

# PUBLIC LIBRARIES' ROLE IN WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:

A look across ten public library systems



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A look across ten public library systems

## FINAL REPORT

SUBMITTED TO: CHIEF OFFICERS OF  
STATE LIBRARY AGENCIES (COSLA) and  
INSTITUTE OF MUSEUM AND LIBRARY  
SERVICES (IMLS)



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| TABLE OF CONTENTS .....   | ii        |
| TABLE OF FIGURES .....  | iv        |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....   | v         |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....   | vi        |
| <b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| STUDY PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND .....  | 1         |
| CONTEXT.....  | 3         |
| METHODOLOGY.....  | 7         |
| ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT.....   | 9         |
| <b>2. LIBRARIES’ WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES .....</b>  | <b>12</b> |
| OVERVIEW .....  | 12        |
| WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES.....   | 12        |
| SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES.....  | 18        |
| ADMINISTRATION OF WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES.....  | 23        |
| IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC.....   | 28        |
| SUMMARY: OBSERVATIONS OF LIBRARIES’ WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES                               | 30        |
| <b>3. PUBLIC LIBRARIES’ ROLE IN WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS .....</b>                          | <b>32</b> |
| INTRODUCTION .....  | 32        |
| RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SYSTEM.....   | 33        |
| SYSTEM OUTCOMES .....   | 34        |
| FACTORS RELATED TO LIBRARY APPROACHES TO INTERACTING WITH WORKFORCE<br>AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS ..... | 38        |
| SUMMARY: OBSERVATIONS ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES’ ROLE IN WORKFORCE<br>AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS .....        | 40        |
| <b>4. MEASURING LIBRARIES’ CONTRIBUTION TO WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT.....</b>                        | <b>43</b> |
| INTRODUCTION .....  | 43        |
| EXISTING EFFORTS TO MEASURE WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES .....                               | 44        |
| OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO MEASURING OUTCOMES .....   | 49        |
| SUMMARY: OBSERVATIONS ON TRACKING WORKFORCE AND<br>BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES.....                         | 52        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>5. KEY THEMES AND HYPOTHESES FOR FURTHER TESTING.....</b> | <b>55</b>  |
| INTRODUCTION .....   | 55         |
| KEY THEMES .....   | 55         |
| BUILDING ON THE LEARNING .....                               | 57         |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>APPENDIX A: SUMMARY CASE STUDIES .....</b>                | <b>A-1</b> |
| SUMMARY: Asotin County Library.....                          | A-2        |
| SUMMARY: Bangor Public Library .....                         | A-4        |
| SUMMARY: Brooklyn Public Library.....                        | A-6        |
| SUMMARY: Cambria County Library System.....                  | A-8        |
| SUMMARY: Hartford Public Library .....                       | A-10       |
| SUMMARY: Kenton County Public Library .....                  | A-12       |
| SUMMARY: Memphis Public Libraries .....                      | A-14       |
| SUMMARY: North Liberty Community Library .....               | A-16       |
| SUMMARY: San Diego Public Library .....                      | A-18       |
| SUMMARY: St. Joe County Public Library .....                 | A-20       |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY.....</b>                          | <b>B-1</b> |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>APPENDIX C: ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS.....</b>               | <b>C-1</b> |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>APPENDIX D: GLOSSARY OF TERMS.....</b>                    | <b>D-1</b> |

# TABLE OF FIGURES

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| FIGURE 1. Map.....  | 2   |
| FIGURE 2. Role of libraries in workforce and business development system.....             | 7   |
| FIGURE 3. Theory of change: outcomes .....  | 8   |
| FIGURE 4. Overview of case study libraries.....   | 9   |
| FIGURE 5. Workforce development services.....   | 12  |
| FIGURE 6. Workforce development: standard services.....                                   | 13  |
| FIGURE 7. Workforce development: specialized services.....                                | 14  |
| FIGURE 8. Workforce development: community hub services.....                              | 16  |
| FIGURE 9. Business development services.....  | 18  |
| FIGURE 10. Business development: standard services.....                                   | 19  |
| FIGURE 11. Business development: specialized services.....                                | 20  |
| FIGURE 12. Business development: community hub services.....                              | 22  |
| FIGURE 13. Theory of change: system level .....   | 33  |
| FIGURE 14. Common online workforce training programs offered by case study libraries..... | 37  |
| FIGURE 15. Library characteristics of ten case study sites.....                           | 39  |
| FIGURE 16. State policy environment in ten case study sites.....                          | 40  |
| FIGURE 17. Motivations and audience for measuring performance.....                        | 48  |
| FIGURE A1. Research questions.....  | B-1 |
| FIGURE A2. Ten case study sites.....  | B-4 |
| FIGURE A3. Case study interviews by site.....   | B-5 |

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Beth Siegel, President and Founder, Mt. Auburn Associates (project director)

Emily Doglio, Senior Associate, Mt. Auburn Associates (project manager)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) instituted Measures that Matter (MtM) in partnership with the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA) to address challenges to public library data collection and use. To increase understanding of what it might take to measure community wellbeing, MtM decided to support a pilot effort that had four objectives: 1) developing a conceptual framework that articulates libraries' roles in workforce and business development; 2) exploring libraries' design and delivery of library workforce and business development services, engagement with partners, and use of outcome assessment tools; 3) identifying new, potential tools to measure the contribution of libraries to help build library capacity; and 4) generating hypotheses for informing future research.

This report provides a summary of the findings of this pilot effort. The methodology included conducting a literature review, developing a theory of change, and undertaking ten case studies of library systems across the U.S. To select the case studies, the Mt. Auburn team first defined the universe of influential libraries as those that literature reported as having a noteworthy approach or those that the Advisory Group recommended as having relevant services based upon its knowledge of the field. Using this process, the team identified 85 library systems and selected ten case study library systems, diverse in size, type of community, administrative structure, and location. The case study sites are:

1. **Asotin County Library (ACL), Washington:** a small library system in rural, eastern Washington State notable for its direct workforce development services, including its Job and Career Catalyst Center.
2. **Bangor Public Library (BPL), Maine:** a single-outlet system in a small city, which established a co-working space in 2021 to respond to perceived community needs.
3. **Brooklyn Public Library (BPL), New York:** one of the largest library systems in the country, which has implemented many innovative programs, such as a business plan competition, the Business & Career Center, and Adult Learning Centers.
4. **Cambria County Library System (CCLS), Pennsylvania:** a federated library system consisting of 14 independent libraries, has a full-service CareerLink site on the first floor of the Cambria Public Library, hosts job fairs, and provides digital literacy programs.
5. **Hartford Public Library (HPL), Connecticut:** a small city library that has operated The American Place since 2000, covering adult education, careers, and immigrant services, and also houses a satellite of the region's American Jobs Center (AJC).
6. **Kenton County Public Library (KCPL), Kentucky:** a suburban system with three branches in northern Kentucky operates a Career and Job Services Division, serves as a Kentucky Career Center Access Point, supports a management-level job search support group, and hosts job fairs.
7. **Memphis Public Libraries (MPL), Tennessee:** a city library system with 18 outlets that operates JobLINC and a Small Business Center at the central branch, and the Mobile Career Center, a bus equipped with ten laptops, internet access, digital resources, and specialized staff.
8. **North Liberty Community Library (NLCL), Iowa:** a single-outlet system serving a

small suburban city, NLCL plays a core role in its community's workforce and business development systems as a connector and information resource.

9. **St. Joe County Public Library (SJCPL), Indiana:** a district system with ten outlets, SJCPL recently created the Community Learning Center at its main branch and is the implementation partner for the Bendable pilot, an innovative lifelong learning initiative.
10. **San Diego Public Library (SDPL), California:** a large municipal system hosts a Career Center and offers business development services, including a makerspace, a Patent and Trademark Resource Center, and an emergent Microbusiness Center.

## WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

The project team developed a framework for the various ways in which public libraries support workforce and business development in their communities:

- *Standard services* are typically unscheduled, accessible to all patrons, and do not require staff with highly specialized knowledge or skills. The libraries' reference and information staff often provide these services and could include helping patrons access online resources or use a computer.
- *Specialized services* require more customized staff training for delivery and may require patrons to formally "opt-in" or register for programming. These services could include workshops run by library staff or specialized equipment and facilities.
- *Community hub services* are developed and/or delivered in partnership with other agencies and often hosted in library facilities. These could include hosting services provided by another community

organization or partnering on a training program.

Using this framework, the research team identified the types of workforce and business development activities by case libraries.

### Workforce development

- *Standard services:* Activities include general computer use, job data bank search, access to related collection material and specialized online programs, and staff assistance to help access resources. All public libraries provide some level of standard services, but the breadth of resources and the expertise of library staff vary significantly.
- *Specialized services:* These services include designated workforce development space and staff, technology workshops, work-readiness workshops, career coaching, digital navigation, support groups, and adult literacy and occupational training and certification.
- *Community hub services:* Libraries, in partnership with other workforce development providers, provide space for public workforce entities such as one-stop centers, partner with adult education providers, host job fairs, and partner with other workforce service providers.

### Small business development

- *Standard services:* While not as deep as workforce standard services, case study libraries provide entrepreneurs with access to technology, reference librarian assistance, and access to collections and digital resources.
- *Specialized services:* Efforts include having dedicated small business development staff, providing makerspaces and media and technology studios, having specialized resource centers, and providing specialized programs, such as business pitch contests.

- *Community hub services:* The case studies identified a number of public libraries partnering with local Small Business Development Centers and SCORE offices and hosting services and meetings for small business-related organizations.

The delivery and management of these services varied across the case study libraries. Generally, the libraries provided standard services through their general reference librarians. In some cases, libraries hired more specialized program staff or provided specialized training for their librarians. In case study libraries with multiple branches, the staff at the system level generally oversaw most of the specialized and community hub services. Funding for workforce development services derived primarily from the general operating budget, with occasional grants to support distinct initiatives. Finally, libraries use a broad range of marketing strategies to promote and raise awareness about their programming.

The case studies also examined the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the libraries' approach to meeting the workforce and business development needs of residents and found that, during the pandemic, libraries strengthened and leveraged relationships with other organizations, increasing awareness of the libraries' roles in their communities. The COVID-19 pandemic also re-emphasized the importance of digital literacy and access to technology. Finally, case study libraries demonstrated a foundational culture of innovation and a strong connection to community needs that enabled them to adapt to the crisis and changing environment.

### ROLE IN WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS

The initial theory of change hypothesized that libraries contribute to community wellbeing directly through the services they offer and indirectly through their role in the community's workforce and business development systems. The case study libraries provide some evidence

that, while difficult to measure, libraries could contribute to two types of system outcomes through informal relationships, formal partnerships, and engaging in cross-sector groups:

1. **Contributing to system reach and inclusiveness:** Perhaps the most significant role that libraries play in the workforce and business development systems is increasing the number of residents who are receiving workforce or business development services. Case study libraries were serving as the system's front door for local residents seeking assistance because they perceive libraries as accessible in terms of their location as well as safe and welcoming places. In addition, public libraries may be expanding the reach of the system by addressing the needs of specific populations, notably those with more limited access to services.
2. **Contributing to system efficiency:** The case studies provide evidence that some public libraries may be contributing to more efficient systems by providing technology access and basic literacy services and through offering free access to online workforce and small business training resources.

