

PUBLIC LIBRARIES & EMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

TECHNOLOGY ACCESS

Public libraries offer free access to computers, broadband Internet, and wireless Internet

DIGITAL LITERACY

Public libraries offer a wide range of free computer and Internet use instruction, including classes on using employment resources

EXPERTISE

Public libraries offer expertise that helps people understand and use employment resources

ASSISTANCE

Public libraries help people search for jobs, create resumes, and apply for jobs online

COLLABORATION

Public libraries partner with outside agencies and individuals to offer classes on job seeking, to help people find and apply for jobs, and to help people start businesses and create business plans

With a presence in almost every community and the free public access technologies they provide, public libraries are well situated to provide the employment-seeking assistance people need. Millions of job-seekers use public library services to find job openings, work on resumes, and complete online applications.

77.5%

Libraries help people create resumes

84.1%

Libraries report that providing employment services is important to their communities

92.2%

Libraries help people access online job databases and resources

76.0%

Libraries help people apply for jobs online

The employment services that public libraries provide are particularly important for those who do not have high speed Internet or computer access in the home or lack technology skills and expertise. Public libraries are also open evenings and weekends, better meeting the needs of those who cannot access other employment services only available during the work day.

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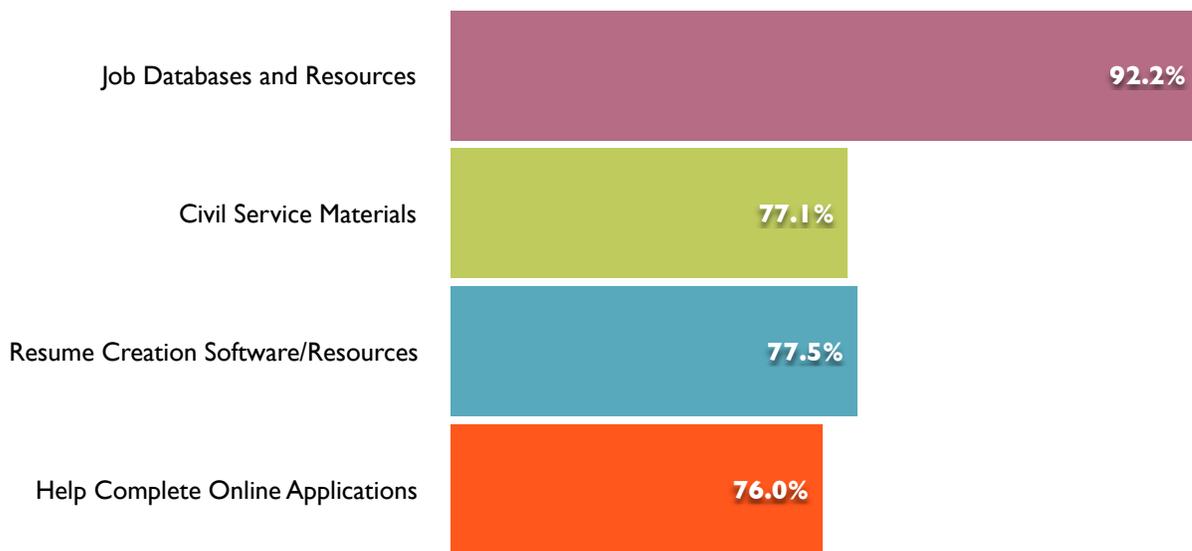


Figure 1. Selected Public Library Employment Support Services.

Employment Services

The unemployment rate in America rose sharply beginning in 2007, and remains high. In the current job market, digital literacy skills are critical to successful careers. Employers, from multi-national corporations to grocery stores, increasingly require job applications to be submitted online. In the recent economic downturn, many people are turning to public libraries for these skills and services. Libraries are seeing record use of their computers for job-seeking activities, social services, email access, education, and other purposes.¹

Public Libraries and Employment Services

Because of their presence in almost every community, and the free public access technologies they provide, libraries are well situated to provide the employment-seeking assistance people need. In 2009, over 30 million job-seekers used public library computers for activities including looking for job openings, working on resumes, and completing and sending applications.² Librarians themselves have identified the provision of employment services to job-seekers as the most important public

access technology service that they offer in their communities.

