

PUBLIC LIBRARIES & EMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

TECHNOLOGY

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

EXPERTISE

Public librarians offer expertise that helps people understand technology and Internet-enabled services and resources

SKILLS

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

ASSISTANCE

Public libraries help people search for jobs, create résumés, 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 provide significant and impactful assistance to job seekers. Estimates during the peak of unemployment show as many as 30 million Americans relying on public libraries for career search assistance.¹ Librarians routinely assist individuals with finding and applying for jobs online, training for employable skills, as well as writing résumés and cover letters. Libraries also assist in expanding local economies through small business development.

62.3%

Libraries offer online job and employment resources

73.1%

Libraries help people interview and apply for jobs

68.3%

Libraries help people access job opportunity databases

36.1%

Libraries provide work space for mobile workers

17.0% of all American households do not have broadband access, reaching up to 53.2% for rural communities.² Over the past few years, more than half of public libraries report being the only provider of both free Internet access and computers in American communities.³ With employers increasingly using online-only means for listing open positions and application submissions, library technologies are essential for many Americans to find employment.

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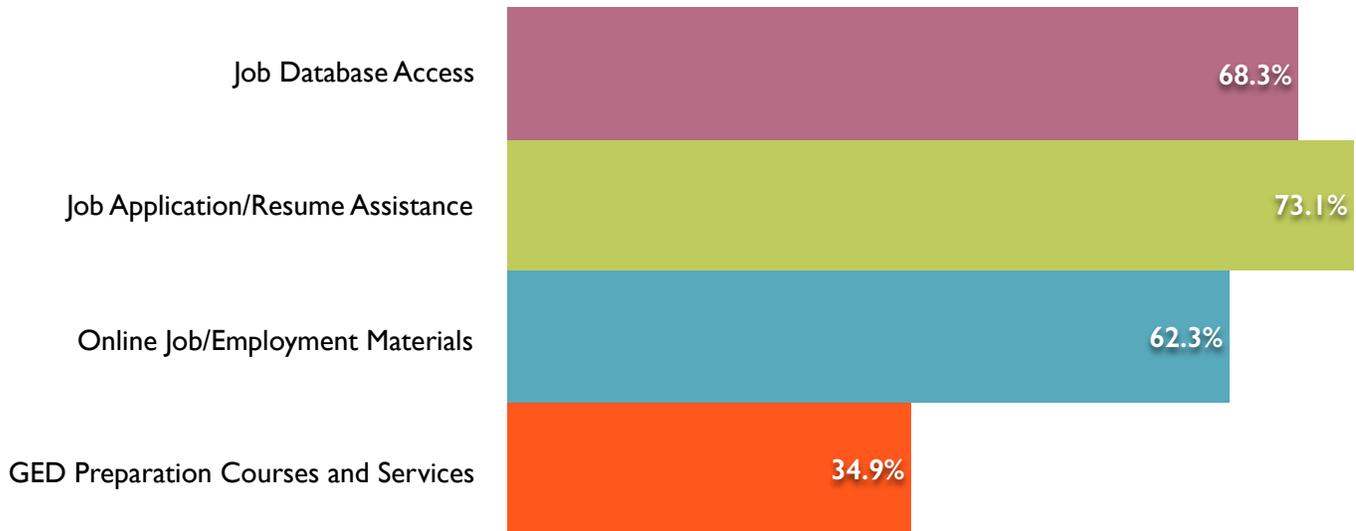


Figure 1. Selected Public Library Employment Support Services

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. More than a third of libraries (34.9%) offer GED courses and services that certify fulfillment of adult literacy skills. 15.0% of Americans report not using the Internet – a third of whom find the Internet too difficult to use.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:

- 73.1% of libraries offer programs to help patrons apply for jobs, create resumes, and interview;
- 68.3% of libraries provide programs that assist patrons with accessing employment databases and job opportunity resources; and
- 62.3% of libraries provide access to online job/employment materials.

