Presentation of learning: libraries' role in workforce and small business development

Mt. Auburn Associates

October 2022

Agenda

1. Introduction – research questions and methods

2. Libraries' workforce and small business development services

3. Libraries' role in workforce and small business development systems

4. Tracking and measurement

5. Implications of findings

MT. AUBURN
A S S O C I A T E S

Research questions

1. How can libraries help improve economic conditions in their communities through their activities related to workforce and business development?

2. What is the specific value of libraries to the broader workforce and business development systems in their communities?

3. How can the contribution of libraries to their communities' economies through business growth, skill development, and job access be measured?

4. What are key hypotheses that are emerging about the role of libraries in addressing their communities' workforce and business development needs that could be tested in future research?

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Phases of the work

Phase 1
2020

Literature review and theory of change

provided a scan of other research efforts and informed the Mt. Auburn team's approach to the work

Phase 2
2022

10 case studies

of a diverse set of library systems that are playing a role in providing workforce development and business development services

Phase 3
2022

Cross-site report

looks across the 10 library case study sites and identifies key themes and emerging hypotheses related to measuring outcomes

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Methods

1. The research team selected a purposive sample of 10 case study public library systems

   ▶ The universe of possible case studies identified through having been reported in a national journal article, book, or blog post as having a noteworthy approach to workforce or business development; and/or libraries nominated by the Project Advisory Group

   ▶ Selected a sample with a diversity of system sizes (number of branches), organizational types, state policy contexts, geographic sizes (rural, city, suburban communities), and types of workforce and business development programming

2. Case study research included interviews of branch staff, library system staff, workforce and business development stakeholders, and civic leaders for each case

   ▶ 8-15 interviews per site, for a total of 114 completed interviews

3. Case study interview analysis informed cross-site report

   ▶ Research team utilized individual case studies and NVivo analysis of interviews to generate cross-site themes

MT. AUBURN
A S S O C I A T E S

Overview of case study sites

1. Asotin County Library

2. Bangor Public Library

3. Brooklyn Public Library

4. Cambria County Library System

5. Hartford Public Library

6. Kenton County Public Library

7. Memphis Public Libraries

8. North Liberty Community Library

9. San Diego Public Library

10. St. Joe County Public Library

Clarkston, WA
Bangor, ME
Hartford, CT
Brooklyn, NY
North Liberty, IA
South Bend, IN
Johnstown, PA
Fort Mitchell, KY
San Diego, CA
Memphis, TN

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES
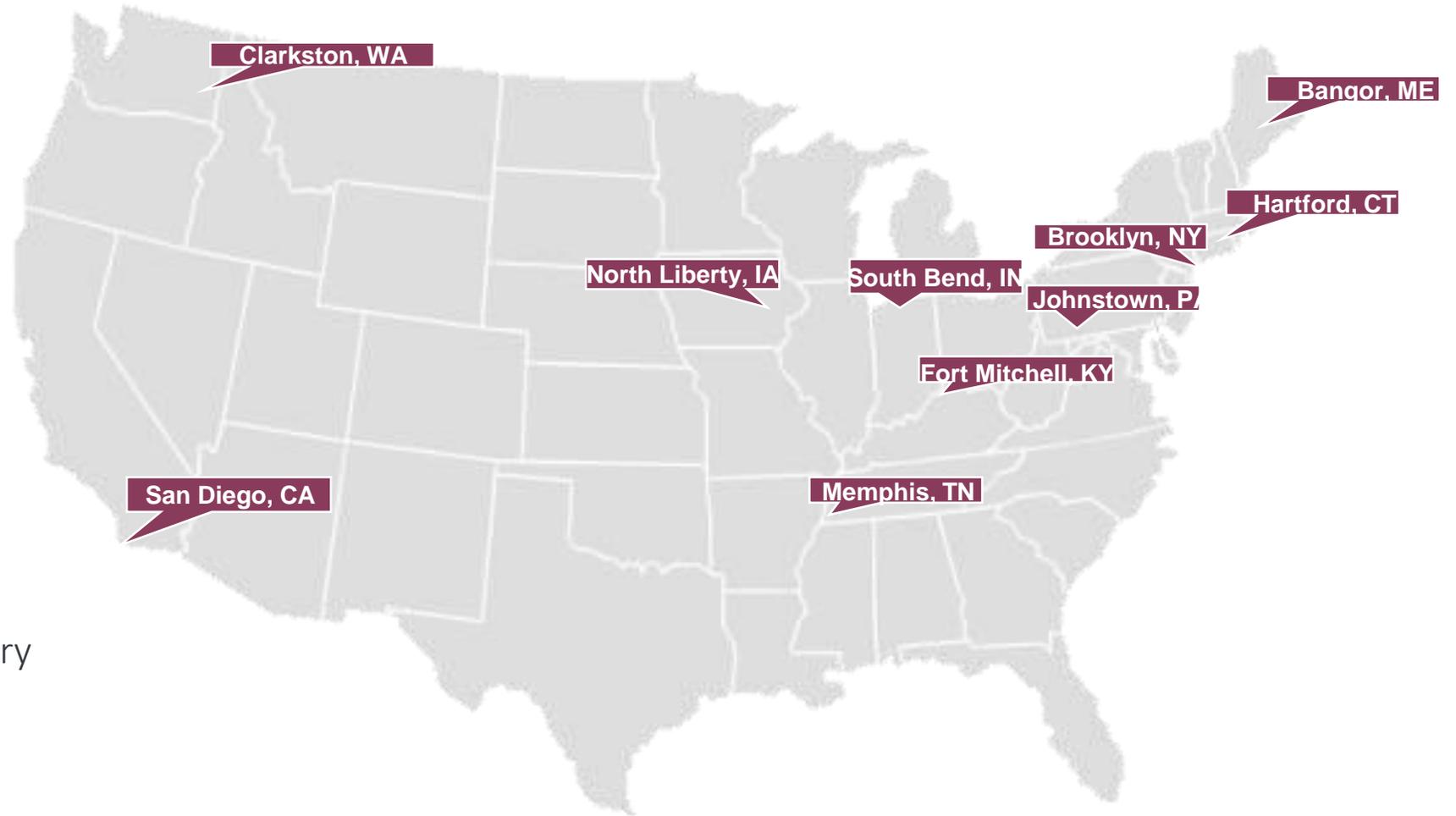
Overview of case study sites cont.

