



SUPPORTING JOB SEEKERS AND SMALL BUSINESSES THROUGH LIBRARIES

Serving Communities Across Iowa and the Nation

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

Public libraries in Iowa 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.

Job seeking and skills building

The North Side Library in Des Moines is located in a diverse low-income neighborhood, where families move frequently. Many children spend their entire Saturday at the library while their parents are working—often more than one job. Library staff assist these working families and other community members, many of whom do not have

a high school diploma, with applying for jobs at fast food restaurants, dollar stores, and gas stations, as well as for manual labor and factory jobs. In addition to informal assistance, the library offers a weekly Job Seekers class, intended to help people—many of whom are living paycheck-to-paycheck—find longer-term work and not have to uproot their families as much.

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



- Libraries in Iowa 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.

The library also aids seniors looking for part-time work to earn extra income, and jobseekers with disabilities who may have special requirements such as finding work close to the bus route for transportation. During class time participants search for jobs, work on resumes, and build digital skills.

Librarians offer one-on-one help to support and encourage jobseekers to build digital skills and fulfill their goals. For example, over several class sessions a librarian helped one jobseeker to convert her old

paper resume into a new digital one, as well as to cut it down to the most important details relevant to the jobs she was applying for.

The public library system in Des Moines also partners with local agencies to further support jobseekers. These agencies—some of whom offer assistance at branch libraries, include the Iowa Workforce Development Center, the Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families, and Goodwill Careers.

Bridging the workforce digital divide

Increasingly, participating in today's workforce requires digital competency

“To bridge the digital divide, libraries are often the only provider offering free and equitable access to all the tools and resources that the Internet provides.”

—Clarence Anthony, Executive Director, The National League of Cities



North Side Library in Des Moines

and internet access to complete even the most fundamental of tasks.

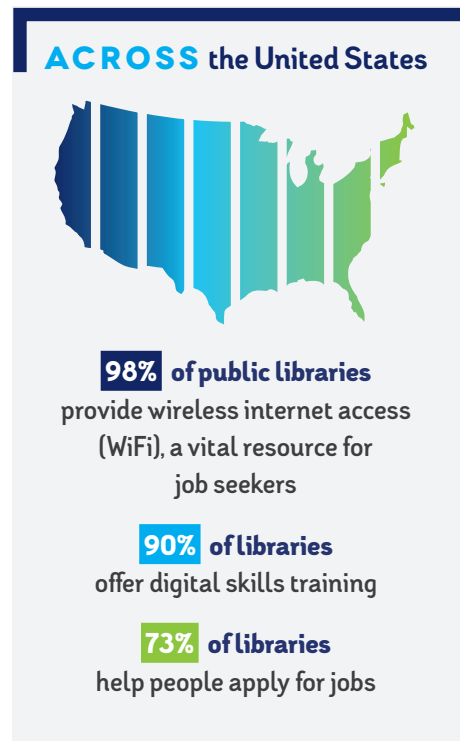
For a variety of reasons, some Iowa residents—in both urban and rural areas of the state, do not have home computer or internet access. In Des Moines, many rely on the public computers at the North Side Library to conduct work-related

digital tasks. This includes not only job seekers, but also employees. Library staff help bridge the workforce digital divide by offering hands-on assistance, helping patrons apply for jobs and access pay stubs, take online tests, as well as submit timesheets and other employee paperwork.

Empowering entrepreneurs

In the community surrounding the North Side Library, many businesses quickly go in and out of business. To support these local businesses in achieving sustainability, the library has hosted business-related programs in partnership with the Economic Center for Success, the Small Business Development Center, and Iowa SCORE. Program topics have included: starting a business, the legal side of business, and growing one's business.

Meanwhile, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa the public library along with SCORE, area lenders, and other partners have taken another approach to supporting entrepreneurship. The partners work together to offer micro loans to local businesses (\$500–\$10,000 for up to three years at 4% interest). At the Cedar Rapids Public Library, community members can receive help filling out a basic loan application and creating a business plan, as well as additional help upon approval of the loan. 



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