



THRIVING WORKFORCE, THRIVING ECONOMIES WITH LIBRARIES

Providing Opportunity Across Maryland 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 Maryland 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.

Overcoming barriers to workforce participation

The Baltimore County Public Library system (MD) serves a diverse population of nearly 860,000 people who live in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Some 38% of residents either live below the poverty line or earn less than the regional cost of living, in part due to the job environment. Stable, living wage

employment at manufacturing and steel plants has given way to minimum wage retail and service industry jobs. Additionally, many older workers lack adequate digital skills and do not have the means, financial or otherwise, to access advanced or higher education and job training. To support jobseekers and digital skill learners, librarians regularly offer technology classes as

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

- Libraries in Maryland 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.

well as one-on-one appointments for assistance with resumes, cover letters, and job applications. Recognizing another barrier to employment, the Baltimore County Public

Library partners with Maryland Legal Aid to hold free legal advice and expungement clinics at library branches. The clinics, which see an average of 11,617 visitors per year, often assist justice-involved residents who may have difficulty getting an interview or obtaining employment due to a criminal record.

Skills building for jobseekers

In Hagerstown (MD) there is a lack of entry level jobs, and digital skills are a key to employment. In this context, the Washington County Free Library works to boost residents' digital skills and employment opportunities through workshops, one-on-one appointments, and other programming. For example, the library offered an incentive for community members to complete Google Cloud certifications in G Suite by obtaining a grant to pay the certification exam fee. These certifications allow jobseekers to demonstrate competency in common workplace activities such as creating spreadsheets and presentations using cloud-based tools. The library also provided Open Lab time to give community members a quiet place to practice related skills or apply for jobs. To kick off the initiative, the

"Our library is committed to working with our community partners and to helping everyone in our community grow no matter their skill level."

—Washington County Free Library

library gave a presentation to 40 local youth and teens in partnership with the Western Maryland Consortium. At the event the library handed out information about the program to additional community partners who, in turn, helped get the word out about this library resource.

Igniting small businesses development

In addition to supporting jobseekers, the Baltimore County Public Library offers programming for business owners and entrepreneurs. These programs focus on supporting new and developing businesses to ensure that community members are connected to both the necessary resources and the knowledge that builds equity. The library system's Entrepreneur Academy (a seven-part series of classes in which participants receive support in creating business plans) and Pop-Up Shops (setup in library branches) support nascent small businesses and entrepreneurs, providing educational, marketing, and sales opportunities. Meanwhile, library-hosted networking nights, social media marketing classes, and nonprofit and small business information fairs connect participants to information and resources. In turn, "Business 101" classes and small business counseling, provided in partnership with organizations such as the Small Business Development Center, CASH Campaign



Alice Virginia and David W. Fletcher Branch of the Washington County Free Library, Hagerstown (MD)

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of Maryland, as well as local business associations and Chambers of Commerce, offer high-quality small business programs and services at no cost to residents. Women, low-income individuals, the formerly incarcerated, and underserved groups all benefit from these programs, helping residents build successful businesses which uplift the community as a whole. 🇺🇸

ACROSS the United States



98% of public libraries provide wireless internet access (WiFi), a vital resource for job seekers

90% of libraries offer digital skills training

73% of libraries help people apply for jobs

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

ALA American Library Association

© November 2020. This state brief is part of the Libraries Lead with Digital Skills initiative, a collaboration of the American Library and Public Library Associations. The initiative aims to ensure public libraries across the nation receive ongoing access to resources to help everyone across America grow their skills, careers, and businesses. Libraries Lead is sponsored by Google.