

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.

74.5%

Libraries help people
create resumes

91.8%

Libraries report that
providing employment
services is important to
their communities

90.9%

Libraries help people
access online job
databases and resources

71.9%

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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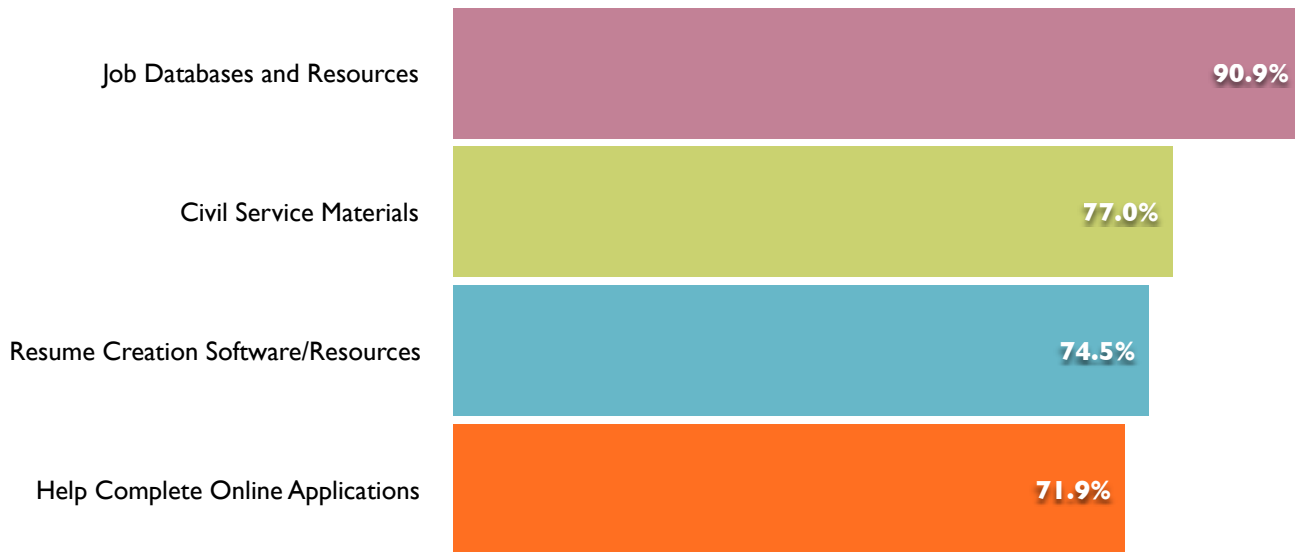


Figure 1. Selected Public Library Employment Support Services.

Employment Services

The unemployment rate in America has risen significantly since the financial crisis of 2007. 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):

- 90.9% provide access to online job databases and resources;
- 77.0% provide access to online civil service materials;
- 74.5% offer software and other resources for resume creation;
- 71.9% help people complete applications online; and
- 48.1% 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 78.8% of public libraries offer point-of-use technology training and 38.0% offer formal technology training classes. Formal classes cover key digital literacy skills, including general computer use, Internet use, and Web searching and software use. Participation in these instructional classes has increased over the past year at 27.6% of libraries overall, and to 40.8% of

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urban libraries. Providing resources and databases for K-12, higher education, and adult/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. 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.³

Key Issues and Challenges

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

- 55.9% do not have enough staff to meet patron needs;
- 43.4% report that the staff does not have the necessary expertise;
- 33.0% 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.⁴ 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.