Library	Central branch city	State	Service area population	Number of branches	Organizational type	2019 budget	Budget per capita	FTE
Asotin County Library	Clarkston	WA	22,520	3	District	$904,351	$ 40.16	9.8
Bangor Public Library	Bangor	ME	32,262	1	Nonprofit	$2,281,847	$ 70.73	31.34
Brooklyn Public Library	Brooklyn	NY	2,504,700	60	Nonprofit	$153,512,307	$ 61.29	1092
Cambria County Library System	Johnstown	PA	104,316	14*	Nonprofit	$1,340,561	$ 12.85	20.03
Hartford Public Library	Hartford	CT	122,587	7	Nonprofit	$10,287,427	$ 83.92	103.3
Kenton County Public Library	Fort Mitchell	KY	165,410	3	District	$14,040,893	$ 84.89	140.4
Memphis Public Libraries	Memphis	TN	823,667	18	Municipal	$22,248,275	$ 27.01	296
North Liberty Community Library	North Liberty	IA	19,539	1	Municipal	$1,141,457	$ 58.42	12.38
San Diego Public Library	San Diego	CA	1,420,572	36	Municipal	$60,301,128	$ 42.45	402.63
St. Joe County Public Library	South Bend	IN	167,606	10	District	$16,631,208	$ 99.23	127.75

*The Cambria County Library System is a federated system of independent libraries, not branches.

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Libraries' workforce and small business development services

Role of libraries in workforce and business development system

		Workforce development	**Small business development**
Library designed and led services	**Standard services**	• Access to computers for resume writing • Help filling out applications or submitting resumes • Books and online information related to job search • Access to online training programs • Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources	• Access to computers for tax, regulatory, and other forms • Books and online information on entrepreneurship, small businesses, and specific industries • Access to databases for business plans and market studies • Access to technology for prototyping - 3D printer • Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources
	Specialized services	• Computer literacy workshops and training • Career readiness workshops and training • Occupational training • Adult education and ESOL training • Digital navigation and one-on-one coaching • Designated career space • Facilitate job search support groups	• Business plan development and other specialized workshops • Maker spaces, co-working space, media and technology space • Pitch contests and other specialized programs • One-on-one coaching or mentorship programs by dedicated small business staff • Entrepreneur networking events
Partnerships	**Community hub services**	• One-Stop Career Center location • Facilities for training providers • Training programs run with other partners • Host job fairs with partners • Trusted convener of community service providers • On-the-job training and internship placements	• Joint programs and workshop with other small business service providers such as SCORE • Facilities for small business support organizations to meet clients and hold workshops • Trusted convener of community service providers

MT. AUBURN ASSOCIATES

Spotlight: workforce development services at Memphis Public Libraries

Workforce development services are central offerings of MPL, which sees itself as a trusted guide to those looking to navigate complex systems and services across the city.

