



THRIVING WORKFORCE, THRIVING ECONOMIES WITH LIBRARIES

Providing Opportunity Across Arkansas and the Nation

As technology further shifts the economic landscape, libraries prepare American jobseekers to enter the workforce, reskill to meet evolving requirements, and succeed as business owners.

Public libraries in Arkansas and nearly 17,000 strong across the country: (1) help people secure employment through job search, resume writing, and interview training, (2) provide internet access and digital skills programs that encourage use of emerging technologies and empower entrepreneurship, (3) collaborate with other community stakeholders to identify workforce challenges and build vibrant local economies.

With many communities hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and facing economic challenges, libraries are a critical part of the economic safety net, now more than ever.

Building digital skills

Gravette, Arkansas—where the major industry is livestock—is thriving economically thanks to the construction of Interstate 49 which connects the community to larger cities to the southeast where the corporate offices of Walmart, Tyson Foods and JB Hunt are located. One of the primary needs of both jobseekers and small

businesses in Gravette is to develop stronger digital skills. Responding to this need, the Gravette Public Library offers classes, such as Computer Basics, Applied Digital Skills, and Power Your Job Search sessions, where participants receive assistance relevant to their particular goals and incoming skill levels. In response to an additional community need, the library plans to

TAKEAWAYS for local, state and national public officials, and potential partners 

- Libraries in Arkansas and nationally support jobseekers, entrepreneurs, and local businesses.
- Libraries are well-placed to offer digital skills training and economic empowerment programs to all Americans, including those with few alternatives or resources.
- Libraries are cost-effective and efficient partners that should be included in the development and implementation of workforce and economic development initiatives.

create a new program for influencers (bloggers/vloggers) which will cover creating a website, domain names, hosting, marketing, graphics, content creation, and

analytics. There are many opportunities for influencers to whom corporations are turning as lower cost marketing options.

Thus, this provides an opportunity for local residents to work from home with relatively low startup costs.

Partnering to support jobseekers

The rural community of Mountain Home, Arkansas is home to many retirees as well as a sizeable number of low-income households. Beyond offering digital skills classes for community members, the Baxter County Library partners with other local organizations to support workforce development, including Goodwill, Arkansas State University–Mountain Home, the Food Bank of North Central Arkansas, and Arkansas Workforce. A current partnership, the Job Seeker Project, was born from the realization that there were several organizations in the community wanting to help people develop job skills and find jobs. By working together, the groups help each other be more effective and prevent duplication of effort. One program organized by the Job Seeker Project was a resume workshop leading up to a big career fair at the local college, where attendees received help to develop clear, concise resumes before the event.

“Digital skills are key in the current work environment and having skills provides options, whether it’s working at a business, working remotely or starting your own business.”

—Gravette Public Library

Upskilling the workforce

In Fayetteville, Arkansas employers are challenged to find workers with adequate technology skills as well as

certified food service workers.

To address these employer concerns, the Fayetteville Public Library, as part of its 80,000 square

foot expansion, is building a Center for Innovation to train adults for coding and tech industry jobs. The Center will feature state of the art resources for VR/AR development, simulation labs, robotics and fabrication labs, as well as photography, video production, and music studios. The library is also building a teaching kitchen to train adults seeking required certifications for the food service, restaurant and catering industries.

Helping small businesses succeed online

Beyond workforce support, libraries play a critical role in meeting additional local business needs. The Fayetteville Public Library, for example, partnered with the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce and Startup Junkie to host a Grow Your Small Business event.

The day featured sessions on how to get a business online and reach customers digitally, workshops on human resources, and a networking lunch. Nearly 120 people participated, and many attendees booked appointments for one-on-one consultations with library staff to get individualized assistance.

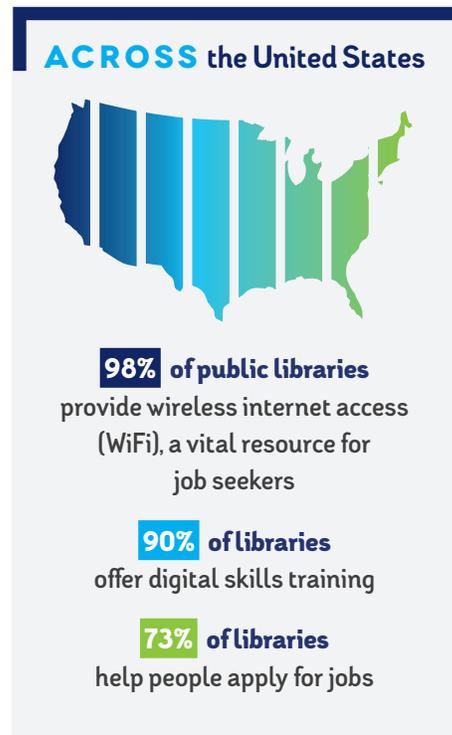
“We create our classes based on the needs of our community and what they have the desire to learn.”

—Baxter County Library



Small business class at the Fayetteville Public Library

One participant, a senior citizen who had recently started her own business, was overwhelmed by the prospect of online advertising. By the end of the day, she believed she could handle an online presence for her business and was grateful to know that she could reach out to the library for further help. Meanwhile, to stay in contact with jobseekers and small businesses during the pandemic, the library has recorded programs so that community members can watch remotely. ■



SOURCE: digitalinclusion.umd.edu/sites/default/files/DigitalInclusionBrief2015.pdf