Examples of successful statewide partnerships include:⁵

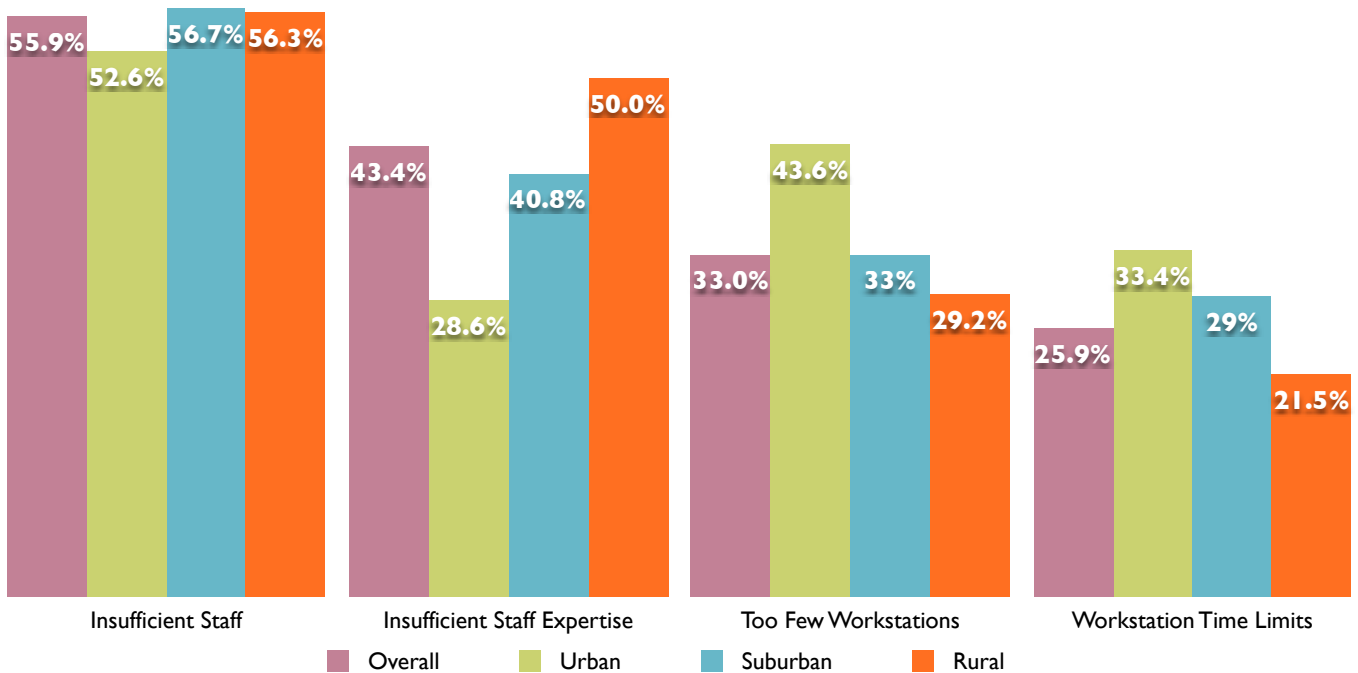


Figure 2. Public Library Challenges to Providing Employment Services.

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- 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/>).
- The States of Delaware and Virginia have engaged libraries as “Access Points” in their SHARE (Sharing How Access to Resources Empowers) Networks. Access Points are community-based and nonprofit organizations that are nonfinancial partners serving as employment information centers by providing job seekers and unemployed workers with career assistance and connections to One-Stop Career Centers via computer or direct referral.

Examples of local partnerships include:⁶

- The Anoka County Job Training Center (ACJTC), the local workforce investment board, and the Anoka County library system (Minnesota) have partnered to inform job seekers about each other’s resources and make referrals.
- The Seattle Public Library created a Job Resources Center at its central library location and branded it as a WorkSource Seattle-King County “connection site.” The Job Resources Center includes six dedicated computer terminals that patrons can use for up to two hours to conduct job search activities. Workforce development experts from South Seattle Community College, a WorkSource affiliate site, teach a series of workshops at the library aimed to build job seeking skills.

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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- ² Becker, S., Crandall, M. D., Fisher, K. E., Kinney, B., Landry, C., & Rocha, A. (2010). Executive Summary & Purpose and Methods, *Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries*. Retrieved from <http://tascha.washington.edu/usimpact>.
- ³ Becker, S. et al. (2010).
- ⁴ U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. (2010, June 29). Training and Employment Notice No. 50-09. Retrieved from <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEN/ten2009/ten50-09.pdf>.
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. (2010, June 29). Appendix: Highlights of Existing Partnerships Between the Public Workforce System and Public Libraries. Retrieved from <http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/attach/TEN/ten2009/ten50-09a1.pdf>.
- ⁶ U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. (2010, June 29). Appendix: Highlights.