These are services that communities need from their public libraries. Indeed, 34.0% of Hispanics and 28% of Blacks 16 or older indicated that

public libraries help people find jobs and pursue training “a lot.”⁵

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 or find better employment opportunities by developing their digital literacy skills. Public libraries offer a range of training in areas that can assist patrons with career eligibility or advancement:

- 89.9% of libraries offer technology training to patrons in general Internet use;
- 86.9% of libraries offer technology training in general computer use;
- 84.4% of libraries offer technology training to patrons in computer software use;
- 43.4% of library-based training in general computer use were formal classes;
- 40.7% of library-based training in software use were formal classes; and
- 38.9% of library-based training in Internet use were formal classes.

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Libraries Help to Develop Small Businesses

Libraries also help to create new jobs in their communities by providing services and space to help patrons to create small businesses:

- 47.9% of libraries provide access to and assist patrons with online business information resources;
- 36.1% of libraries provide work space(s) for mobile workers; and
- 32.2% of libraries offer programs that support small business development.

Out of the public libraries that offer programs supporting small business development (see Figure 2):

- 59.0% of libraries provide assistance with starting a small business;
- 49.3% of libraries help patrons develop small business plans;
- 39.4% of libraries offer space where patrons can conduct business affairs;
- 37.3% of libraries offer market research services; and
- 21.7% of libraries host networking opportunities for patrons.

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.⁶ This website also directs New Jersey residents to their local library for further assistance from trained public librarians.

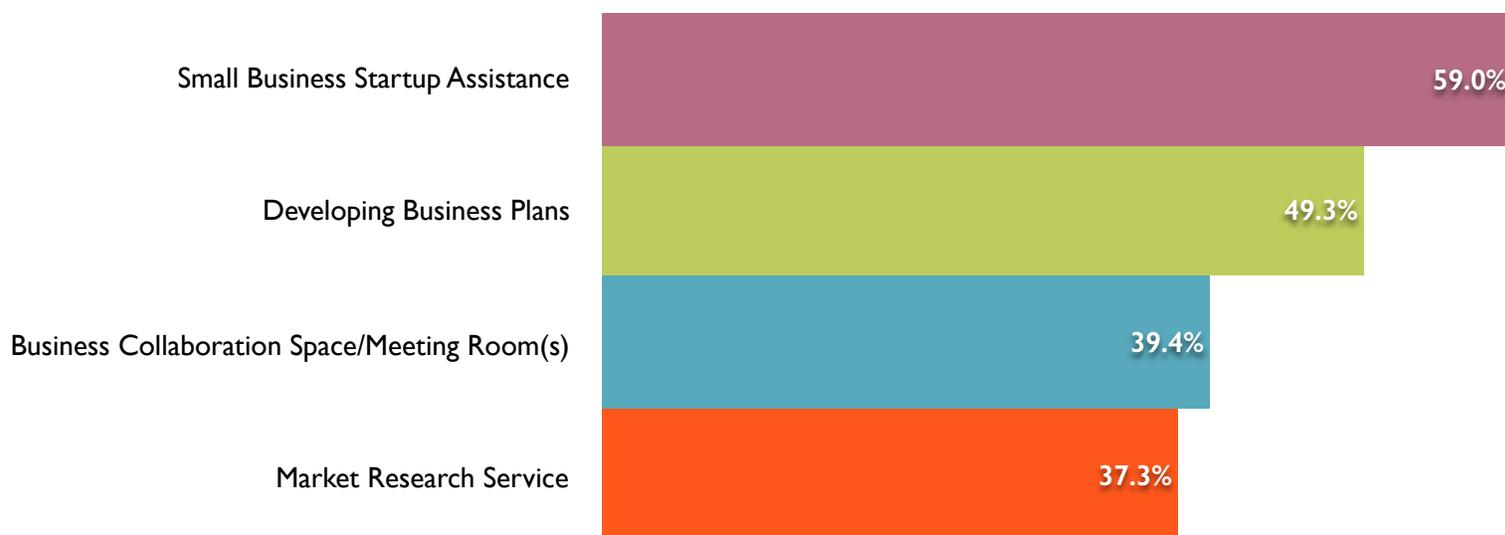


Figure 2. Public Libraries and Small Business Support

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- 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.⁷
- 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.⁸
- The Business Resource Innovation Center (BRIC) was started by the Carson City (Nevada) Library in partnership with the city and is a specialized facility that houses the city's offices of Business Development, Building, Engineering, Planning, Business Licenses and Permits.⁹ It also serves as a space for meetings and networking events, and its library affiliates offers one-on-one career counseling and seminars, among other employment resources and services.

