



# PARTNERING FOR A STRONGER WORKFORCE WITH LIBRARIES

## Empowering Jobseekers Across Vermont 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 Vermont 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.

### On-demand help for jobseekers

The economy in Bennington, Vermont is both thriving and struggling. The recent closings of two major local employers, including a local liberal arts and nursing college and an Energizer battery factory, were a blow. Yet, simultaneously, the community is working on a major downtown redevelopment project and a variety of jobs in the

health care and other sectors continue to exist. In this context, the Bennington Free Library helps people to access and complete online job applications. The library aims to meet jobseekers where they are, offering free and friendly service at a convenient downtown location. While modifications due to COVID-19 have been necessary, under normal circumstances public computers

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

- Libraries in Vermont 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.

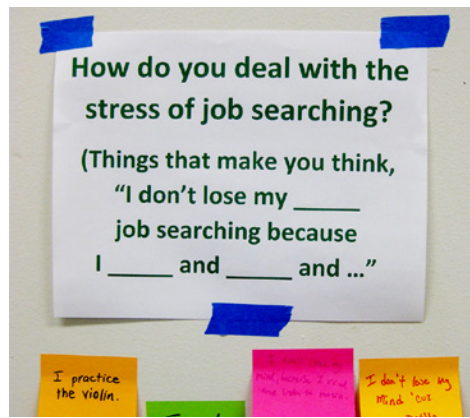
are available for use at the library, as well as on-demand help and weekly evening technology drop-in hours. In addition, the library recognizes that some jobseekers may face particular constraints, such as working parents who want to improve their technology skills but do not have the time or resources. To address this particular need, the Bennington Free Library has considered incorporating information about resources for jobseekers into family programming—hosting activities for kids while giving adults a chance to become comfortable in the library and gain awareness of what it has to offer.

### Skills building and job seeking

Beyond regular informal help for jobseekers, the Bennington Free Library offers jobs workshops and events. At a day-long Job Seekers Jamboree hosted at the library, community members were invited to explore digital skills and tools relevant to the jobseeking process, including using email effectively, developing a resume, online job searching, and completing online applications. By providing snacks and prizes, along with concrete digital skills help, attendees were able to work on their digital skills in a fun community environment. For example, a young woman who attended the event received help to redesign and improve her existing resume using an online template and later won a gift certificate to the local bookstore. Most importantly, attendees—who ranged in age from their early twenties to over sixty—learned that the library can

**“We would like to see a small group of job seekers learn and train together in a longer workshop series, and see one or two of those participants train others, ultimately creating a self-sustaining tech training corps.”**

—Bennington Free Library



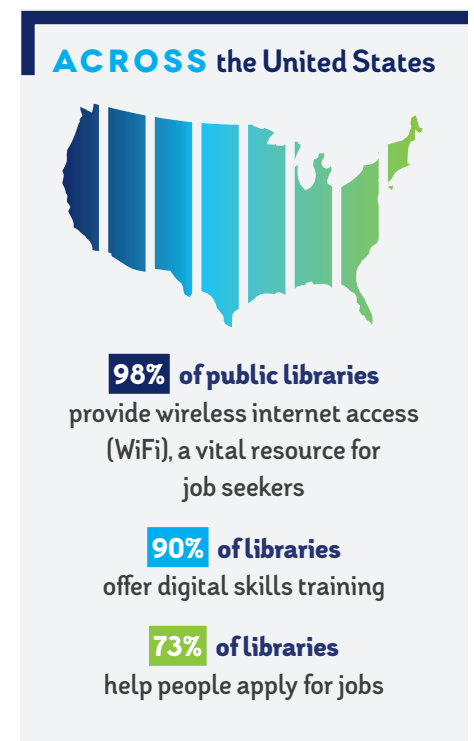
**“We support learning technology by answering questions patiently, emphasizing small successes and championing tenacity.”**—Bennington Free Library

direct people to a variety of useful free resources for jobseekers, as well as help people make use of them.

### Supporting the workforce ecosystem

An economic development strategy for Southern Vermont identified several priorities for the region including improving job opportunities and encouraging job growth; helping economic development officials and partners work together; and improving broadband connectivity, inclusion, and diversity. Recognizing these goals as well as the fact that many organizations play a role in supporting workforce and community development, the Bennington Free Library partners with groups such as the Vermont Department of Labor office. Additionally, the library attends local workforce and education committee meetings to maintain awareness of and support broader community efforts to enhance employability. In the future,

the library plans to continue to reach out to and partner with local groups. Resulting initiatives could include longer-term, tech-focused job seeker initiatives including the development of a self-sustaining tech training corps, and library-led workshops at partner locations. 🌱



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