### MEASURING LIBRARIES' CONTRIBUTION

Although there is interest on the part of some public libraries to better measure the outcomes related to their workforce and business development activities, it is rare to find libraries collecting individual-level program or outcome data that includes personally identifiable information (PII), linking with other data sources to measure outcomes, or pursuing long-term follow-up to develop a longitudinal database of patron participation and outcomes. Equally as important, there are very few, if any, efforts to measure how the public library services contribute to extending the reach and improving the efficiency of the

current workforce and small business development systems.

The case studies provided examples of public libraries' data collection in the following categories:

- general library metrics
- information requests and referrals
- online databases and web-based analytics
- program outputs
- specific program outcomes
- anecdotal evidence of program impact

Like many service organizations, libraries face challenges in collecting, analyzing, and reporting data, especially data that connect library activity to patron outcomes. The reported challenges include:

- staff capacity
- library culture of privacy
- ability to attribute success directly to the library
- limited or too many different technology systems
- difficulty collecting follow-up data

Given the many challenges associated with tracking performance and measuring outcomes, libraries may need a compelling reason to spend time and resources on data collection. This report identifies three different types of motivation: internal learning and innovation, making the case for the library's contribution to the community, and funder-mandated data collection.

As part of the case study interviews, the project team tried to get a better sense of not only what the libraries are *currently doing* to overcome challenges but also what library staff thought *was potentially feasible* in terms of overcoming these challenges. Staff suggested:

- developing systematic approaches to presenting data on utilization and patron feedback;

- using creative approaches to address privacy concerns;
- developing specialized instruments to track patron use of standard services such as pop-up surveys, improved tracking of referrals by library staff and other service providers; and
- working with partners on data collection.

## KEY THEMES AND HYPOTHESES FOR FURTHER TESTING

The case studies provide evidence of the types of activities, the diversity of approaches, and the various ways libraries may administer these services. Findings include:

- ✓ Standard services relevant to job seekers and entrepreneurs, which all libraries offer with different intensity levels, remain a critical under-measured and under-tracked service.
- ✓ Examples of libraries providing specialized services relevant to workforce development seem more prevalent than entrepreneurship and small business-type programming.
- ✓ One of the more critical services public libraries provide is supporting digital literacy through basic computer access, one-on-one assistance, or specialized workshops.
- ✓ While locating a one-stop career center in a library can be an effective strategy, library and career center staff would benefit from cross-staff training, collaboration, and enhanced integration.
- ✓ While the COVID-19 pandemic clearly presented many challenges for the libraries, it also led to some learning and new opportunities related to providing workshops virtually and better meeting residents' computer and internet access needs.

The case studies provide some evidence that libraries can contribute to *workforce and business development system reach and*

*inclusiveness* and contribute to *efficiencies in how resources are being used*. Observations about public libraries' system role include:

- ✓ Libraries' role in the workforce and small business development systems may be less about the specific programs they operate and more about forging deep relationships with other organizations and public sector agencies.
- ✓ The most important role that many libraries play is providing access to technology and services to strengthen digital literacy.
- ✓ Public libraries that develop deep multistakeholder engagement may contribute to greater system-related outcomes because a broader set of community stakeholders understand the resources that the library could provide in the community.
- ✓ Expanding the reach of the existing workforce and small business development systems may be one of the most important ways in which public libraries contribute to community wellbeing.
- ✓ Dynamic, proactive leadership can help integrate libraries into the community and create a culture of collaboration among the staff.

The case studies provide new insights into how staff at public libraries think about data and measurement and the approaches that different libraries are taking. Specific observations include:

- ✓ It may be unrealistic to think that public libraries, particularly small systems with limited staff capacity, will be able to complete a rigorous analysis of the outcomes of their workforce and business development activities.
- ✓ Libraries need to have a compelling motivation to engage in often time-consuming and complex efforts to track

outcomes.

- ✓ The approach to measurement should align with the library's goals related to audience and purpose.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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.

In addition to observations based on the case study libraries, this report offers potential topics for further exploration or research. IMLS could support pilot efforts to explore some possible new strategies for tracking outcomes, including expanding the use of existing data collection tools; exploring strategies to collect anonymized, individual-level data; increasing capacity to utilize existing data; leveraging partner agency data collection and sharing capacity; piloting a network survey to test the role of strong relationships to community outcomes; experimenting with systems to capture referrals; and collecting qualitative stories more systematically.

IMLS could also support some further research efforts to enhance learning by testing some of the hypotheses that emerged through this research project, such as:

- Libraries' system-related outcomes can contribute to community economic wellbeing.
- State Library and workforce policies that support library participation in the workforce system may contribute to the likelihood of partnerships across the systems at the local level.
- Partnerships between Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act-funded

workforce entities are most effective when there is cross-training and alignment of services.

- Free access to virtual learning programs may be an important contribution to community economic wellbeing.

- Digital literacy is one of the most important workforce-related services public libraries provide and contributes to the ability of residents to access the training and support needed to access employment and advance in their careers.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## STUDY PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Public libraries throughout the United States have responded effectively and creatively to shifting technology and changing economic and community conditions. Libraries are now central community resources for a broad range of services and an important source for technology access and digital content. This shift in the role of libraries became even clearer throughout the COVID-19 pandemic when public libraries were one of the few institutions that continued to operate and pivot to new ways of working to ensure that they were meeting critical needs in their community.

Recognizing the multiple roles public libraries are playing in the community, in 2016, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) instituted Measures that Matter (MtM) in partnership with the Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA). The goal of MtM is to address short- and long-term challenges to public library data collection and use, including a decision to support a pilot effort to provide insights into how to measure library activities related to workforce development (this expanded to include business development). (See sidebar for definition of terms in this report). This focused effort built on the theory that the learning related to measuring libraries' workforce and business development efforts could then apply more broadly to other elements of community wellbeing.

To better understand library activities related to workforce and business development, COSLA retained Mt.

## DEFINING WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

**Workforce development** is a term that describes the broad set of public and private initiatives that seek to raise the skill level of residents, assist residents in accessing employment, and address the workforce needs of businesses. Usually, this term applies to efforts focusing on the working-age population and is distinguished from education, most specifically the K-12 system. There is, however, no clear consensus on what is and is not part of a community's workforce development system. For the Measures that Matter project on workforce development, Mt. Auburn's definition encompasses all services that seek to raise the basic and occupational skills of working-age residents, including providing basic literacy resources; assisting residents in finding, keeping, or advancing in a job; and supporting local businesses in accessing the workforce they need to succeed.

Early in the project, the question emerged about whether or not to include the role of libraries in supporting entrepreneurship and small business development. Many in the workforce development system view self-employment and starting a business as an element of a comprehensive workforce development strategy. Moreover, both efforts to connect residents to jobs and support residents in their business pursuits align with the overall economic health of the community. Finally, interviews the Mt. Auburn team conducted as part of this research effort with those in the library field found that many library systems view their services related to workforce and business development as interconnected. As a result, this project explores both the workforce-related activities defined above as well as business development activities.

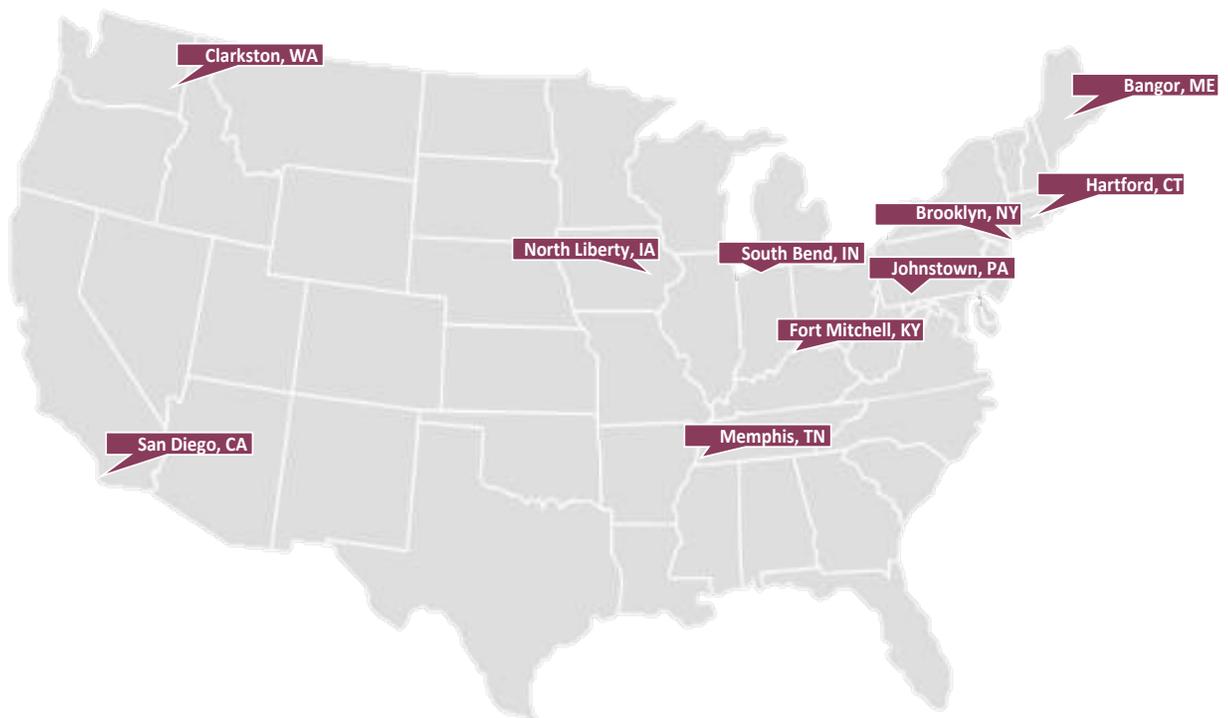
For this research effort, Mt. Auburn defines **business development** as efforts to support individuals who want to start their own business, pursue self-employment, or operate a small business and seek assistance to grow the company or improve its performance. This could include entrepreneurial assistance programs, small business advising, and facilities such as incubators, co-working spaces, makerspaces, or accelerators.

Auburn Associates and its partner, Program and Policy Insight (the Mt. Auburn team), to conduct the pilot study effort, which had four objectives: 1) developing a conceptual framework that articulates libraries' roles in workforce and business development; 2) exploring libraries' design and delivery of library workforce and business development services, engagement with partners, and use of outcome assessment tools; 3) identifying new, potential tools to measure the contribution of libraries on workforce and business development outcomes to help build library capacity for innovative and sustainable programming; and 4) generating hypotheses for informing future research that can seek to derive direct impacts using a more robust design.