Libraries across the country are providing a number of employment seeking services (see Figure 1):

- 92.2% provide access to online job databases and resources;
- 77.1% provide access to online civil service materials;
- 77.5% offer software and other resources for resume creation;
- 76.0% help people complete applications online; and
- 31.3% offer formal technology training classes on accessing online job databases and resources and career-related websites.

In addition to direct employment seeking services, public libraries offer resources and training to people that will improve their job qualifications. Over 82.7% of public libraries offer point-of-use technology training and 44.3% offer formal technology training classes. Formal classes cover key digital literacy skills, including general computer use, Internet use, and Web searching and software use. Providing resources and databases for K-12, higher education, and adult/

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continuing education students is also a key public library service that increases employability.

The use of employment seeking services and resources at public libraries has an important impact on our nation's unemployed and under-employed. Every day, over 300,00 Americans get job-seeking help at their public library.³ Last year, over seven million people received job interviews after using library services and over three million were hired as a result of the use of library employment services.⁴

Key Issues and Challenges

Despite the importance of providing employment seeking services, libraries face several challenges (see Figure 2):

- 49.8% do not have enough staff to meet patron needs;
- 41.3% report that the staff does not have the necessary expertise;
- 37.2% have too few work stations; and
- In urban libraries, an insufficient number of workstations and workstation time limits are greater challenges than staff expertise.

Though these challenges can impede the ability of public libraries to help people successfully attain employment, public libraries have found

numerous ways to help people get back to work.

Libraries are forming a range of partnerships with employment and labor agencies both locally and nationally. Collaboration with outside agencies and individuals can help relieve some of libraries' staffing challenges while providing beneficial services for people.

Indeed, the U.S. Department of Labor Training and Employment Administration (ETA) issued guidelines to encourage local workforce investment boards, state workforce agencies, and One-Stop Career Centers to partner with public libraries.⁵ In partnership with the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), ETA seeks to promote public library-workforce partnerships that help people get back to work through such strategies as co-locating One-Stop Career Centers and libraries; using library space to provide career assistance and employment services; and training library staff about employment and other public workforce resources. Libraries are also forming successful connections with community organizations and members to assist their neighbors their employment endeavors.

Examples of successful statewide, local, and



Figure 2. Public Library Challenges to Providing Employment Services.

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community partnerships include:

- The North Carolina Department of Commerce, the Employment Security Commission, and the State Library within the Department of Cultural Resources partner to train library staff in resources available to help individuals search and apply for jobs. In part, the partnership produced a Job Search Toolkit wiki to facilitate communication and support (<http://jobsearchtoolkit.pbworks.com/>).⁶
- The Plainview Public Library in Illinois partners with local community members with human resources experience as well as the Mobile Workforce Center to provide job seeking services and instruction on a weekly basis. They also work with Goodwill and the local community college to share information about courses on job searches as well as employment opportunities.
- The East Brunswick Public Library in New Jersey opened a Business Resource Center specifically to respond to its community's employment seeking needs. Through the funding provided by the Broadband Technologies Opportunity Program, East Brunswick staff receive training on job searching resources from the New Jersey Department of Labor.
- The Maine State Library formed a partnership with the Department of Labor to determine how information could best be shared with patrons, as well as establishing two pilot programs to examine how resources were being used, creating more partnerships with local groups like career centers and the Workforce Investment Board.⁷

These collaborations between libraries and other agencies and organizations can improve employment services through a range of synergies, facilitate employment attainment, and better meet the employment needs of people.

Conclusion

Public libraries provide their communities essential employment and job-seeking support services. Libraries offer millions of people access

to employment and career information, certification and testing resources, assistance with online job applications, skills training and free public Internet and computing access. In addition, public libraries are open evenings and weekends, thus meeting the needs of millions who cannot access other government employment support services that are only available during the working day and week. State and local partnerships and collaborations with employment and workforce agencies can provide stronger community employment services that get people back to work.

References

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