Standard services: JobLINC career center resources include an online job and career platform for job postings and employer contact, access to technology and internet services, and online adult learning and training resources.

Specialized services: JobLINC career specialists support job seekers with career counseling, one-on-one resume review, interview preparation, and job application assistance. JobLINC's primary location is within the central library, but its services reach across the city via JobLINC's Mobile Career Center. This 38-foot bus, equipped with ten laptops, internet access, digital resources, and specialized staff, aims to increase community engagement with the career services MPL offers without requiring individuals to travel to the central branch. MPL also oversees LINC211, the region's 2-1-1 system, and facilitates connections to social supports and services.

Community hub services: While the library directs the majority of MPL's workforce services, MPL does collaborate with other organizations and shares its space. For example, MPL hosts events such as job fairs in library space in collaboration with the city of Memphis and other partners.

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Spotlight: business development services at Hartford Public Library

Hartford Public Library offers services in support of small business development, including:

Standard services: Library resources include researchIT CT, a Connecticut State Library resource that gives cardholders access to a large set of collections, including EBSCO's Small Business Reference Center, which offers business and industry information that benefits business owners. Library staff offer ad hoc support to patrons with questions related to small business development

Specialized services: The Park Street branch established a women's entrepreneurship program, Mujeres Emprendedoras, based on HPL's relationship with a group of female immigrants who had started selling their own goods from their homes. In 2021, HPL secured a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving's Latino Endowment Fund to offer **small business development workshops (in Spanish) for these women and other community members.** The grant also covers the cost of childcare during the workshops and provides the women with $1,000 to purchase materials needed for the workshops. Workshop topics include banking, breadmaking, sewing, and artisanal art.

Community hub services: HPL provides community space for nonprofits and other entities to offer workshops to support entrepreneurs. For instance, HPL conducted outreach and recruitment for a series of SBA workshops at the main branch on how to start a business. HPL has offered these SBA workshops approximately two to four times annually.

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Key themes: library services

1 Standard services relevant to job seekers and entrepreneurs, which are available at all case study libraries, remain a critical and under-measured and tracked service.

2 Examples of libraries providing specialized services relevant to workforce development seem more prevalent than entrepreneurship and small business-type programming.

3 One of the more common workforce and business-related services is supporting digital literacy through basic computer access, one-on-one assistance, or specialized workshops.

Key themes: library services cont.

4 Co-location of career centers may benefit from cross-staff training, collaboration, and integration.

5 Most case study libraries concentrated specialized and community hub services in the central branch. Library branches primarily develop more ad hoc services to meet localized needs.

6 While the COVID-19 pandemic clearly presented many challenges for the case study libraries, it also led to some learning and new opportunities.

Libraries' role in workforce and small business development systems

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

SYSTEM LEVEL: Libraries are critical players in the workforce and business development systems

Value Add
- Universal access point for residents provides services broadly and to diverse communities
- Unique role as an institution of community trust focused on information access, community navigation, convening, and responding to community gaps