This project had three phases:

1. a literature review and development of a theory of change (TOC) for the role of libraries in workforce development. (The completed literature review is available at <https://measurethatmatter.net>);
2. ten case studies (see Figure 1) of a diverse set of library systems that are playing a role in providing workforce development and business development services. (Summaries of these case studies are attached as Appendix A of this report and the full case studies are available at <https://measurethatmatter.net>); and
3. this cross-site report, which looks across the ten library case study sites and identifies key themes and emerging hypotheses related to measuring outcomes.

Figure 1. Map



## CONTEXT

It is important to understand the context within which the Mt. Auburn team completed this study. Most notably, it is critical to acknowledge the related initiatives looking at the role of libraries in workforce and business development, other efforts related to outcome measurement, and the timing of this study amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

### The state of the field

#### Evolving nature of the workforce development system

Federal policy to support the workforce and training needs of individuals looking for employment or career advancement and businesses seeking skilled workers has evolved considerably from its earliest inception. There have been significant changes in the governance of the system, the role of business in the system, and the types of services supported. Most importantly, in terms of the system's current status, the total funds for workforce development have declined significantly, with federal resources supporting workforce in the 1980s far exceeding what is currently available.<sup>1</sup>

Today, the federal government supports state and regional efforts to serve youth, adults, dislocated workers, and people with disabilities under the 2014 WIOA. This legislation continued the requirement that states support a system of *one-stop centers*, where multiple partners in a community co-locate or network to provide services to the unemployed or those seeking training. A state workforce board determines the structure of each state's system, and local workforce development boards, among other

responsibilities, oversee the one-stop system in their communities.

Beyond the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) system, multiple other programs related to job access and career development operate in most communities. These include adult literacy programs that often are part of the education systems, community and technical colleges that play a key role in occupational training, and a wide array of nonprofit organizations that may run specialized training or employment support programs. While every community in the U.S. has some element of the federal system, the breadth and depth of other supports vary significantly across communities.

Libraries have long played a role in helping residents to develop their skills and access jobs. In fact, at various points in time, the federal government has acknowledged this role through the design of special programs or efforts to better align libraries with the federal workforce development system. For example, in response to the 2008 recession, the U.S. Department of Labor Employment & Training Administration entered into a partnership with IMLS to encourage libraries and the workforce system "to collaborate in the delivery of employment and training services at the state and local levels, resulting in increased and enhanced employment and training services to job seekers that lead to good jobs, including career pathways and sustainable wages."<sup>2</sup> In addition, WIOA formally recognized libraries as potential partners for the one-stop career centers, which provide a range of services to individuals and businesses in their

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<sup>1</sup> Siegel, B. and Seidman, K. (2009), "The Economic Development and Workforce Development Systems: A Briefing Paper." The Surdna Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Oates, J. (2010, June 29). Encouraging Partnerships between the Workforce Investment System and Public Libraries to Meet Career and Employment Needs. [Internal U.S. DOLETA Training and Employment Notice]. Washington DC: Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration.

communities. This formal acknowledgment of libraries as one of the potential partners in the one-stop structure of the workforce development system was a critical step in deepening the relationships between libraries and workforce development providers in many communities.

### **The small business support system**

The primary federal system related to entrepreneurs and small businesses is the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). In addition to the SBA's many small business financing programs, the agency also supports a national network of organizations that assist entrepreneurs and small businesses. These include Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), which offer "one-stop" assistance for individuals and small business owners seeking management and business counseling services; SCORE, which mobilizes the experience of skilled business volunteers to assist small business owners; Women's Business Centers, which provide long-term training and counseling to encourage small business ownership among women; the Office of Veterans Business Development, which provides direct assistance to veterans; and the Program for Investors in Microentrepreneurs, which awards grants to microenterprise organizations to offer technical assistance to low-income entrepreneurs. Beyond the SBA, the Economic Development Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is the only federal government agency focused exclusively on supporting and funding regional economic development, which can include efforts to support small businesses.

Beyond these federal resources, state governments, regional entities and authorities, municipalities, and community-based organizations run significant specialized entrepreneurship and small business support programs and more general economic development programs.

The scope and level of resources for small business support systems vary significantly across communities. In some of the nation's larger cities, specialized business libraries have provided information and support targeted to assisting local businesses in the community for decades.<sup>3</sup> More recently, a number of communities have sought to fill gaps in small business assistance by providing support or partnering with other service providers to assist entrepreneurs and small businesses in their community.

### **Related initiatives focused on the role of libraries in workforce and business development**

With the changing role of public libraries in the community, a number of recent research projects are relevant to this study. These studies involved surveys and case studies of libraries engaged in workforce development or business development activities. The intention was that this MtM research effort would complement these existing efforts by diving into more detail concerning specific programs and initiatives, concentrating on the issues related to tracking and measuring outputs and outcomes. In addition, there was an explicit decision not to select as case studies for this project, library systems engaging in these other research efforts so that the Mt. Auburn team's research would

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<sup>3</sup> Manley, M. (1942). *Public library service to business: A comparative study of its development in cities of 70,000 and more*. Newark, NJ: Newark Public Library.

contribute new data about different library systems for the field. The recent studies include:

- The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University released a significant study on the relationship between public libraries and workforce development. This study included surveys and interviews with state and local library staff across the U.S.<sup>4</sup>
- The American Library Association (ALA) undertook a study of the role of public libraries in workforce development and looked more specifically at the partnerships between libraries and agencies in the workforce development system. This study included a literature review and case studies.<sup>5</sup>
- In May 2018, Urban Libraries Council (ULC) launched an initiative, “Strengthening Libraries as Entrepreneurial Hubs.” This initiative, in collaboration with the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, sought to strengthen the role of public libraries in supporting entrepreneurship in their communities. ULC completed a national scan of how libraries were supporting entrepreneurs in their communities and surveyed 116 of its members.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2020, the ALA and Google embarked on a new initiative, “Libraries Build Business.”<sup>7</sup> This effort included a cohort of 13 public libraries working to further

explore learnings related to meeting small business development needs.

- In 2021, IMLS issued a report by Reinvestment Fund (RF), *Understanding the Social Wellbeing Impact of the Nation’s Libraries and Museums*.<sup>8</sup> RF based this study on quantitative analysis and 24 case studies, and the report examines the role of museums and libraries in promoting social wellbeing.

#### **Other output and outcome measurement-related efforts**

Libraries, like other publicly funded entities, increasingly seek program data to understand patron outcomes, communicate program results, and improve service implementation. In addition to MtM, there have been four primary national outcome measurement efforts:

- *The Public Libraries Survey (PLS)* is an annual online survey through which IMLS collects data from public libraries across the country. Although there are no survey elements in the PLS related to workforce development, several states have added data elements that cover this area.
- *Edge* is an online assessment tool that facilitates the evaluation of libraries’ technology resources and community value. A national coalition of leading library and local government organizations, with support from the Bill &

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<sup>4</sup> Holcomb, S., Dunford, A., & Idowu, F. (2019). *Public Libraries: A Community's Connection for Career Services*. New Brunswick, NJ: John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, Rutgers University.

<sup>5</sup> Amundsen, J.L. (n.d.). *Libraries and Workforce Development*. Washington DC: Public Policy and Advocacy Office, American Library Association.

<sup>6</sup> Urban Libraries Council (2019). *Strengthening libraries as entrepreneurial hubs*. Washington DC: Urban Libraries Council; and Urban Libraries Council (2019). *Strengthening libraries as entrepreneurial hubs: Summary of National Scan*. Washington DC: Urban Libraries Council.

<sup>7</sup> "Libraries Build Business," American Library Association, November 18, 2019. <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/workforce/grant> (Accessed September 7, 2022). Document ID: 5054fa5d-2e6e-4f60-a753-addedde98123de98123

<sup>8</sup> Reinvestment Fund. “Understanding the Social Wellbeing Impacts of the Nation's Libraries and Museums.” Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2021. <https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/swi-report-accessible.pdf>

Melinda Gates Foundation, developed this ULC-led management tool. Edge asks libraries about their provision of technology classes, content, and e-resources for workforce development support, and how they use their resources and technology to assist in patron education. This tool does not focus on the outcomes of the services.

- *Project Outcome*, launched by the Public Library Association (PLA), with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is a free data collection, utilization, and communication effort that helps public libraries understand and share the impact of essential library services. The Project Outcome standardized surveys include instruments of relevance to workforce and business development.
- *IMLS States Program Reports* are a requirement of all projects that state libraries fund through the IMLS Grants to States. These reports provide data on each project, including the funding sources, the intent, the activities, some quantitative outputs related to the activities, and characteristics of the beneficiaries.
- *Impact Survey*, which was originally part of the University of Washington's Information School<sup>9</sup> and is now part of the PLA, collects patron feedback on their use of technology in several program areas, including education, employment, entrepreneurship, health and wellness, civic engagement, and social inclusion.

These existing efforts are noteworthy contributions to the field and provide important data on library services and patrons, but, overall, there is more limited attention to the direct outcomes of library workforce and business development services

on patrons or the larger role of the public library in the local workforce and business development systems in their local communities.

## **The timing of the work—impact of COVID-19**

### **Disruption in library services**

The implementation of the Mt. Auburn project coincided with an unprecedented public health crisis arising from COVID-19, which resulted in dramatic changes in library operations and program implementation. Most libraries across the country halted in-person service for multiple months, and ongoing staffing, material availability, and online programming varied considerably across libraries. Libraries instituted a number of strategies for in-person access, including social distancing practices, curbside services, appointment-only visits, and delivery to patrons. This disruption of library services due to the COVID-19 pandemic had multiple implications for the planned study. First, social distancing and travel restrictions delayed the in-person, onsite case studies. Second, the unforeseen change in library operations and services, coupled with the changing workforce needs and service demands resulting from the pandemic, had implications for the types and format of libraries' workforce and business development services and partnerships in both the short and long term. Finally, the unexpected context provided an opportunity to collect meaningful information about how libraries have adapted to the changing circumstances and the expected long-term impacts on library workforce and business development service delivery and measurement.

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<sup>9</sup> See Public Library Association (n.d.). *Impact Survey* [Survey instrument]. Retrieved from [http://www.ala.org/pla/sites/ala.org.pla/files/content/initiatives/impactsurvey/Access\\_at\\_a\\_Glance\\_survey.pdf](http://www.ala.org/pla/sites/ala.org.pla/files/content/initiatives/impactsurvey/Access_at_a_Glance_survey.pdf)

## Economic changes resulting from pandemic

The economic conditions that emerged as a result of the pandemic is also a critical component of the context within which this research took place. According to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce report, “At the height of the pandemic, more than 120,000 businesses temporarily closed, and more than 30 million U.S. workers were unemployed.”<sup>10</sup> During this period, there was increased demand for library resources due to individuals applying for unemployment, looking for new jobs, or seeking help for their small business. Since that time, however, there is less consensus about what is occurring in the nation’s labor market. We know that jobs have been increasing steadily and unemployment is going down. At the same time, the labor force participation rate is also going down. By 2022, many employers were concerned about filling jobs, and experts were trying to understand the changes in the labor market leading to this challenge. Of additional relevance to this project, evidence suggests that there has been a large increase in the number of individuals seeking to start their

own business. Again, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, “Over the last two years, nearly 10 million new business applications were filed and in 2020 alone more than 4 million new businesses were started.”

