library District (Colo.) with local employers and the Colorado Advanced Manufacturing Association illustrate this trend.



Dialysis technician training using 3D and virtual reality

📍 “High touch” services for people of all ages/stages. From adult education classes to **New Jersey’s Fresh Start @ your library program** for people who previously have been incarcerated to the **Rhode Coders** youth program at Providence (R.I.) Public Library, public library staff “meet people where they are” in their learning journeys.

💡 Flexible and innovative problem solving. Even when the pandemic closed many library buildings to the public, staff innovated and coordinated with local partners to shift services to meet ongoing and new demand. The Kenton County (Ky.) Public Library launched **Job Search Central** to meet the needs of career changers with services ranging from career coaches to virtual job fairs. The Broward County (Fla.) Library has partnered with General Assembly, a global leader in skills education, and Black Valley Digital, a minority-owned education and marketing agency, to offer technology workshops and a business incubator to aid minority solopreneurs and freelancers launch and grow tech businesses. And the Berks County (Penn.) Public Libraries partnered with its local workforce development board to launch a **Mobile Job Lab**, to bring workforce resources and instruction to community centers.

MOBILE **JOB LAB**



Find more information at ala.org/advocacy/workforce or email Larra Clark at lclark@ala.org.