Library services and resources

Referrals to services

Partnerships between libraries and other systems

Referrals to services

Community workforce and business dev. services and resources
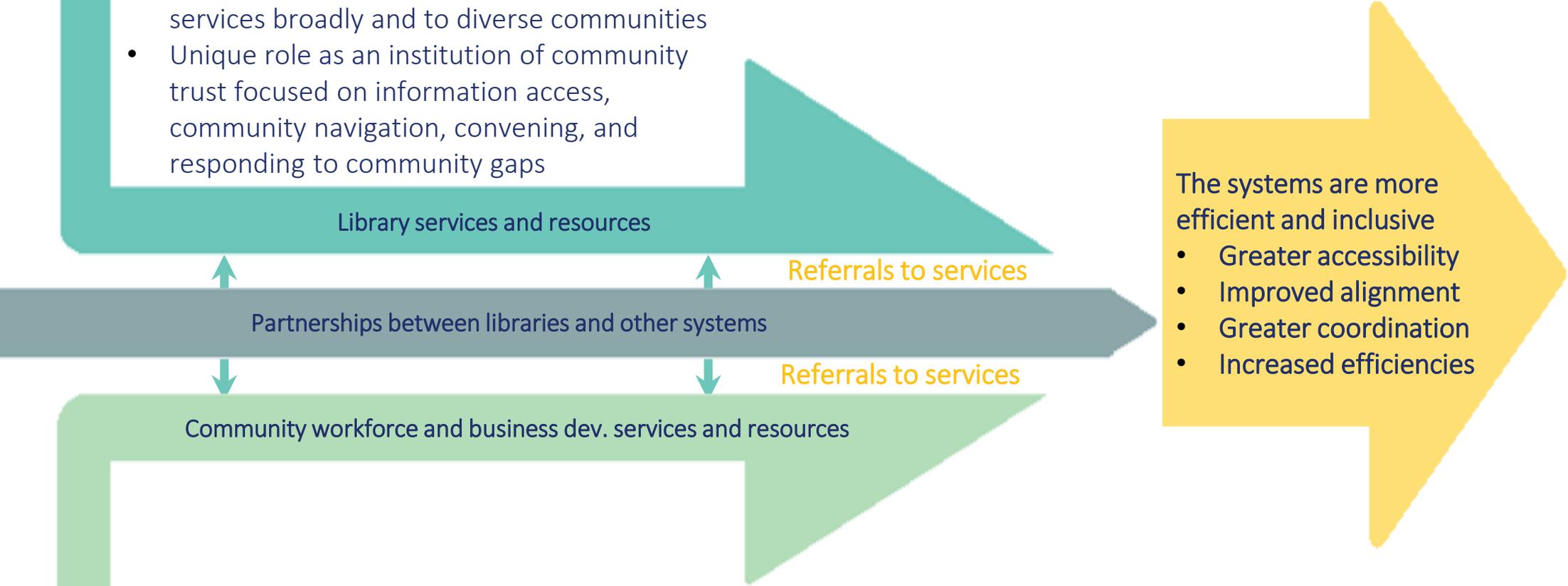
The systems are more efficient and inclusive
- Greater accessibility
- Improved alignment
- Greater coordination
- Increased efficiencies

The community achieves increased economic resilience

Context: Size of community, economic conditions, community ecosystem, state enabling environment

Relationships with other organizations in the systems

Informal relationships: Librarians are often aware of other organizations in their community that provide services to job seekers and entrepreneurs. Both the libraries and other community organizations may provide information to community members about each other's services, such as promoting events or sharing informational materials such as flyers or brochures.

Formal partnerships: Most commonly, formal relationships involve providing space within the library facility for a community partner to serve individuals. Other formal partnerships include jointly designing and operating a training program or workshop. Common library partners include the local WIOA one-stop system, the SBA SCORE system or SBDC.

Multi-stakeholder engagement: Some library systems went beyond having one-on-one relationships with other organizations to engaging more deeply in their community's civic infrastructure. In some cases, it has meant having the library represented at larger working groups in the community on workforce or economic development issues. In other cases, the library itself is playing more of a leadership role in convening other workforce or business development entities.

MT. AUBURN
A S S O C I A T E S

Relationships with other organizations in the systems: examples
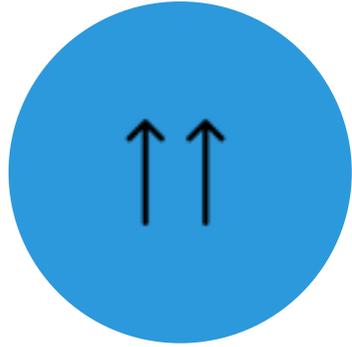
Informal relationships

- **Bangor Public Library** staff reach out to other workforce service providers to facilitate cross-referrals and cross-marketing of services.
- **North Liberty Community Library** forged many relationships throughout its community as well as Iowa City.
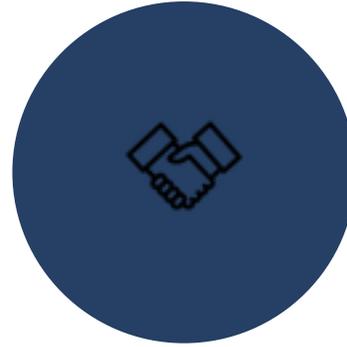
Formal partnerships

- The most common formal partnership among case study libraries was between the library system and the community's career center.
- For example, **Cambria County Library** partners extensively with co-located CareerLink, and **Kenton County Public Library** has a Kentucky Career Centers access point at a library branch.

Multi-stakeholder engagement

- **Brooklyn Public Library** plays a convening role in the local workforce and business development ecosystems, including by bringing together adult literacy organizations.
- **Asotin Community Library** took the lead in developing a Broadband Action Team, and participates in a "career development team" with local organizations.