## METHODOLOGY

### Phase I: Literature review and theory of change

During Phase I of this project, the Mt. Auburn team completed a literature review on libraries' role in workforce and business development and identified public libraries with interesting or exemplary models. In addition, the team developed a TOC that provided an initial framework for thinking about the public libraries' role in contributing to the economic wellbeing of residents. A project Advisory Group offered input on the TOC, the identification of case studies, and the overall research design. (See Appendix C for list of Advisory Group members.)

The TOC identified three distinct roles that public libraries play: standard, specialized, and community hub. (See Figure 2.)

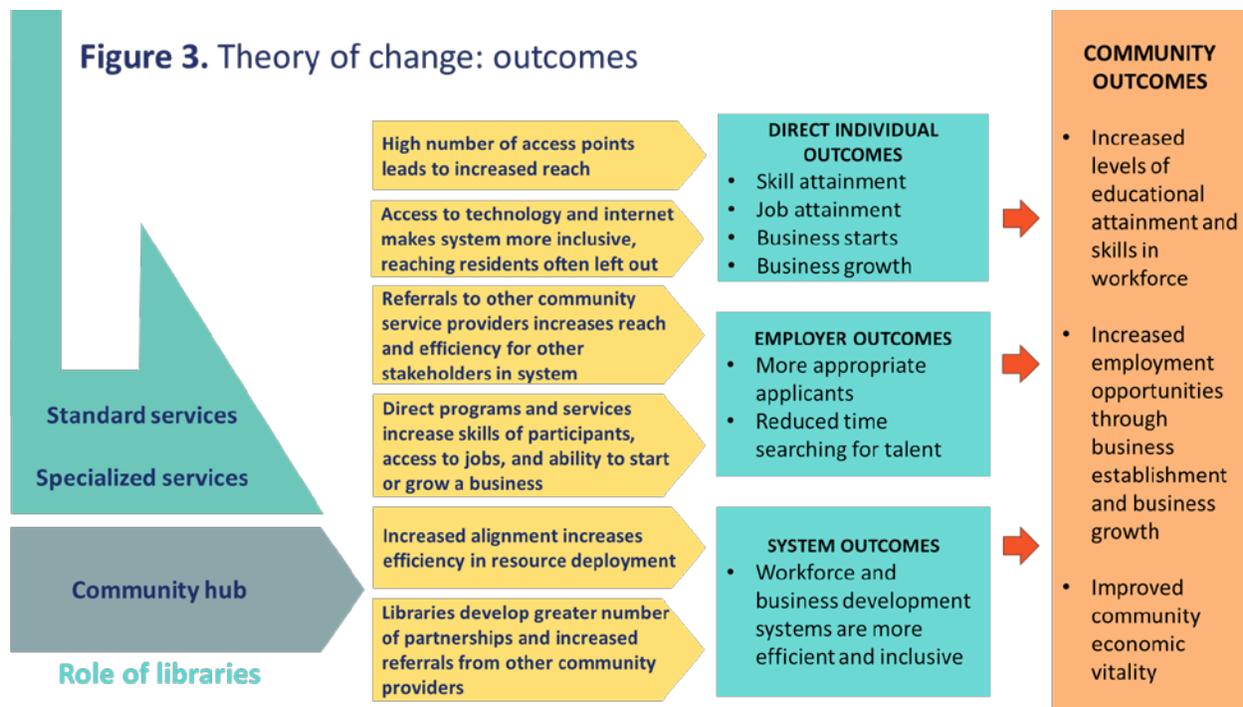
**Figure 2. Role of libraries in workforce and business development system**

|                                   |                               | Workforce development  | Small business development   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Library designed and led services | <b>Standard services</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to computers for resume writing</li> <li>• Help filling out applications or submitting resumes</li> <li>• Books and online information related to job search</li> <li>• Access to online training programs</li> <li>• Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources</li> </ul>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to computers for tax, regulatory, and other forms</li> <li>• Books and online information on entrepreneurship, small businesses, and specific industries</li> <li>• Access to databases for business plans and market studies</li> <li>• Access to technology for prototyping - 3D printer</li> <li>• Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources</li> </ul> |
|                                   | <b>Specialized services</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Computer literacy workshops and training</li> <li>• Career readiness workshops and training</li> <li>• Occupational training</li> <li>• Adult education and ESOL training</li> <li>• Digital navigation and one-on-one coaching</li> <li>• Designated career space</li> <li>• Facilitate job search support groups</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business plan development and other specialized workshops</li> <li>• Maker spaces, co-working spaces, media and technology spaces</li> <li>• Pitch contests and other specialized programs</li> <li>• One-on-one coaching or mentorship programs by dedicated small business staff</li> <li>• Entrepreneur networking events</li> </ul>   |
| Partnerships                      | <b>Community hub services</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-Stop Career Center location</li> <li>• Facilities for training providers</li> <li>• Training programs run with other partners</li> <li>• Host job fairs with partners</li> <li>• Trusted convener of community service providers</li> <li>• On-the-job training and internship placements</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint programs and workshop with other small business service providers such as SCORE</li> <li>• Facilities for small business support organizations to meet clients and hold workshops</li> <li>• Trusted convener of community service providers</li> </ul>   |

<sup>10</sup> Ferguson, S. (August 2022), “Understanding America’s Labor Shortage,” U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

This framework became an important element in the case study research.

The TOC (see Figure 3) also distinguished between the direct outcomes of library services and the outcomes related to libraries' role in expanding the reach of the larger workforce and business development system and creating some system efficiencies.



## Phase II: Case study selection and completion

The primary data source for this study was ten case studies of library systems across the U.S. (See Figure 4.) The Mt. Auburn team did not intend the case studies to be generalizable to the population but to offer examples of influential libraries that represented a variety of socioeconomic contexts and workforce and business service delivery strategies. For this project, the project team defined the universe of influential libraries as those that a national journal article, book, or blog post reported as having a noteworthy approach to meeting the workforce or business development needs of

patrons. In addition, the Advisory Group recommended libraries that it believed were providing some type of exemplary practice in the area of workforce or business development.

Using this process, the Mt. Auburn team identified 85 library systems across the United States. Working with IMLS, COSLA, and the Advisory Group, the team selected ten library systems, diverse in terms of size, type of community, administrative structure, and location. Eight of the original ten sites agreed

**Figure 4. Overview of case study libraries**

| Library                         | Central branch city | State | Service area pop. | # 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.

to participate, and the team selected two alternate sites to substitute for the two that could not participate. (See Appendix A, Summary Case Studies, and <https://measurethatmatter.net> for the complete case studies.)

The first step in the case study process was to research the state and local context in the communities where the libraries reside. Next, working with a staff lead at each library, the Mt. Auburn team identified whom it would like to interview. The categories included:

- library system staff, including leadership, staff overseeing specific workforce or business development activities, and individuals responsible for data and measurement;
- library branch staff (if applicable);
- staff from local or regional workforce development and business development organizations; and
- other civic leaders, such as funders and municipal and county leaders, with a perspective on the library's role in the community.

The interviews were part of a site visit to each library system or completed virtually for those unable to meet in person.

There was nearly 100 percent participation by those invited to participate in an interview across all of the case studies sites. Due to variations in the size and/or structure of the library, there was a varied number (between eight and 15 respondents) interviewed per site. There was a total of 114 interviews. (Appendix C is a more detailed methodology.)

## ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The organization of this report is as follows:

1. *Introduction* provides the purpose of this report, the context within which it took place, the framework that guided the research, and the methodology that the Mt. Auburn team utilized.

2. *Libraries' workforce and business development services* provides an overview of how the libraries in the case studies are meeting patrons' workforce development and business development needs. Using the framework developed as part of the theory of change process, this chapter describes

standard-, specialized-, and community hub-related activities. Finally, this section explains how library systems administer these services.

*3. Public libraries' role in the workforce and business development systems* examines the types of relationships that libraries have forged with other organizations in their communities and how public libraries contribute to the reach and efficiency of the local systems that are involved in meeting the workforce needs of residents and trying to enhance the community's economy through small business development. This chapter concludes with an analysis of some factors that may be associated with how libraries interact within these systems.

*4. Measuring libraries' contribution to workforce and business development* explores current efforts by libraries to track the outputs and outcomes associated with their workforce and small business development activities, the challenges they report, and some potential methods for further exploration to enhance the evaluative capacity of libraries.

*5. Key themes and hypotheses for further testing* extracts some of the key themes that this research effort surfaced and identifies some hypotheses for further testing and exploration in future research efforts.

## CASE STUDIES

**Asotin County Library (ACL), Washington:** ACL, a small library system in a rural area in eastern Washington State, is notable for its direct workforce development services, including its Job and Career Catalyst Center, its specialized training classes, and the recent digital navigators.

**Bangor Public Library (BPL), Maine:** BPL, a single-outlet system in a small city, opened a co-working space in 2021 to respond to community needs identified when the library was planning a major renovation. Unfortunately, the center's use has been less than anticipated. (See full case study.) Staff have developed referral networks and partnerships with workforce development providers in their community.

**Brooklyn Public Library (BPL), New York:** BPL, one of the largest library systems in the country, has many innovative programs, such as the PowerUP! Business plan competition, the Business & Career Center in the newly renovated Central Library, the BKLYN Fashion Academy, and Adult Learning Centers, which provide a range of training and literacy supports for residents.

**Cambria County Library System (CCLS), Pennsylvania:** CCLS, a federated library system consisting of 14 independent libraries, is able to make the most of its reach working in an area with small cities and rural communities by collaborating with other organizations, most notably through the location of a full-service CareerLink site on the first floor of the Cambria Public Library, by hosting job fairs, and by providing digital literacy programs throughout the system libraries.

**Hartford Public Library (HPL), Connecticut:** HPL established and has operated The American Place since 2000, covering adult education, careers, and immigrant services. It houses a satellite of the region's American Jobs Center and, through its involvement in the transformation of the former Swift Factory in North Hartford, will be taking on an enhanced role in small business support.

**Kenton County Public Library (KCPL), Kentucky:** KCPL, a suburban system with three branches in northern Kentucky just outside Cincinnati, Ohio, plays a prominent role in connecting, expanding, and building the workforce development ecosystem. It operates a Career and Job Services Division, serves as a Kentucky Career Center Access Point, supports a management-level job search support group, and hosts job fairs, including those targeted toward immigrant communities.

**Memphis Public Libraries (MPL), Tennessee:** MPL, a city library system with 18 outlets, established and operates specialized programs related to both workforce and business development, including JobLINC and a Small Business Center located in the central branch, and the Mobile Career Center, a bus equipped with ten laptops, internet access, digital resources, and specialized staff, to meet needs of residents throughout the city.

