iPAC
INFORMATION POLICY & ACCESS CENTER

PUBLIC LIBRARIES & EMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

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

SKILLS
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 small businesses

In a time of high unemployment in the United States, libraries have provided significant and impactful assistance to job seekers. Estimates show that as many as 30 million Americans rely on public libraries for career search assistance each year. [1] Librarians routinely assist individuals with finding and applying for jobs online, as well as writing résumés and cover letters. Libraries also assist in expanding local economies through small business development.

78.0%
Libraries help people create resumes

95.0%
Libraries offer workforce development training programs

95.6%
Libraries offer online job and employment resources

72.2%
Libraries help people apply for jobs online

30.0% percent of American households do not have broadband access, [2] and public libraries are the only provider of free Internet access inclusive of computers in 62.1% of American communities. [3] With major employers increasingly using online services as the primary means of listing open positions and only allowing applications to be completed online, library technologies are essential for many Americans to find employment.

DIGITAL INCLUSION SURVEY
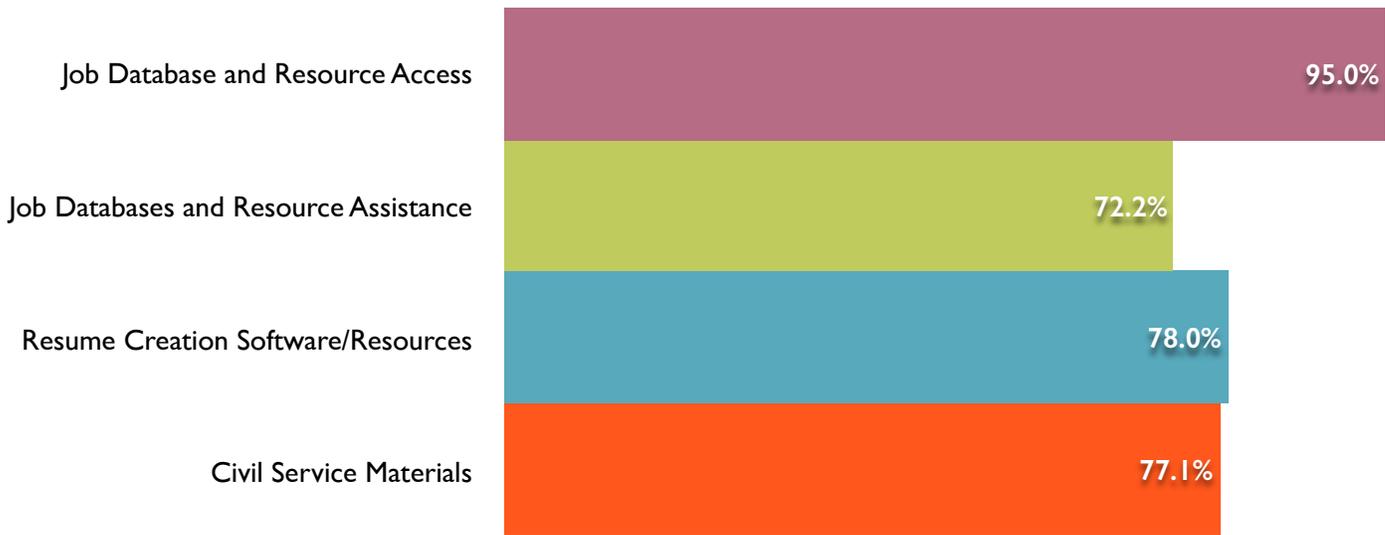
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Figure 1. Selected Public Library Employment Support Services

Public Libraries and Employment Services

Libraries go beyond bridging the digital inclusion gap by providing computer and Internet access to patrons who lack such employment necessities in their homes. 15.0% of Americans do not use the Internet, either due to personal choice or limited access. [4] Therefore, librarians also strive to assist individuals who lack digital literacy, which includes the skills needed to search for jobs online, fill out online forms such as applications, and use word processing tools to create strong, attractive résumés:

- 72.2% of libraries provide programs that assist patrons with access to jobs databases and job opportunity resources;
- 77.1% of libraries provide access to civil service exam materials; and
- 78.0% of libraries offer programs to help patrons create resumes and other employment materials.

Libraries and Workforce Development Skills

Digital literacy is not merely essential for finding employment. Instead, job seekers' eligibility for many positions is contingent upon their ability to use the Internet and productivity software in the workplace. In other cases, employed patrons can advance in their current careers, receive a promotion in their workplaces, or find better employment by developing or refining their digital literacy skills. Public libraries offer a significant range of training in areas that can assist patrons with career eligibility or advancement:

- 98.0% of libraries offer either formal or informal technology training to patrons;
- 49.3% of libraries offer formal training classes in general computer use;
- 12.4% offer online training materials in general computer use; and
- 30.6% offer individual help by appointment in general computer use.

