



BUILDING DIGITAL SKILLS AT LIBRARIES

Supporting Economic Opportunity Across Michigan 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 Michigan 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.

Digital skills training for jobseekers

Negaunee Public Library provides services in Michigan’s rural Upper Peninsula, a region that struggles with both a reliable job market and internet access. Negaunee has been hit particularly hard by the sharp decline in a once booming mining industry. As the local population ages, they struggle to find

jobs that do not require technical skills and basic computer literacy—jobs the community used to be able to count on in mining.

To address this Negaunee Public Library partnered with faculty from Michigan Technological University to train local youth to help others gain digital skills using the BASIC: Building Adult Skills in Computing program.

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



- Libraries in Michigan 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 youth tutors then worked one-on-one with job seekers and community members on the technology issues they faced. Over time the program's popularity grew, serving people in need of assistance, while simultaneously helping the teens build their own job skills.

Helping local businesses get online

In addition to assisting individual jobseekers, libraries strengthen local economies by helping business owners gain the digital skills they need to grow their businesses. The Gladwin County District Library in rural Michigan offered Get Your Business Online classes, covering topics such as making a business easier to find online, building a website, and using metrics to measure success. Many of the “Mom and Pop” businesses in the area are unaware of how to maximize search engines to have their businesses not only listed but found online. The classes combined basic computer skills with ideas on how list business hours, locations, and services. One participant, a long-time owner of a crafts and gifts shop, knew that when someone searched for “crafts” online suggested businesses would appear, but her shop did not. Through the class, she gained valuable skills to help market her business online, and as a result saw an increase

“The library provides a vital role in giving job seekers the tools they need to find work like computer access, reference help, and assistance using digital tools.”

—Negaunee Public Library

“We are all one little family, between the police station to the grocery store to the library. We all depend on each other to survive.”

—Gladwin County District Library



“We are now going to be working on being part of the economic growth in the county and making our library part of the solution.”

—Gladwin County District Library (shown left)

in visitors to her store during the summer season. The library continues to support business owners, offering one-on-one assistance with business resources and digital tools.

Partnering to meet community needs

Libraries—often the first stop for jobseekers and entrepreneurs—serve as key institutions that provide direct services, make referrals to local and online resources, and partner with other organizations to more effectively

address community workforce and economic development needs.

To make its tech tutoring program possible, the Negaunee Public Library partnered with the Michigan

Technological University (MTU), a local high school, and employment offices—making use of local resources to address a community need. The library also works with Invent@NMU, an idea incubator affiliated with Northern Michigan University. Invent@NMU has a kiosk in the library, where patrons can connect online with NMU staff to receive innovation and entrepreneurship support. Meanwhile, the Gladwin County

District Library continues to identify and fill resource gaps for local business owners. While the library has a limited program budget of \$2–3,000, they have been able to leverage partnerships to better serve the community. Among other things, the library has established partnerships with Michigan Works! and the local Chamber of Commerce to help develop and implement a business resource center within the library. 🇺🇸

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