**North Liberty Community Library (NLCL), Iowa:** While it does not operate many specialized programs, NLCL, a single-outlet system serving a small suburban city, plays a core role in its community's workforce and business development systems as a connector and information resource.

**St. Joe County Public Library (SJCPL), Indiana:** SJCPL, a district system with ten outlets including its main branch in South Bend, recently created the Community Learning Center at its main branch and is the implementation partner for the Bendable pilot, an innovative lifelong learning initiative developed in partnership with the Drucker Institute.

**San Diego Public Library (SDPL), California:** SDPL, a large municipal system with 36 branches, hosts the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Career Center, an affiliate of the San Diego Career Center Network. It offers robust business development services, including IDEA Lab makerspaces, a Patent and Trademark Resource Center, and an emergent Microbusiness Center.

## 2. LIBRARIES' WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

### OVERVIEW

The literature review the Mt. Auburn team conducted for this study identified multiple roles that libraries play in creating positive community outcomes, including supporting lifelong learning, providing small business support, and building workforce participation. Moreover, libraries fill a unique niche in the community by prioritizing their role as a trusted public institution and by offering universal access to services. Library stakeholder input on the role of libraries in workforce and business development, collected through multiple interviews with steering committee members in the early stages of the project, supplemented findings from the literature review. Through this process, the Mt. Auburn team defined three key categories of workforce and business development library services: standard, specialized, and community hub.

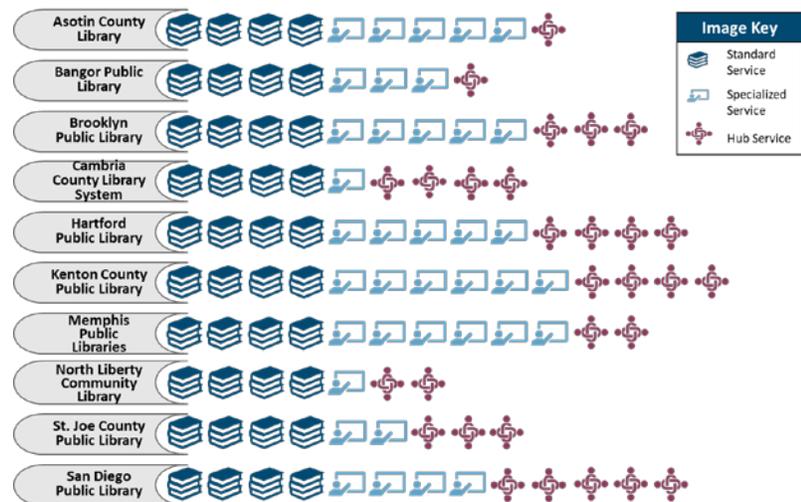
- *Standard services* are typically unscheduled, accessible to all patrons, and do not require staff with highly specialized knowledge or skills.
- *Specialized services* require more customized staff training for delivery and may require patrons to formally “opt-in” or register for programming.
- *Community hub services* are developed and/or delivered in partnership with other

agencies and often hosted in library facilities.

The following sections provide more detailed information on standard, specialized, and community hub workforce development and business development services based on case study observations and a description of how libraries administer these services. In addition, this chapter contains information on how the library systems adjusted to and learned from their experience responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Figure 5. Workforce development services



## Standard services

Figure 6. Workforce development: standard services

|                                      |   |  |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Asotin County Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Online training programs &amp; employment databases</li> <li>• Assistance with basic job search questions from reference librarians</li> </ul>                     | <b>Kenton County Public Library</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Print &amp; online workforce development resources</li> <li>• Basic assistance from librarians</li> <li>• Landing page for Career &amp; Job Services with links to resources</li> </ul>              |
| <b>Bangor Public Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology &amp; digital resources</li> <li>• Assistance from reference librarians</li> <li>• Referrals to CareerCenter &amp; Maine State Library resources</li> </ul>                   | <b>Memphis Public Libraries</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online job search &amp; training platform</li> <li>• Access to technology resources (e.g., computers, WiFi hotspots)</li> <li>• Referrals to local workforce development organizations</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Brooklyn Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Business and Career Center offers specialized collections</li> <li>• Resource librarians for one-on-one support</li> <li>• Referrals to other providers</li> </ul> | <b>North Liberty Community Library</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to computers and printing</li> <li>• Print and online workforce development resources, including Brainfuse</li> <li>• One-on-one walk-in and appointment support from adult services librarian</li> </ul>                           |
| <b>Cambria County Library System</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Assistance from reference librarians</li> <li>• Online workforce databases and resources</li> <li>• Referrals to basic services through CareerLink</li> </ul>      | <b>San Diego Public Library</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic technology resources</li> <li>• Reference librarians able to answer basic job search-related questions</li> <li>• Online workforce development resources and test preparation courses for target industries</li> </ul>               |
| <b>Hartford Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Online workforce development databases &amp; programs</li> <li>• Support from librarians with job search activities</li> </ul>                                     | <b>St. Joe County Public Library</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Staff support with basic job search activities &amp; workforce-trained librarians for specialized support</li> <li>• Landing page for unemployment resources &amp; job training resources</li> </ul> |

Libraries offer standard services through universal access to technology, materials, and databases and may or may not involve staff assistance. Workforce development support through standard services comprises computer use, job data bank search, circulation materials related to a job search or occupational characteristics, and staff assistance to help access library or other community resources related to workforce development. To some extent, all public libraries provide some level of standard services related to workforce development, but the breadth of resources and the orientation of library staff toward those seeking assistance varies significantly. (See Figure 6.) Following is a more detailed look at the standard services the case study libraries delivered.

 **Access to technology and the internet:** Access to computers and a WiFi connection are essential services for many job seekers, enabling them to work on their resumes, search for a job, and complete job applications. To support this critical service, all of the libraries in the case studies made computers freely accessible.

For some, there was also laptop and hotspot loaning, a service that increased across all ten library sites during the pandemic. Printing, available at the case study libraries, is also a crucial standard service for job seekers, supporting their ability to print their resumes, portfolios, or other needed documents for job applications. The differences across the case study libraries in terms of access involve the number of internet-connected computers available, the reach of the WiFi signal, and whether or not the library loans hotspots or laptops.

 **Reference librarian assistance:** Across all libraries, including those with and without more formal career services, general reference librarians are the first point of contact in the job search or skill-building process. Reference librarians commonly provide an introduction to and help with navigating library workforce development resources, and some provide one-on-one assistance with resumes, job searches, cover letters, and referrals to community workforce development services. These

referrals may involve handoffs with direct contact from the librarian to specific individuals in the community agencies to facilitate the connection. Reference librarians also point patrons to appropriate resources to gain additional skills or pursue a new career. Some case study libraries had reference librarians who had specialized knowledge of other workforce-related services available in the community.

**Standard collections and digital resources:** Standard library collections and digital resources also facilitate patron workforce development activities. Print collections can support job seeker interest inventories, job searches, and workforce skill preparation. Digital resources and databases are a growing source for preparation and training activities. Common online workforce tools active in library services for job seekers include Brainfuse JobNow and VetNow, LearningExpress, LinkedIn Learning, and Gale Courses.

**Basic digital literacy support:** Providing support to patrons who have very limited familiarity with operating a computer or other digital device may be the most unique role that libraries play in supporting the employment needs in their community. Digital literacy support may include ad hoc assistance with technology and referrals to online training modules through library digital resources. Stakeholders from both libraries and community workforce development service providers noted the need for individuals to have an established baseline of digital competency to participate in services through more traditional workforce development providers. These agencies often refer individuals who seek these services to the library for foundational support in understanding how to use a computer, establish an email address, and use basic online platforms and standard software applications, such as Microsoft Office.

## Specialized services

Figure 7. Workforce development: specialized services

|                                      |   |  |  |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|--|
| <b>Asotin County Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One-on-one counseling and digital navigator assistance</li> <li>Job &amp; career kits</li> <li>Specialized training classes</li> <li>Work placement through WIOA</li> </ul>  | <b>Kenton County Public Library</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One-on-one support from career navigators &amp; other specialized staff</li> <li>Job search skills classes</li> <li>Computer &amp; online training classes</li> <li>NKYAG for mid-career professionals</li> </ul> |
| <b>Bangor Public Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classes on technology skills run by digital media reference librarian</li> <li>Technology workshops on variety of topics</li> <li>One-on-one technical assistance on computers &amp; software</li> </ul>                           | <b>Memphis Public Libraries</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One-on-one career counseling &amp; job search support via JobLINC career counselors</li> <li>JobLINC Mobile Career Center</li> <li>LINC211 Resource Center</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Brooklyn Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops through Business and Career Center &amp; at local branches</li> <li>Drop-in and virtual assistance from job information resource librarians</li> </ul>   | <b>North Liberty Community Library</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information kiosk for pamphlets and brochures from IowaWorks</li> <li>Volunteer and practicum student programs</li> <li>Other ad hoc services such as free headshots</li> </ul>                                   |
| <b>Cambria County Library System</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services through CareerLink, including one-on-one job search support, on-the-job training programs, GED classes, &amp; unemployment registration</li> <li>Ad hoc services at independent libraries based on patron need</li> </ul> | <b>San Diego Public Library</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeted certification courses</li> <li>Digital navigators at 5 branches, fluent in several locally spoken languages</li> <li>Career Online High School (COHS) and career certification program</li> </ul>        |
| <b>Hartford Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specialized workforce development services through The American Place (TAP) program</li> <li>Programming based on community need at individual branches</li> </ul>   | <b>St. Joe County Public Library</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited digital literacy classes &amp; targeted trainings</li> <li>Bendable workforce development platform, including wide range of locally-responsive training &amp; curricula</li> </ul>                        |

Specialized services vary widely across libraries, but core offerings include library-provided workshops, one-on-one assistance, and job seeker support. (See Figure 7.) Additionally, libraries may develop robust workforce development services responsive to their community context and patron demand.

☞ **Designated workforce development space:** In some cases, such as the Brooklyn Public Library Business & Career Center, the Asotin County Job and Career Catalyst Center, and the JobLINC Career Center at the Memphis Public Libraries, libraries have established designated space in their facility for greater visibility in reaching and serving job seekers. Memphis has also taken an innovative approach with its Mobile Career Center that brings technology, career resources, and support staff to the residents in Memphis neighborhoods.

☞ **Technology workshops:** In the case study libraries, specialized workshops that library staff have designed and operate include training on software applications, such as word processing or spreadsheets, or technology platform suites, including Google and Microsoft and their respective team collaboration features. Libraries may offer certifications, such as Google Workspace or Microsoft Office, to patrons after completing the required workshops; these certifications may be advantageous to job seekers looking to advance their skills and distinguish their resumes from other applicants.

