# THRIVING WORKFORCE, THRIVING COMMUNITIES WITH LIBRARIES

## Providing Opportunity Across Idaho and the Nation

As technology further shifts the economic landscape, libraries prepare American jobseekers to enter the workforce, reskill to meet evolving requirements, and succeed as business owners.

Public libraries in Idaho 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.

### Skills building for success

The Portneuf District Library in Chubbuck, Idaho works to support youth as they start their adult lives and careers. The library's Adulting 101 program covers the basics of adulthood that are often not taught in school and frequently glossed over in the home such as job hunting and resume building, time management, budgeting, insurance, and so on. The program, while aimed at the 16–21-year-old range, has been popular among older community members as well. One mother who participated benefitted greatly from the budgeting class. Something clicked for her during the presentation and mock budget exercise and she commented that she felt empowered to take control of her finances for

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

- Libraries in Idaho 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.

> **"We work very closely with our community to understand where we can be of assistance."**
> —John Hartung, Community Library Network Director

the first time in nearly two decades. The library also partners with Journey's Developmental Disability Services to give youth interns and volunteers real-life work experience to help them identify the adaptations they may need and to find their strengths and limitations when it comes to employment.

## Responding to community needs

The Community Library Network in North Idaho includes eight locations and several mobile units covering 1,110 square miles in Kootenai County and western Shoshone County. Among other things, the library network delivers programs and hosts services to develop job readiness skills—an identified skills gap in the local economy. To that end, the Community Library Network recently added an Emerging Technologies Librarian to their staff and purchased a commercial bus to bring Science Technology Engineering Art and Math (STEAM) skills to the public. The libraries also provide tools such as 3D printing and Microsoft Office Suite products to encourage

> **"We want our community to be successful and so whether they are at the top or the bottom of the financial totem pole, we strive to give them the tools to succeed in their educational and employment endeavors."**
> —Portneuf District Library

skills development. Additionally, routine digital learning classes are held in partnership with local groups including the North Idaho College Workforce Training Center, the Idaho Department of Labor, and the Lakeland Literacy Project of North Idaho.

## Helping small businesses thrive

The Community Library Network also supports local businesses by offering workshops for start-ups such as one titled "Starting a Business in Idaho." Held in partnership with the North Idaho Small Business Development Center, workshop participants were introduced to different ways of entering into business—such as buying an existing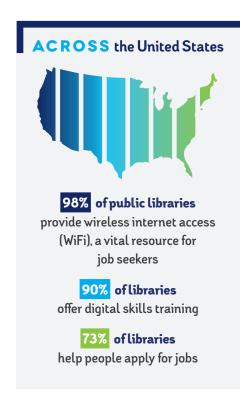 business, purchasing a franchise, or starting their own business. Additionally, the group discussed why businesses fail and how to mitigate this risk and explored topics including business structure, taxes, and insurance. In another library workshop, titled "Getting Your Website Up and Running," business owners learned about creating websites and ways to increase their visibility online. Participants explored site layout, accessibility,



Portneuf District Library

responsive formats, hosting platforms, and template services.

One attendee of the Community Library Network's business series was a young man looking to start a business making custom wooden gaming accessories. At the library he was able to learn the steps he needed to take to start his business. He then took what he learned, sought out business mentors in the community, built relationships with materials suppliers, and successfully started the business.



## ACROSS the United States

**98%** **of public libraries**
provide wireless internet access (WiFi), a vital resource for job seekers

**90%** **of libraries**
offer digital skills training

**73%** **of libraries**
help people apply for jobs

> **"Our libraries work to fill in the gaps between the skills people learn in school and the skills employers need to drive our local economies."**
> —John Hartung, Community Library Network Director

## ALA American Library Association