

# PARTNERING FOR STRONGER LOCAL ECONOMIES WITH LIBRARIES

## Providing Opportunity Across Nebraska 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 Nebraska 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.

### Skills building and job seeking

Rural Cozad, Nebraska has weathered past economic challenges, including the closure of a major employer in 2010 resulting in the loss of 500 jobs. Today the community’s nearly 4,000 residents find employment in meatpacking, manufacturing, and the public sector. Major challenges to the local economy include a lack of tech-savviness and a

lack of housing for potential employees. In this context, the Wilson Public Library supports the local workforce by providing public computer access and aiding individuals on an as-needed basis with digital skills questions. Through the library’s Checkout a Librarian program, residents can schedule hour-long appointments with individual staff to work on specific needs, ranging

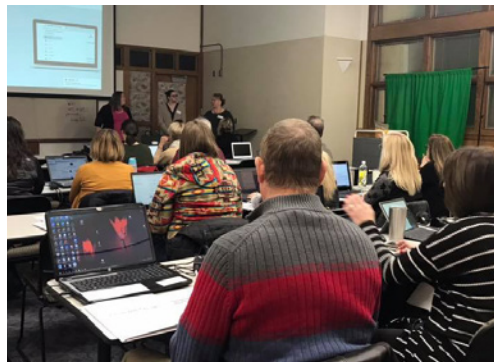
**TAKEAWAYS** for local, state and national public officials, and potential partners 

- Libraries in Nebraska 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.

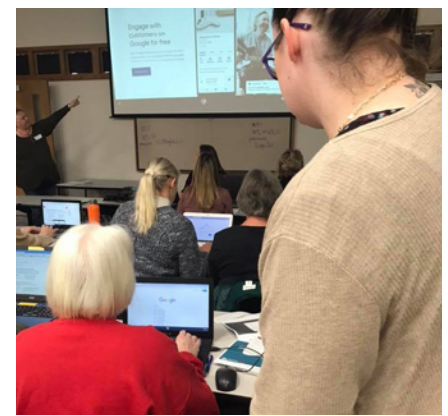
from resume-building, to proofreading, to computer skills, to help with online applications. The library has also partnered with Nebraska Workforce Development to offer resume writing workshops and individual jobseeker support sessions and plans to offer similar support for jobseekers in the COVID-19 context.

## Helping small businesses thrive online

Libraries help local businesses gain the digital skills they need to thrive and increase their visibility online. The Wilson Public Library partnered with the Cozad Chamber of Commerce to offer a series of classes for small business owners, including Get Your Business Online, Reach Customers Online with Google & YouTube, and Using Data to Drive Business Growth. The library worked in conjunction with local newspapers, neighboring chambers of commerce and economic development corporations, and Dawson Area Development, to get the word out about the workshops to a wide range of businesses in the area. The first class in the series was attended by 20 businesses, 15 of which were from Cozad—reflecting a high level of local demand for these skills. Among other benefits, the workshops helped the owner of a local hardware store to understand how to better reach current and potential customers through social media and expand his use of platforms beyond Facebook. He stated, “I have gained insight into the analytics so I



Small business class at the Wilson Public Library



**“Our town’s focus is growing small businesses, and if we can continue that partnership of the libraries helping to strengthen economic development, we’ll keep moving in the right direction.”**—Wilson Public Library

can see how my posts are doing, [and] the reach/impact they have so I can continue to expand on what potential customers are looking for.”

## Pivoting to provide pandemic services

When the Wilson Public Library temporarily closed its doors to comply with public health measures to combat COVID-19, the library continued to support the community. Among other things, the library began offering a curbside fax and copy service to meet the needs of businesses and residents who would normally visit the library in person. The library also made its Wi-Fi network available for use outside the building. Additionally, classes for local businesses originally planned for the early months of the pandemic were rescheduled and held online. The library plans to support

both jobseekers and small businesses during the upcoming economic recovery, starting by re-writing its community needs plan—recognizing that what the community needed pre-COVID versus what it will need post-COVID will more than likely look different. ■

**“Through established partnerships and existing knowledge and resources, libraries will continue to be an important actor and partner as the country assesses and begins to address the damage COVID-19 has caused the labor market.”**

—Stephanie Holcomb,  
*Public Libraries and the Workforce*

## 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](https://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.