☞ **Work-readiness workshops:** In addition to software and technology workshops, some case study libraries offer workshops to support job seekers' personal development, career identification, job search, and work-readiness skills. For example, the Kenton County Public Library runs job search workshops, which include topics such as Unstuck: Moving on from



Image with permission from Memphis Public Libraries  
<https://www.memphislibraryorg/joblinc/>

Rough Job Situations; Finding a Job 101; Building a Resume from Scratch; and Begin Your Career Transition with Us. Likewise, the Brooklyn Public Library Business & Career Center hosts workshops on job interviewing skills and cover letter basics.

☞ **Career coaching:** Libraries may also offer one-on-one career coaching as part of the specialized workforce development services. For example, Asotin County Public Library staffs a part-time career coach who provides tailored interest inventories, job search assistance, and resume and cover letter review. In Memphis, JobLINC specialists deliver career counseling via email, phone calls, and virtual meetings, and provide one-on-one resume review and mock interview and job application assistance. Job information resource librarians at the Brooklyn Public Library offer drop-in and virtual assistance at several library branches.

☞ **Digital navigation:** Libraries also offer specialized one-on-one technology assistance in the form of digital navigators, with computers and software as part of their workforce development offerings. Some libraries, such as the St. Joe County Public Library, have found one-on-one technology assistance to be the most effective delivery method. Although St.

Joe's previously provided more frequent workshops, it found most patrons wanted real-time help while they were experiencing a problem rather than waiting for scheduled classes. Additionally, at least four of the ten case study libraries have recently received grant funding to support the development of digital navigators. The scope of the role varies slightly across libraries but, in all cases, digital navigators provide customized digital literacy and skills training, support accessing technology, and internet connectivity.

- 📖 **Support groups:** Libraries may also offer dedicated support groups for job seekers. Kenton County Public Library established the Northern Kentucky Accountability Group (NKYAG), which meets weekly and provides job search support, weekly speakers, networking opportunities, connections to community partners, job leads, and career coaching.
- 📖 **Basic literacy training, occupational training, and certification:** A few case study libraries facilitate direct training and

certification. In San Diego, the Career Online High School provides coaching, academic support, connection to resources, and ongoing customized guidance. Over 18 months, students may earn a high school diploma as well as certification in other occupations. South Bend developed the Bendable platform in partnership with community providers, area economic and workforce development agencies, and employers. Bendable Career Collections are curated training materials available to patrons that local employers select to meet their workforce needs. For example, Bendable currently offers a child development associate Career Collection, "Ready to Grow St. Joe," in partnership with the United Way of St. Joseph County. The American Place (TAP) program at the Hartford Public Library offers GED preparation, English as a second language, and training for industry-recognized credentials, including Cisco Networking Academy, security officer training, food handling training, and personal attendant training.

## Community hub services

Figure 8. Workforce development: community hub services

|                                      |   |  |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Asotin County Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None currently</li> </ul>  | <b>Kenton County Public Library</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>KCC access point at Erlanger branch; job search classes offered by KCC</li> <li>Career fairs in partnership with other organizations</li> <li>GED preparation &amp; testing offered by Kentucky Adult Education at branches</li> </ul> |
| <b>Bangor Public Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None currently</li> </ul>  | <b>Memphis Public Libraries</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A; most services offered directly through JobLINC rather than through partner organizations</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Brooklyn Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adult Learning Centers at Central Library and 4 other branches</li> <li>Bard Microcollege offering two-year associate's degree</li> <li>Other services offered through partnerships with workforce providers</li> </ul>            | <b>North Liberty Community Library</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting space for businesses and working professionals for trainings, interviews, or meetings</li> <li>One-time partner events such as job fairs and financial planning workshops</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Cambria County Library System</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Host site for CareerLink one-stop career center, including collaboration on workshops &amp; programming</li> <li>Collaboration with community partners to host on-the-job training placements and job/resource fairs</li> </ul>    | <b>San Diego Public Library</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-location of SWDP Career Center</li> <li>Job fairs</li> <li>Joint workforce development landing page &amp; Family Career Exploration days</li> <li>Additional partnerships</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Hartford Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>American Job Center location</li> <li>Host to youth workforce development program &amp; Jobs First Employment Services program (JFES)</li> <li>Space for job fairs &amp; other events hosted by community organizations</li> </ul> | <b>St. Joe County Public Library</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integral community space for individuals, businesses, &amp; nonprofits</li> <li>Classroom space for South Bend Community School Corporation Adult Education program</li> <li>Space for trainings by local providers</li> </ul>         |

Libraries serve as workforce development community hubs to provide services and space in partnership with other workforce development providers.

✦ *Public workforce partnership:* Two of the ten case study libraries have comprehensive workforce development career centers co-located in the library that their workforce development partners staffed; two other case study libraries serve as satellite or access point locations for the workforce development system. (See sidebar.) Despite the potential to optimize public workforce partners' expertise in workforce development service implementation and data collection, some federal WIOA guidelines may hinder the potential for partnering with libraries. In Kenton County, for example, existing WIOA regulations may limit eligible service providers to fee-for-service entities. Because the library provides its services free of charge, public workforce agencies may be unable to include the library on their eligible provider list. Opportunities to include library activity in WIOA universal service data have advanced in Kenton County, with further discussions on the horizon for ways to address the current barrier to eligible provider designation and resultant direct service referrals, participation, and data sharing.

✦ *Adult education partnership:* Libraries may partner extensively with adult education providers to host classes and testing in the library. The Brooklyn Public Library supports Adult Learning Centers across five of its branches. These centers partner with diverse community education providers to deliver basic literacy and ESOL classes, classes for high school equivalency, and specialized training programs, including food handler certification and virtual

## PARTNERING WITH FEDERALLY SUPPORTED CAREER CENTERS

The federal workforce system, guided by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), supports a network of one-stop career centers as part of the American Job Center. Local workforce development boards manage these centers, which provide a range of services for individuals seeking employment or looking to advance their skills. While the system exists nationally, the types of services, number of centers, and locations of these centers differ by state. Public libraries partner with these centers, both formally and informally, to deliver services to their patrons. The case studies provide the following examples of a variety of types of formal partnerships between libraries and career centers:

In **San Diego**, a San Diego Workforce Partnership Career Center, the **Bank of America Merrill Lynch Career Center**, is on the fifth floor of the Central Library. San Diego Workforce Partnership contractors staff the center. Its doors open when the library opens, and it closes at 5:00 p.m. unless there is an evening career center workshop. Librarians refer patrons to the career center for more advanced workforce development services.

In **Cambria County**, a comprehensive full-service **CareerLink site** is on the first floor of the Cambria County Library. The CareerLink office provides intensive one-on-one support for job seekers, including skills assessments, resume writing, job search and interview assistance, and opportunities for on-the-job training and upskilling.

**Hartford Public Library** hosts an **American Job Center (AJC) satellite location** on the first floor of the main library branch. Capital Workforce Partners, the regional workforce development board, operates the AJC, which offers a suite of career services, including career counseling, training and workshops, evaluation for WIOA eligibility, and registration in the state comprehensive workforce development online platform.

**Kenton County Public Library** serves as a **Kentucky Career Center (KCC) Access Point**. For the library to qualify as an access point, at least one library staff member must undergo training on WIOA services and policy and programming. Additionally, the library must establish a physical access point space to showcase the career center, with brochures and bulletin boards. The local KCC co-locates a business services representative several hours a week at the library, typically coinciding with other library workforce development activities.

medical billing. San Diego Public Library provides adult and family literacy services through its partnership with READ/San Diego, and South Bend makes classroom space available for South Bend Community School Corporation Adult Education program.

✦ *Job fairs:* Nine of the ten case study libraries host job fairs in partnership with community agencies. These job fairs concentrate a large number of area employers, which is of value to job seekers, and offer opportunities for community partners to share resources and meet the library patron base. In several libraries, individual employers may also directly reserve library lobby and meeting spaces to hold hiring events themselves. Still, other libraries are initiating new hiring events in partnership with community-based organizations to focus on diverse community populations, such as Latino residents. Greater library engagement and joint planning with trusted community organizations can help build trust, establish rapport, and increase participation among prospective job fair attendees.

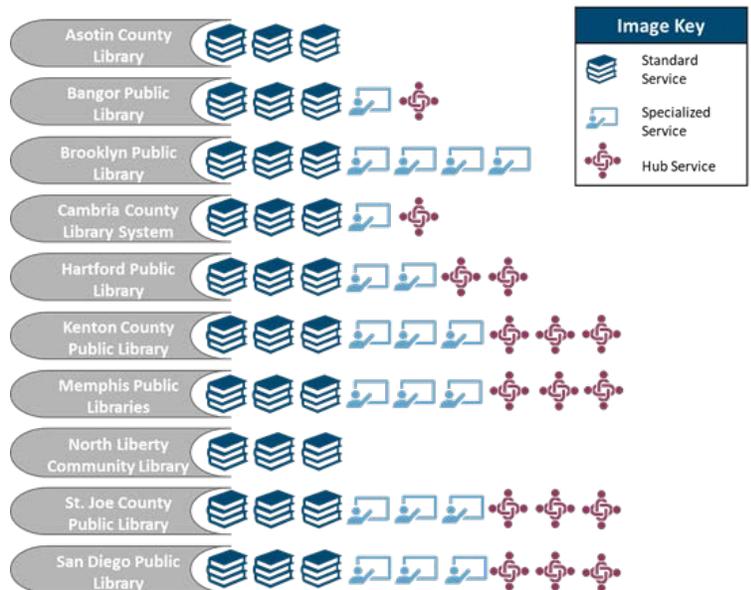
✦ *Joint workshops and meeting space:* A number of the case study libraries made classroom space and other meeting spaces available to organizations providing workforce-related services and classes. This could include classes in ESOL and basic adult literacy run by other community organizations or specialized occupational training classes.

✦ *On-the-job training and internship placements:* Multiple case study libraries

are also involved in workforce development through their position as an employer. Some case study libraries provided on-the-job training, youth pre-employment, or internship placements for individuals engaged with the workforce development systems. At least four of the ten library sites have hosted work experience or on-the-job training placements at the library. For example, Hartford Public Library has served as a site for participants in a local workforce program to gain subsidized employment or work experience, and the Asotin County Library is a work experience site for youth participating in WIOA as well as a work placement site for students with disabilities receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services through Vocational Rehabilitation services.

### SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Figure 9. Business development services



## Standard services

Figure 10. Business development: standard services

|                                      |  |  |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Asotin County Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Business skills &amp; entrepreneurship courses in Gale Courses and LinkedIn Learning</li> </ul>   | <b>Kenton County Public Library</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wide range of circulation materials &amp; online resources</li> <li>• Assistance with basic resources &amp; questions from librarians</li> <li>• Referrals to outside organizations (e.g., SCORE, Small Business Admin office)</li> </ul> |
| <b>Bangor Public Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Business-related resources (print &amp; online)</li> <li>• Two-way referrals to SCORE</li> </ul>  | <b>Memphis Public Libraries</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive collection of physical &amp; online materials on business development</li> <li>• Online resources to help with market research</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Brooklyn Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialized Business Library with free access to business &amp; investment resources</li> <li>• Additional resources through Business and Career Center and virtually</li> </ul>                            | <b>North Liberty Community Library</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current focus is on expanding business-related collections</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Cambria County Library System</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Books, materials, &amp; online resources related to small business development</li> <li>• Two-way referrals with Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI)</li> </ul> | <b>San Diego Public Library</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reference librarians able to provide basic small business support</li> <li>• Access to wide range of circulation materials and online resources</li> <li>• Referrals to specialized library centers</li> </ul>                            |
| <b>Hartford Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ad hoc support from librarians with questions related to small business development</li> <li>• Print resources &amp; online databases</li> </ul>  | <b>St. Joe County Public Library</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology, business databases, and reference books</li> <li>• Advanced digital technology through Studio 304</li> </ul>  |

Similar to workforce development services, standard small business development services that libraries deliver typically include access to technology, reference assistance, and standard print and digital collections. (See Figure 10.) While all case study libraries provided some level of small business development support through their standard services, this tended to be less of a general reference focus area compared to workforce development services. Standard services relevant to business owners and entrepreneurs include:

-  **Access to technology and the internet:** Access to computers, scanners, and paper printers is an essential service for entrepreneurs and small business owners, and library WiFi connection is crucial, particularly in rural areas with inconsistent internet coverage.
-  **Reference librarian assistance:** Reference librarians across all case study libraries

provide basic small business support, such as access to circulation materials, online support, and referrals to local small business development organizations. In some cases, though less universally, reference librarians also help patrons search for financing sources and prepare basic business plans.

-  **Standard collections and digital resources:** Patrons also have access to standard library collections and digital resources for small business development support. Commonly available databases include AtoZdatabases, Business Source Complete, Consumer Reports, Entrepreneurial Studies Source, Gale Legal Forms, Health Business Full Text, Legal Information Reference Center, ReferenceUSA, ThomasNet, and Morningstar.

## Specialized services

Figure 11. Business development: specialized services

|                                      |  |  |   |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>Asotin County Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None currently</li> </ul>   | <b>Kenton County Public Library</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small business courses through Google</li> <li>• One-on-one support from Covington branch career navigator</li> <li>• Makerspace at Erlanger branch for marketing, printing, fabrication, &amp; product development</li> </ul> |
| <b>Bangor Public Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services offered through the Allen Business Center, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-working &amp; meeting space</li> <li>• Computers &amp; high-capacity printer</li> <li>• Business-related software</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <b>Memphis Public Libraries</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Business Center at MPL's central branch</li> <li>• Programming for small businesses (e.g., guidance on how to access COVID-19 relief funds, free legal clinics for business owners)</li> </ul>                           |
| <b>Brooklyn Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>PowerUp!</i> offers classes, individual counseling, visibility, &amp; financing for entrepreneurs</li> <li>• <i>BKLYN Fashion Academy</i> offers an intensive program to prepare designers for launching fashion businesses</li> </ul>                         | <b>North Liberty Community Library</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None currently</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Cambria County Library System</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information sessions or workshops on business development topics (e.g., Google Docs for business owners) at Cambria Public Library</li> </ul>   | <b>San Diego Public Library</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patent and Trademark Resource Center (PTRC)</li> <li>• New Microbusiness Center</li> <li>• IDEA Lab makerspace with tools and resources for exploration in science, technology, and design</li> </ul>                          |
| <b>Hartford Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mujeres Emprendedoras program at Park Street branch</li> <li>• Engagement with other community stakeholders to support entrepreneurs &amp; creatives</li> <li>• YOUmedia program &amp; makerspace</li> </ul>  | <b>St. Joe County Public Library</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance with marketing &amp; promotional materials at Studio 304</li> <li>• Full-time research librarian supporting small businesses &amp; business development</li> </ul>  |

While not as typical as library activities related to workforce development, a number of the case study libraries were actively involved in designing and implementing their own efforts to meet the needs of local entrepreneurs and small businesses. (See Figure 11.)

**Dedicated small business development staff:** A couple of the case study libraries had dedicated small business development staff. For example, the St. Joe County Public Library has a full-time research librarian to assist small businesses and business development. At Kenton County Public Library, the career navigator at one of the branches manages more of the business interaction in comparison to the other library workforce development staff. The navigator participates in Covington Business Council meetings to share library resources, understands business demands, and offers one-on-one appointments with business owners and entrepreneurs to educate them on how the library can support their needs. In Memphis, the central library has a Small Business Center with staff and

resources available for walk-in and scheduled appointments.

**Makerspaces and media and technology studios:** Libraries with makerspaces or technology studios offer creatives, entrepreneurs, and small business owners access to more advanced technology, including graphic software programs, large format and 3D printers, recording studios, and audio/visual arts resources, among others. Three case study libraries had some form of specialized facilities with equipment that could be relevant to entrepreneurs (see sidebar).

**Specialized resource centers:** Four of the ten case study libraries have established dedicated small business centers. In Brooklyn, the business center is part of a broader Business & Career Center that also offers workforce development resources. The Bangor, Memphis, and San Diego business centers focus exclusively on business. In addition to the Microbusiness Center, the San Diego Public Library has instituted a Patent and

Trademark Resource Center (PTRC) to support entrepreneurs seeking patent and trademark assistance. To provide staff capacity, one librarian at the branch has completed training with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and attends related conferences. The PTRC also hosts specialized programming to support patron needs, such as a local law firm giving monthly pro bono patent and trademark legal advice.

📌 *Information sessions and workshops:* Libraries may also provide information sessions and workshops targeting small business owners and entrepreneurs. Some examples of session topics the case study library sites presented include starting and running a small business, conducting market research, Google Docs for business owners, free legal clinics for small businesses, and programming on how to access COVID-19 recovery funding. Although all case study libraries with dedicated small business development staff or centers provided workshops for small business owners, multiple libraries without these specialized supports also offered episodic workshops focused on small business development.

📌 *Specialized programs:* Brooklyn Public Library has several specialized programs to support emerging small businesses and entrepreneurs. The PowerUP! program offers entrepreneurs classes and individual counseling in addition to visibility and financing. To participate in the PowerUP! business plan competition, businesses must meet with a business advisor and attend at least three PowerUP! webinar classes. Competition winners receive monetary awards. The library also offered a specialized competition, PowerUP! KREYOL Business Plan Competition, targeting Haitian entrepreneurs. The BKLYN Fashion Academy is an intensive program for designers to prepare them for launching

## MAKERSPACES AND MEDIA/ TECHNOLOGY STUDIOS

Three case study libraries have specialized places within the facilities with equipment that entrepreneurs, creative individuals, and other patrons can use to explore new products and their interests.

- At the **St. Joe County Public Library, Studio 304** provides computers, printers (large-scale and 3D), and a podcasting studio. Library staff are available to help patrons design flyers and promotional materials, design a website, or create a Facebook page.
- Similarly, **Kenton County Public Library** has a makerspace in the Erlanger branch that small business owners can use for marketing, printing, fabrication, and product development.
- At the central **San Diego Public Library** branch, **IDEA Lab** patrons can access 3D printers, vinyl cutters, a sewing machine, a CNC milling machine, a laser printer, and a printer and heat press, among other tools. The IDEA Lab makerspace also has a transfer station where patrons can access, digitize, and share video and audio recordings. Software available in the IDEA Lab includes varied 3D design, Adobe, audio/visual, coding, and graphic design programs. There are eight other makerspaces in the branch libraries to increase equitable access to these resources.

fashion businesses. Program participants attend several classes and labs and participate in a final fashion show. In Hartford, the Park Street branch of the library, located in a largely Latinx neighborhood, established the Mujeres Emprendedoras (Entrepreneurial Women) program, working with female immigrants interested in starting their own businesses. Hartford Public Library also has The Beat program aimed at creative entrepreneurs. This program creates a curated digital archive of new music by jury-selected local musicians; selected artists receive an honorarium and have an opportunity to perform via the library's partnership with The Bushnell, the state's largest arts organization.

## Community hub services

Figure 12. Business development: community hub services

|                                      |  |  |   |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|
| <b>Asotin County Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None currently</li> </ul>   | <b>Kenton County Public Library</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Erlanger branch hosts weekly Erlanger Business Council meetings</li> <li>• Prior to pandemic, small business counseling through SCORE at branch locations (not currently operating)</li> </ul>                       |
| <b>Bangor Public Library</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lunch &amp; Learn sessions for small business owners and entrepreneurs through partnership with SCORE</li> </ul>  | <b>Memphis Public Libraries</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space for community organizations to host events</li> <li>• Workshops for small business owners through partnership with the Memphis chapter of Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)</li> </ul>               |
| <b>Brooklyn Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships with local business assistance providers</li> <li>• Counseling to clients onsite (prior to COVID) and meeting space for the Women’s Business Center (WBC)</li> </ul> | <b>North Liberty Community Library</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting space for local businesses</li> <li>• Currently focusing on ways to provide space as a regional hub for the community, with specific focus on nonprofit businesses</li> </ul>                                |
| <b>Cambria County Library System</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborations with other organizations to host workshops</li> <li>• Advertisement for workshops held at other locations</li> </ul>   | <b>San Diego Public Library</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnership with College of Continuing Education to offer Google Suite, Microsoft Suite, and other basic business platform training</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Hartford Public Library</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space for community organizations to offer workshops and programming</li> </ul>   | <b>St. Joe County Public Library</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small business training in partnership with local agencies</li> <li>• Partnership with SCORE to facilitate business development classes through GROW with Google</li> <li>• Meeting spaces for businesses</li> </ul> |

In addition to designing and implementing their own specialized services for small business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs, public libraries commonly partner with other organizations that deliver business assistance services at library facilities. While not as extensive as their partnerships with workforce development providers, the case studies identified a number of different ways that

public libraries provide community hub services in the small business support system.

✦ *Partnering with local SBDCs and SCORE offices:* Many of the case study libraries offered their facilities to host partner organization meetings or workshops. At least six of the ten case study libraries partnered with SCORE or their regional SBA to provide small business training on topics such as writing a business plan, bookkeeping with QuickBooks, promoting a business through social media, government contracting, and small business financing. For instance, the Bangor Public Library and the Memphis Public Libraries collaborate with the Small Business Administration’s SCORE program to provide workshops on such topics as writing a business plan or turning a hobby into a business in library facilities. In some cases, the library and community partner jointly develop and deliver workshop content in library meeting space.

✦ *Hosting services and meetings:* Libraries may also support small business



Image with permission from Bellweather Agency and Brooklyn Public Library  
<https://bellweather.agency/insights/bellweather-agency-brooklyn-public-library-campaign-for-brooklyn/>

development by hosting partner programs. Brooklyn Public Library, for instance, has developed a strong partnership with a number of small business assistance providers who run small business support programs. Prior to COVID-19, some of these partners delivered counseling services to clients onsite at the library. These partners include SCORE NYC, City Bar Justice Center's Neighborhood Entrepreneur Law Project, and Start Small Think Big. In addition, the library can also serve as a small business development community hub by functioning as the host site for chamber of commerce or local business council meetings. In Kenton County, for example, Kenton County Public Library hosts the Erlanger Business Council weekly meetings.