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.¹⁰ 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.

30.9% of public libraries work with partner organizations to practice interview skills and develop resumes, 58.1% work with partners to assist patrons in small business development, and 29.2% work with partners to assist patrons in accessing and using online business information resources.

Libraries and Program Growth

Libraries that have the necessary financial support to make renovations and upgrades to their network capacity and general use space are able to offer job programming at higher rates than those that were not able to undergo renovations in the last five years (see Figure 3). There is a roughly 5% gap between renovated and non-renovated libraries that enable access employment databases as well as small business development resources. The gap is almost 10% for providing workspace for mobile workers. This indicates the funding and support a library receives from its community helps foster greater economic development.

Conclusion

Public libraries provide their communities with essential employment and job-seeking support services that individuals and businesses need. 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. Public libraries are also open evenings and weekends, 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 reach and discover better career opportunities.

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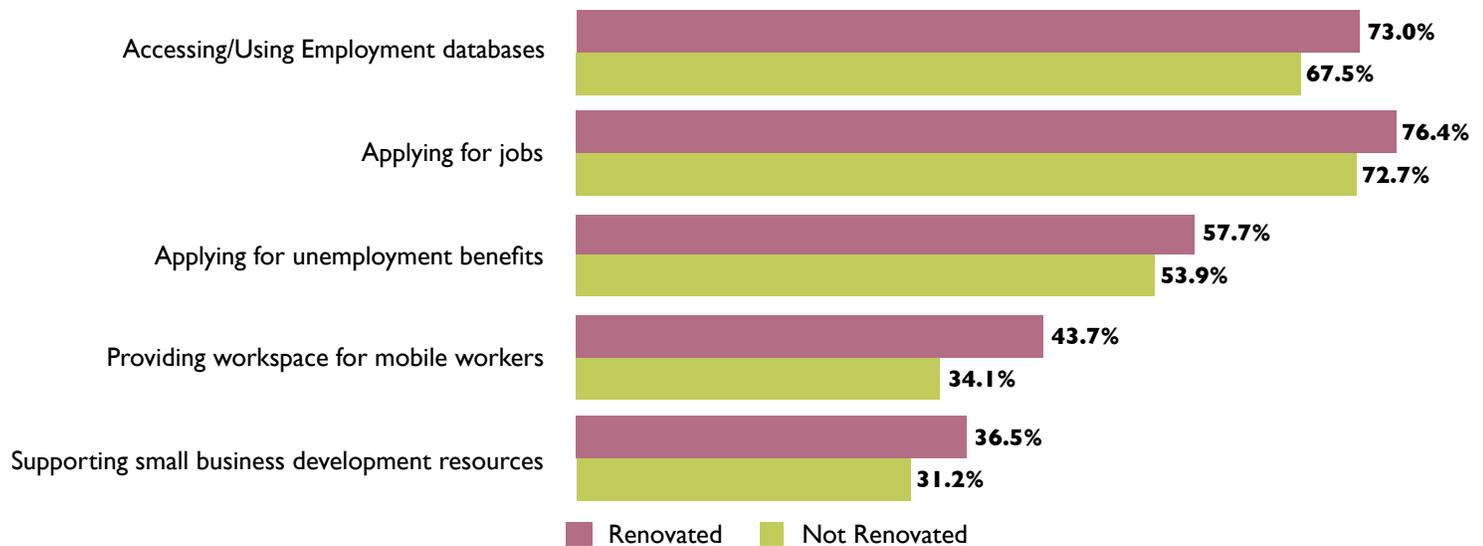


Figure 3. Public Library Program Offerings Overall for Libraries Renovated and Not Renovated in the Last Five years.

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