



# THRIVING WORKFORCE, THRIVING ECONOMIES WITH LIBRARIES

## Providing Opportunity Across New Jersey and the Nation

**A**s 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 New Jersey 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.

### Helping small businesses thrive online

In Roxbury Township (NJ), a family-friendly suburban community, residents work in local businesses within the New Jersey corridor or commute into Manhattan. Roxbury Public Library works to support both jobseekers and small businesses in a competitive economy. The library partners with the

Roxbury Area Chamber of Commerce to co-produce a monthly series, called Business Beyond Basics. Program events bring businesses and the community together to network and learn, exploring business and workforce development topics at a 401, vs. a 101, level. Programs have included Growing your Business with Reference USA, How to Get Hired in the 21st Century, and The

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



- Libraries in New Jersey 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.

**"[In response to COVID-19] we quickly morphed into a virtual library, and significantly increased the amount of new library cards issue in March, April and May 2020."**

—Roxbury Public Library

### Million-Dollar One-Person Business.

When the library was forced to close due to the pandemic, staff quickly pivoted to offer planned business workshops online, adapting the content to be relevant to the challenges facing the business community. In one class, "Google My Business and Crisis Management," participants learned how to develop and enhance their virtual storefronts, including how to customize their message, manage reviews, and communicate with past and future customers.

### Skills building and job seeking

Piscataway (NJ), one of the most diverse towns in the state, is home to Rutgers University as well as the Colgate-Palmolive corporate headquarters. Many residents are employed in the food service industry, as well as at technology companies and organizations such as Motorola, SHI, and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. In this context, the Piscataway Public Library works to build job seekers' digital skills,

serving residents representing a variety of age groups, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds. Prior to the pandemic, the library

partnered with the New Brunswick Professional Service Group to provide weekly sessions that support resume writing, online job searching, and

**"As a community within the most densely populated state, there is an abundance of highly educated people in our area all competing for a limited amount of jobs."**

—Roxbury Public Library



In-person and virtual programs hosted by the Roxbury Public Library

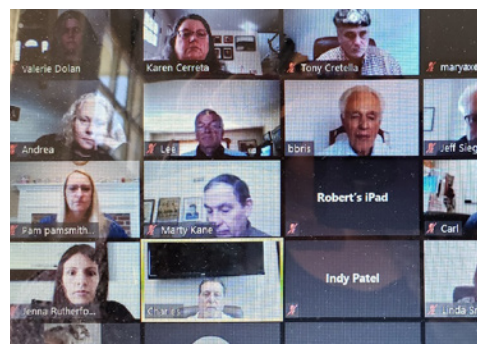
applying for jobs online. Yet, due to a digital skills gap, it has been a challenge to find meaningful and viable ways to continue to offer such services virtually during the pandemic. Many who need these services are themselves less savvy with computer and technology use, and require in-person, hands-on assistance, such as that provided at the library which is a key community resource in bridging digital access and digital skills divides.

### Responding to community needs

Libraries are integral parts of their communities and adapt programs and services to meet local needs. When the Piscataway Public Library offered a business plan series it was predominantly attended by African-American participants and potential entrepreneurs. As a result, the library began to

consider developing opportunities to specifically support African-American entrepreneurs in the local area, recognizing that they may have unique systemic

challenges impeding their progress in starting and operating their small business. Meanwhile, when the Roxbury Public Library closed due to the



pandemic, library staff, working from home, called all library cardholders, inquiring about wellness, offering help with available resources, and even dropping off homemade masks to families and individuals in need. In addition, the library has pivoted to offer virtual programs, coached many residents on how to use Zoom and other digital services, and has remained accessible to the community via phone, email and Facebook messenger. 🌱

### 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