



THRIVING WORKFORCE, THRIVING ECONOMIES WITH LIBRARIES

Empowering Communities Across Pennsylvania 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 Pennsylvania 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.

Providing access to opportunity

In Aliquippa (PA), where people of color play a prominent role in neighborhood life, many residents lack the resources to pay for training or higher education necessary to succeed. In response, the B.F. Jones Memorial Library offers opportunities for residents to build digital and other workforce skills. The library provides computer access, as

well as job search and resume help. The library connects with local residents by creating a welcoming workshop environment for low-income participants, and ensuring instructors reflect diverse backgrounds.

In addition to its ongoing workforce development services, B.F. Jones Memorial Library recently partnered with Job Training Beaver County to

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

- Libraries in Pennsylvania 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.

hold a job fair. Ten employers participated, offering networking and on-site interviews. Attendees took part in digital tools tutorials, as well as one-on-one training sessions with library staff. One job fair participant who had lost his job at the railroad reported he gained confidence from the event and was able to find work soon after.

Helping local businesses thrive online

In addition to assisting jobseekers, libraries strengthen local economies by helping business owners gain digital skills. In Carlisle (PA) small business owners taking part in the Bosler Memorial Library's "Get Your Business Online" workshop learned business and online marketing skills while networking with one another. Participants ranged from: an experienced beauty consultant who wanted to start a business providing one-on-one consultations teaching people how to use cosmetics they already own; to an artist who sells her works on Etsy but who wanted to create her own website; to a certified veterinary technician who runs a doggie daycare and wanted to expand to include cat care. The library

"The public library is part of the local economy and possesses a variety of assets that can help local small businesses grow and thrive, thus contributing to the wealth and vitality of the community."

—Christine Hamilton-Pennell,
Growing Local Economies

workshop introduced participants to online tools to build a website, get found online, maximize web ads, and more—all to launch and grow their businesses.

Partnering to meet community needs

Libraries—often the first stop for jobseekers and entrepreneurs—serve as key institutions for direct services but also make referrals and partner

with organizations to cost-effectively address community workforce and economic development needs.

Bosler Memorial Library actively engages organizations like United Way, YWCA, and

the Employment Skills Center to maximize library assets to benefit a wide range of community members. Partnering with the Cumberland County Prison System, Bosler Memorial Library

provided laptops and staff instructors to offer technology education to individuals on the verge of release, helping to ensure they successfully re-enter their communities. Meanwhile, B.F. Jones Memorial Library partners with local economic development corporations to expand access to resources. For example, the Aliquippa Economic Development Corporation, funded the creation of a business conference room at the library that can be used by teams to meet and collaborate. ■



The historic B. F. Jones Memorial Library in Aliquippa, Pa., was built in 1927.

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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



"During the Great Recession, over 30 million people, roughly 10% of the total U.S. population at that time, reported using computers in public libraries for employment-related activities."

—John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University

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

ALA American Library Association

© September 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.