Contribution to system outcomes

System reach and inclusiveness

Libraries increase the number of residents in a community who are receiving workforce or business development services by:

▷ Serving as the system's front door

- ▶ Accessible locations
- ▶ Seen as safe and welcoming spaces
- ▶ Workforce and business development system navigation
- ▶ Provide access to critical social services

▷ Addressing the needs of specific populations

System efficiency

Libraries help leverage limited resources in the system to contribute to better outcomes by:

▷ Reducing service duplication through system alignment

▷ Providing technology access and digital literacy services, basic literacy services, and ESOL

▷ Providing free access to online workforce and small business training resources and data

MT. AUBURN
A S S O C I A T E S

Key themes: libraries' role in workforce and business development systems

1   **Expanding the reach of the existing systems,** in terms of number of residents and involvement of specific often-excluded population groups, may be one of the more significant outcomes of public libraries in contributing to community economic well-being.

2   The most important role that many libraries play in their broader workforce and small business development systems may be **providing access to technology and services designed to strengthen digital literacy.**

3   Public libraries that develop **deep multi-stakeholder engagement may be able to contribute to greater system-related outcomes** because a broader set of community stakeholders understand the resources that the library could provide in the community.

4   **Dynamic, proactive leadership can help integrate libraries into the community** and create a culture of collaboration among the staff.

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Tracking and measurement

Library Level: Outcomes of Libraries' Role

Standard services

Specialized services

Community hub

High number of access points leads to increased reach

Access to technology and internet makes system more inclusive, reaching residents often left out

Referrals to other community service providers increases reach and efficiency for other stakeholders in system

Direct programs and services increase skills of participants, access to jobs, and ability to start or grow a businesses

Increased alignment increases efficiency in resource deployment

Libraries develop greater number of partnerships and increased referrals from other community providers

DIRECT INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES
- Skill attainment
- Job attainment
- Business starts
- Business growth

EMPLOYER OUTCOMES
- More appropriate applicants
- Reduced time searching for talent

SYSTEM OUTCOMES
Workforce and business development systems are more efficient and inclusive

COMMUNITY OUTCOMES
- Increased levels of educational attainment and skills in workforce
- Increased employment opportunities through business establishment and business growth
- Improved community economic vitality

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Existing efforts: types of measurement

- Library measurement of workforce and business development services is often limited to direct outputs and outcomes related to program activity and anecdotal evidence of impact.

- Case study libraries reported collecting:

Most case study libraries	Some case study libraries
• General library metrics • Online databases and web-based analytics • Program outputs • Anecdotal evidence of program impact	• Information requests • One case study library tracks referrals to the in-house career center • Program outcomes

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Spotlight: Tracking and measurement efforts at Brooklyn Public Library

At BPL, two full-time staff are in charge of data collection, analysis, and support. They help branch staff utilize program data and assess population-level statistics to understand their communities.

1. **General library metrics**: Tracks basic data such as number of programs, circulation, and WiFi use per public funder requirements. The department sees itself as building the data, creating visualizations of the data, and working with BPL staff to ensure they understand how to use the data.

2. **Information requests**: BPL has software that categorizes all email and chat reference requests. Business & Career Center staff record the number and type of questions they answer on a daily basis.

3. **Usage of online resources:** BPL can get data on how many patrons have accessed some of the available online learning tools. Each of BPL's vendors has its own way of keeping track of who uses its services and how they use the service.

4. **Program outputs:** BPL staff who provide direct services to patrons track the number of people they serve. As part of this effort, staff track when and for how long the service was provided.

5. **Program outcomes:** The library collects pre-/post-TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) data, reports outcome data to the state Department of Education, and submits workforce program employment data to the state for wage record matching. Library staff administer regular surveys of the entrepreneurs who have participated in PowerUP!. In addition to surveys after class completion and an evaluation survey at the end of the program, staff follow up with a survey two years after completion.

6. **Anecdotal evidence of impact:** Patrons often email and report to BPL staff about how library services have helped them obtain employment, advance their careers, or start a business. While not consistent, the librarians often keep emails that indicate a patron's satisfaction or outcomes and use these to share positive stories with funders. For the PowerUP! and BKLYN Fashion Academy, the staff have an alumni network, which affords them a better sense of some of the outcomes that participants have achieved over time.

MT. AUBURN
A S S O C I A T E S

Common challenges to measurement

Staff capacity

Library staff have **limited time to assume data collection and reporting** responsibilities.

