

BUILDING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE AT LIBRARIES

Empowering Diverse Communities Across Rhode Island 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 Rhode Island 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.

Serving diverse business owners

Providence, Rhode Island has a large Spanish speaking population as well as many native speakers of other languages, who need to improve their English skills. Additionally, 26% of Providence residents live in poverty, and nearly one-quarter of Rhode Islanders are not connected or under-connected to the internet

at home. The Providence Community Library is a trusted institution which addresses these needs by providing free English (ESL) and GED classes, internet access, digital skill trainings, and job seeking support. With nine branch locations situated primarily in low income, minority-majority neighborhoods the library has a unique reach. It is an especially valuable resource

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



- Libraries in Rhode Island 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.

for small business owners in these neighborhoods, providing access to advanced, often expensive, technology and office equipment and offering free workshops and courses on such topics as social media marketing, developing a business plan, accessing state and/or city contracts, and other financial literacy skills. In addition, the library partners with the Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to offer free business education seminars for Spanish-speaking small business owners and can serve business owners in Spanish when needed.

Encouraging innovation with makerspaces

Providence Community Library also supports workforce development through PVD Makers, an educational and social enterprise focused on developing 21st century skills through maker centered learning, run by the non-profit FabNewport. Over the past two years, the library and FabNewport have built a cohort of over 40 teens who pursue their own passions in 2D and 3D design, film making, sewing, and robotics while also coaching younger students, peers, and adults in library maker spaces. The library acts as an incubator for these innovative young adults, many of whom are poised to



“To bridge the digital divide, libraries are often the only provider offering free and equitable access to all the tools and resources that the Internet provides.”

—Clarence Anthony, Executive Director, The National League of Cities

lead, teach, and sustain themselves in the creative business world. One PVD Makers intern designs and makes clothes and promotional materials to support social causes; another is creating a documentary film about a community mural project; while a third has been hired to design and print t-shirts and stickers for a community member and small startup.

Outreach beyond library walls

Many libraries reach beyond their own walls to bring services to all corners of the community. The Providence Community Library strives to meet youth where they are during the summer by providing a mobile library bus complete with internet access, books, and math/

literacy programming at elementary schools and recreation centers. In addition, the library partners with Providence Recreation to bring a literacy and STEM component to the organization’s \$5/week full day camps designed to

“Our philosophy is to respond to the needs of our community; workforce development is a great need of our community and we will continue to focus on that.”

—Providence Community Library

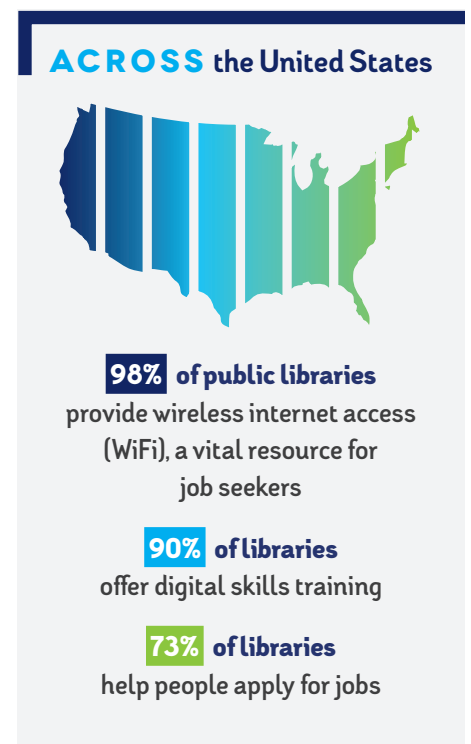
“We see our makerspaces as growing hubs of entrepreneurship and we are working on ways to further develop that concept in our libraries.”

—Providence Community Library



Digital skills workshop at the library

serve low income working parents and their families. Providence Community Library’s other mobile library, the Every Place Makerspace, brings creative tools and workshops to schools and recreation centers across Providence. Additionally, the library is growing efforts to reach adult daycare centers as well as elderly and disabled housing units to offer tech support, maker space activities, and circulation of materials. 🇺🇸



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