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Libraries Help to Develop Small Businesses

Libraries also help to create new jobs in their communities by providing services to help patrons to create small businesses (see Figure 2):

- 58.9% of public libraries provide access to and assist patrons with online business information resources;
- 38.2% of public libraries help patrons develop small business plans; and
- 49.6% of libraries provide resources to help individuals develop their businesses;

Therefore, public libraries not only actively help patrons to fill the jobs that are available in their communities. Instead, they actively work to expand the number of available local careers.

Career Coaching and Community Partnerships

Many public libraries throughout the nation go beyond technological and résumé writing assistance. These libraries either take advantage of their own resources or partner with other organizations to provide advanced career services:

- The New Jersey State Library used funding from the Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program to develop NJWorks.org, a clearinghouse of career information for the unemployed and underemployed.[5] This website also directs New Jersey residents to their local library for further assistance from trained public librarians.
- The New York Public Library provides one-on-one career coaching, including targeted programs for recent college graduates in their twenties and for job seekers over the age of fifty.[6]
- The Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Career Coach buses take career counselors and Internet enabled computers to target areas throughout the state, including public libraries.[7]
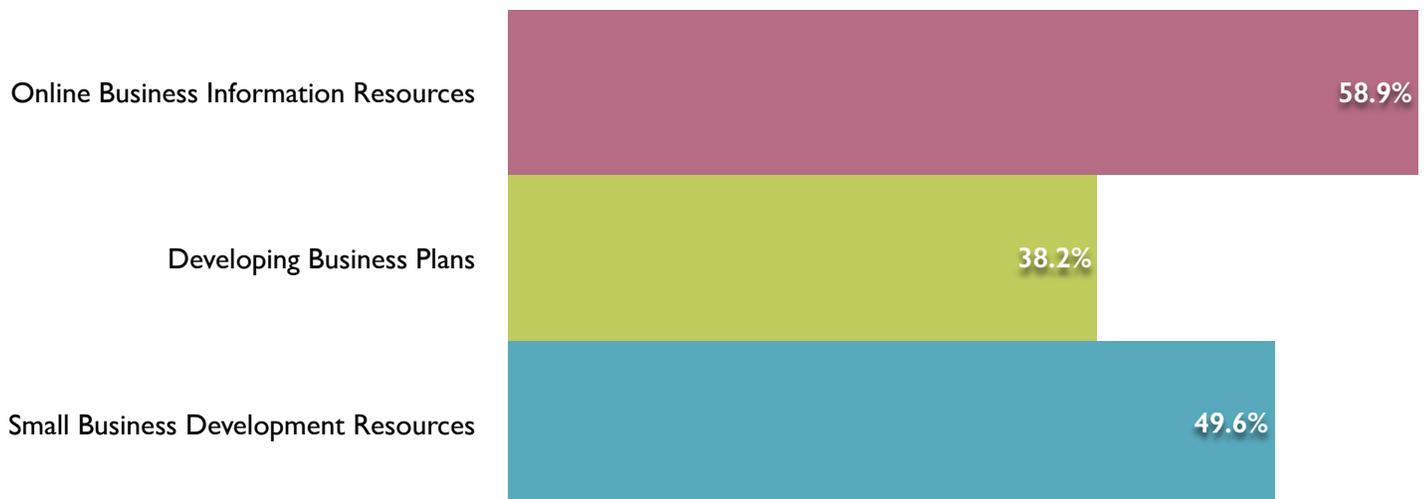

Figure 2. Public Libraries and Business Support Services

- Online Business Information Resources — 58.9%
- Developing Business Plans — 38.2%
- Small Business Development Resources — 49.6%

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These are just some of the innovative actions libraries are taking to enhance employment prospects for local patrons, with collaboration with other organizations being a key element of many of these efforts. 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.[8] 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.

On a local level, libraries routinely partner with outside organizations to provide patrons with employment and small business services. 23.5% of public libraries of public libraries work with partner organizations to help practice interview skills and develop resumes, 23.2% work with partners to assist patrons in developing business plans, and 33.8 % collaborate with outside groups to train the public in entrepreneurship and launching small businesses.

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 run and nonprofit employment support services that are only available during standard business hours on weekdays. State and local partnerships and collaborations with employment and workforce agencies can provide stronger community

employment services that not only get people back to work, but also allow patrons to achieve their full career potential or pursue new entrepreneurial opportunities.

References

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