Library staff may lack **underlying skill sets** related to indicator development, data collection, and reporting.

Culture of privacy

Libraries' **commitment to patron privacy prevents data collection** during program registration.

Collecting **personally identifiable information is a particular concern**, hindering program follow-up.

Attribution

Job seekers and entrepreneurs that libraries serve often also **interact with other service providers in the community.**

Collecting and reporting data on outcomes could at best be used to communicate **a library's role in** *contributing* **to outcomes rather than attributing the outcomes to libraries.**

Technology systems

Data collection systems **might currently rely on paper and pencil, creating burdensome transfer** to databases.

Libraries deal with **competing data requests and reporting platforms**, complicating data collection.

Follow-up data collection

Follow-up data are **notoriously difficult to collect across all sectors.**

Patron mobility and the limited engagement of some library programs can prevent effective follow-up after a program.

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Motivations to measure

Internal

Learning

- Use of resources and programming
- Efficient use of staffing capacity
- Effectiveness of training and one-on-one assistance for program improvement
- Understanding community needs

Internal/External
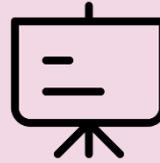
Making the Case

- Presentations on value of library to municipal, county, and state officials
- Communications to the public on value of library
- Value of partnerships

External

Funder Requirements

- Reporting on outputs and outcomes
- Entering data in funder databases
- Formal evaluations

Key themes: tracking and measurement

1 It may be unrealistic to think that most public libraries will be able to complete a rigorous analysis of the outcomes of their workforce and business development activities.

2 Libraries need to have a compelling motivation to engage in often time-consuming and complex efforts to track outcomes.

3 The approach to data collection and measurement may differ depending upon the audience and purpose.

MT. AUBURN
A S S O C I A T E S

Key themes: tracking and measurement cont.

4 Creating a culture of learning and having a strong champion on the staff for using data for learning may help to promote staff interest in tracking the outputs and outcomes of their work.

5 Measuring workforce- and small business-related outcomes with any level of rigor may require a relatively high level of capacity through specialized staff and data systems.

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Implications of findings

Potential implications for libraries

1. **Relationships, relationships, relationships.** Libraries' relationships with other service providers and community organizations maximize their system impact.

   ▶ Strong relationships mitigate risks of replicating services, make it more possible to align and fill gaps.

   ▶ When relationships are strong, other organizations in the community see the importance of the library, refer more job seekers/entrepreneurs, and are more likely to collaborate with the library.

2. **Standard services help libraries make an impact.** They play a significant role in adding value to the greater systems, even simply by providing computer access.

3. **Libraries step in to provide digital literacy support.** These services add value to local systems, and libraries are uniquely positioned to do it well.

4. **Library facilities are key community assets.** Libraries are accessible, shared spaces that patrons who might not otherwise go to a career center perceive as welcoming.

5. **Measurement may be best focused on system impacts.** Measuring program outcomes is difficult and may not best serve libraries. Improving system impact measurement could enable libraries to share their stories more effectively.

MT. AUBURN
A S S O C I A T E S

Overcoming challenges to program outcome measurement

1. Developing more systematic approaches to presenting data on service utilization and patron feedback

2. Using creative approaches to address privacy concerns

    ▶ Strategies may include double-blind coding of participant data to eliminate confidentiality concerns or implementing waivers that participants sign to enable sharing of limited data with explicit program partners

    ▶ Several libraries also discussed using amalgamated profiles that they created through their databases to identify library trends and adjust programming

3. Developing specialized instruments to track patron use of standard services

4. Tracking referrals by library staff and by other service providers

5. Working with partners to track hub services

MT. AUBURN
ASSOCIATES

Measuring system improvements

The case studies provide some evidence of the type of measures that could be useful in making the case of the library's role in the system:

1. **Tracking referrals to and from the public library:** The role librarians often play as system navigators, referring patrons to other service providers, is a role that libraries rarely measure. Similarly, other service providers refer residents to the library for basic skills necessary to participate in their programs.

2. **Tracking use of online training programs and skills attained through these programs**: Online training programs are an efficient way of building workforce readiness and skills. Data are available on how patrons use these services, but libraries do not use these data to their advantage.

3. **Tracking the number of patrons using library computers for workforce- or business-related activities**: Anecdotal evidence suggests that many patrons come to the library to use the computers when they are seeking employment or thinking about starting a business. Libraries rarely track the scale of this usage.

Final research products

Full report and case studies available at https://measuresthatmatter.net/