



# THRIVING LOCAL ECONOMIES AND LIBRARIES

## Empowering Communities Across West Virginia and the Nation

As 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 West Virginia 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.

### Personalized help for small businesses

Lincoln County, West Virginia, once a thriving farming community, has struggled economically in recent years. The local geography limits transportation and communication options (including WiFi and mobile phone service), impacting business opportunities. Despite these challenges,

there is local interest in starting new small businesses, which could serve as a foundation for developing a sustainable economy. Recognizing this, the Hamlin-Lincoln County Public Library, one of three branches of the Lincoln County Libraries, leveraged its own limited resources to offer a “Best Tools to Grow Your Small Business” program to help local businesses build

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



- Libraries in West Virginia 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.

their budget, financial, marketing, and planning skills. To directly engage participants, a librarian took her tablet door-to-door to the businesses that had expressed interest in the program.

These one-on-one sessions led to individual follow-ups, illustrating the way in which libraries recognize community needs and find ways to meet them, inside and outside their walls. In addition to helping local businesses build skills, the Lincoln County Libraries support jobseekers by offering adult education, computer skills, and social media skills classes.

### Engaging in partnerships for greater impact

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. To this end, the Lincoln County Libraries partner with a wide range of other groups. This includes government affiliates such as the West Virginia Extension Office and the state Department of Health and Human Resources, as well as service organizations like the American Legion, the Family Resource Network, the Day Report (an alternative prison program), and HUB—a community development organization.

Partnership activities include disseminating information, connecting

people to relevant groups, providing library work space for partners to use, and financially supporting some ventures. Building on these existing relationships, the Lincoln County

**“Building relationships that foster a sense of trust is our secret to supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs.”**

—Lincoln County Libraries

Libraries are actively looking for ways to expand their partnership activities. Among other things, the library system is planning to work with current partners to develop a program for jobseekers and would like to team up with the local community college and high school to teach resume and job seeking skills at the schools to ensure students leave school prepared for the job market. These ongoing partnerships help to cultivate program sustainability allowing libraries and other organizations to work together to address core community challenges over the longer term.

### Keeping the community informed

Libraries, as central and trusted community institutions, play a key role in connecting community members to resources and each other. The Lincoln County Libraries serve as a community information hub.

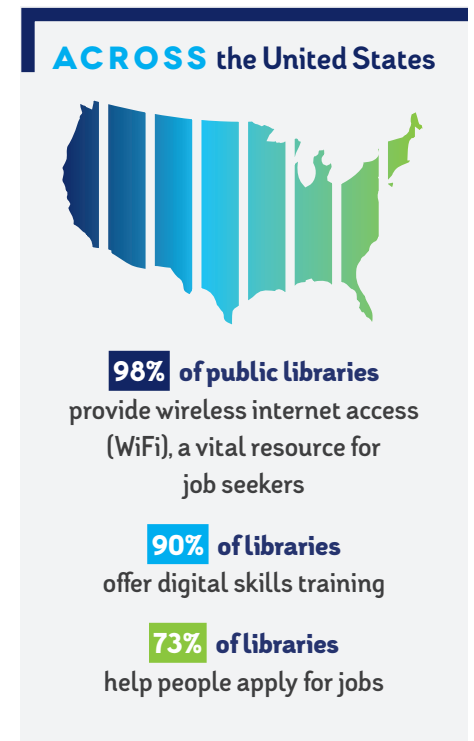
**“Our library strives to create a culture that cultivates sustainability through partnerships and support.”**

—Lincoln County Libraries

To connect local businesses and jobseekers to opportunities, library staff attend non-profit meetings, small business meetings, and other events with flyers in tow, and encourage community members to follow library social media pages to learn about events and resources. To best serve the local population—many of whom are seniors—library staff regularly visit the senior center to let



them know about library trainings and events. To enhance their ability to share community information the Lincoln County Libraries have recently developed a website which will host a county-wide community calendar, enabling community members to share events with one another in one place. Library staff also plan to actively encourage its use as a resource by showing local organizations how to use the calendar and how link it to their own websites.



SOURCE: [digitalinclusion.umd.edu/sites/default/files/DigitalInclusionBrief2015.pdf](https://digitalinclusion.umd.edu/sites/default/files/DigitalInclusionBrief2015.pdf)