## ADMINISTRATION OF WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

### Staffing and management

General reference librarians at all case study libraries provide basic workforce development services, and some provide basic business development services. In half of the case study libraries, these general reference librarians are the primary contact for workforce development services. In these instances, the adult services coordinators within the library tend to oversee workforce development and business development programming. While some of the reference librarians also provided basic information to small business owners and entrepreneurs, most often related to available databases and information they needed, overall, they had less familiarity with the local small business support system.

More dedicated staffing arrangements typically took one of two forms:

- *Specialized program staff:* In some cases, libraries have specialized staff with considerable expertise in workforce development who provide services as part

of specific workforce programs, such as JobLINC in Memphis, TAP in Hartford, Bendable in South Bend, and the Business & Career Center and Adult Learning Centers in Brooklyn. Asotin County Library has a career coach with specialized workforce-related skills. Specialized library workforce development staff may be librarians, but they also include individuals with other professional skills and work experience. For example, the career coach at Asotin Public Library is a retired community college vice president with extensive experience and training in career education and curriculum development. In Brooklyn, the Adult Learning Centers staff are likely to be instructors who specialize in ESOL or teaching for the high school equivalency exam.

- *Non-program-specific development staff:* Other libraries may hire or train librarians or other staff to deliver workforce development services broadly throughout the system, including but not limited to special initiatives or programs. For example, Kenton County Public Library's Career and Job Services Division has multiple dedicated staff, including a workforce manager, career programmer, workforce reference librarian, and two career navigators who provide workforce development services system-wide.

Libraries with public workforce development career centers co-located within their facility or those that have established distinct internal workforce development programs may be less likely to cultivate specialized workforce development librarians due to easy referral access to specialists.

### Management of workforce and business development service in multi-branch library systems

The central system-level staff played a variable role in managing and supporting workforce

and business development services in library systems with multiple branches. In most of the case study libraries with multiple branches, the staff at the system level oversaw most of the specialized and community hub services. Librarians at the branches, however, who could have very different skill and knowledge levels about workforce and business development resources in their community, primarily managed standard services. It was common for branch staff to refer patrons to the central or main library for assistance.

In five of the ten case study libraries, however, branch outlets did have autonomy in developing and delivering services. In Brooklyn and San Diego, among others, branches have their own administration, priorities, and service models. Despite varying levels of independence, branches often communicate with each other regarding service offerings and share resources. In Memphis, for example, much of the workforce and business development programming falls under the oversight of the adult services librarians. The adult services staff from each library meet monthly as the Adult Services Group to discuss their programming, troubleshoot any shared problems, and exchange information. These meetings contribute to the dissemination of information and empower staff to refer library patrons to events happening not only in their specific branch but also across the system. The Adult Services Group also undergoes training on topics of civic importance for adults, such as voter registration, tax preparation, and the 2020 census.

Aside from general reference librarian support for basic workforce and business development services, the libraries centralize the more extensive workforce and business development planning and service delivery primarily in a main library location. For example:

- In Kenton County, the Erlanger branch is located centrally within the county. Focusing workforce development services in this location provides patrons with the most convenient geographic access and maximizes staff capacity.
- In South Bend, Bendable workforce development services are available at the main library, with Bendable staff visiting branch locations to provide services. St. Joe County Public Library staff intend to train branch staff to initiate and deliver Bendable services directly over time.
- In Brooklyn, the library has strong central system-wide staff who serve system functions and provide services to the branches. Depending on branch interest, system staff visit some branches to provide resources for job seekers and deliver training and support to branch staff. System staff also manage the Adult Learning Centers and have staff at four branches and the Central Library.

Several case study libraries also had additional system-level capacity that influenced workforce and business development services. In Brooklyn, a Strategy Department is responsible for collecting and analyzing data, updating the strategic plan, and managing major initiatives in the institution. In addition, it has an internal incubator, which the Brooklyn Public Library designed to promote innovation within the institution. The BKLYN Fashion Institute is a product of this internal incubator. In San Diego, a State Library grant to the system currently funds an enhanced partnership between the San Diego Workforce Partnership and the San Diego Public Library, and this partnership will continue with Library Foundation SD funding after the grant ends. The services this grant facilitated, such as Family Career Exploration Days and advanced co-branding of workforce and library services, target both the main library and local branches.

## Funding

In most case study libraries, funding for workforce development services derived primarily from the general operating budget, with occasional grants to support distinct initiatives. In multiple grant-funded cases, the library has been able to absorb projects, such as the start of the Career Center in Asotin, the career navigator positions in Kenton County, and the current enhanced partnership with San Diego Workforce Partnership in San Diego, into their operating budgets after the grant ends. Additionally, at least two case study libraries subsidized some workforce development workshops with support from local businesses.

In the case study libraries, the specialized business development services rarely got all their funding through regular public funding sources. Supplemental support often came through grant funding from a foundation, from the library foundation, from a specific donor, or from the state. For example, in the case of the Bangor Business Center, funding for the facility came from a local family; in San Diego, Library Foundation SD provided funding for the new Microbusiness Center; and, in Hartford, the library received a grant through the Latino Endowment Fund to support its women entrepreneurship program.

Among the case study sites, Brooklyn Public Library had perhaps the most diverse funding stream, with significant funding from federal, state, and local governments as well as philanthropic and local business support. For example, some of the resources for addressing workforce-related services emerged as a result of federal funds that the library received after the 2008 recession. The city passed through some of this funding to libraries for additional computer terminals and laptops at specific library locations where there was high need. New York State also provided support to public libraries through a variety of funding

streams. For instance, Empire State Development awarded a \$500,000 grant in support of the Business & Career Center at the library. Furthermore, the Adult Learning Department receives a significant amount of federal, state, and city funding related to literacy programs.

## How public libraries determine what to offer

All case study libraries described developing workforce and small business development services in response to emerging needs and opportunities. Library stakeholders rely on several methods to assess workforce and small business development needs, including daily patron interaction, community context, service data, and collaboration with ecosystem partners.

Many case study library staff described the value of librarians' daily interactions with patrons in understanding community needs and service opportunities. In Memphis, for example, branch librarians are the primary decision-makers for which programming or support to provide, a delegation of responsibility widely respected within the system. Memphis Public Libraries recognizes that librarians have the most direct contact with patron needs and requests and are in the best position to recommend services. Similarly, across all case study libraries, most library staff described librarian interaction with patrons as the primary mechanism for identifying needs and developing programming.

Yet, several library stakeholders encouraged library staff to gather information more systematically from the broader community through surveys or community data, which could identify opportunities less visible within existing patron activity. In Brooklyn, two full-time system staff help branch staff utilize program data and assess population-level statistics to better understand their neighborhoods and design responsive

programming. Similarly, in Hartford, the library's programming has always been responsive to the needs of the community, and branch managers have developed specific programs based on neighborhood needs, such as programs targeted at the Latinx community at the Park Street branch and a program on food handling at the Barbour branch. Library stakeholders noted that using broader community-level data or developing community-wide services helps them understand broader community trends outside their typical patron base.

Economic disruptions in communities may also lead to new roles for libraries. In Brooklyn, new workforce and small business support programs often arose in response to larger economic challenges in New York City. For instance, after 9/11, the city provided some special funding to support the library's economic and workforce services and, similarly, after the 2008 recession, with a new focus on the workforce challenges of Brooklyn residents, the city turned its attention to the potential role of the public libraries. Additionally, the internal incubator program that is part of Brooklyn Public Library's Strategy Department funds frontline staff to test ideas before the library incorporates them into practice or replicates them.

Data that libraries collect on program services, including activity outputs, patron feedback forms, and end-of-program surveys, also influence program development. In San Diego, library staff regularly implement Project Outcome surveys to capture participant feedback and expectation of outcomes after program completion; library staff use this information to modify programming based on patron input. Additionally, in San Diego Public Library's IDEA Lab, to better understand utilization and demand, library staff use an anonymous Google survey form to ask patrons why they are visiting the Lab and what services they are using. This helps internal programming

decisions, such as which software to purchase as well as outreach strategies. Librarians across all case study sites noted that simple output data, such as program attendance, also help them understand patron demand and schedule availability.

Libraries' relationships with other workforce and small business organizations also help determine system gaps and subsequent service offerings. For instance, in San Diego, the library collaborates with partner agencies to develop programming based on identified needs, including course offerings and job fair events. In Kenton County, because the library sits at multiple workforce development tables, it is involved in conversations related to larger regional-level workforce development decisions. Stakeholders noted that the Kenton County Public Library's unique value-add in these strategy sessions stems from its working with individuals every day and identifying the kind of tangible help requested and gaps in existing provision. One external stakeholder mentioned that the library is often first to identify an underlying problem in the workforce development infrastructure because it is witnessing daily the challenges that its patrons face throughout the process. This daily interaction with patrons, coupled with strong engagement with the broader ecosystem, helps the library understand unmet needs and plan new programming.

### **Marketing of services**

Libraries use a broad range of marketing strategies to promote and raise awareness about their workforce and business



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<https://www.hplct.org/>

development programming, ranging from traditional print communications to partner engagement and word-of-mouth referrals. Marketing efforts include providing general information on the range of workforce and business development services libraries offer to raise broad awareness about availability as well as targeted efforts to promote specific events or classes. Types of marketing fit within the following categories:

- *Print marketing:* Libraries described diverse print marketing strategies to promote their work, including newsletters, flyers, posters, notecards, and bookmarks.
- *Social media:* Libraries are increasingly relying on social media channels, such as library webpages, YouTube channels, Facebook pages, LinkedIn accounts, and Twitter, to outreach their services.
- *Traditional media:* Libraries continue to rely on traditional media, including newspaper and radio advertisements and television programming, to showcase workforce and business development services.
- *Community engagement:* Libraries attend community events, often managing a library information table, to raise awareness of workforce and business development services among the wider community.
- *Partnership networking:* Libraries' relationships with program partners also support marketing efforts. Libraries and partners mutually advertise and cross-promote each other's activities through their traditional marketing channels and during partner events. Additionally, all libraries involved in the case studies noted the importance of regular participation on community boards and collaborations to maintain library visibility and increase outreach.

- *Word of mouth:* Libraries also rely on ad hoc word of mouth to promote existing services or upcoming events. This informal information sharing may occur between patrons, community partners, or from community partner staff to prospective library patrons.

Libraries may have designated marketing departments or staff or may produce workforce or business development-specific material internal to their reference or workforce development departments. In North Liberty, the library has one full-time marketing staff member with an assistant. The public services librarian in North Liberty supports library marketing efforts through outreach to local businesses and as a chamber ambassador through the Iowa City Area Business Partnership's Ambassador Program. In San Diego, the library's communications office manages service marketing and promotion. In Kenton County, library staff within the workforce and career services division may update library workforce web pages themselves to help keep information current.

Libraries may not have a regular or specific strategy for marketing workforce and business development services outside their normal marketing channels; however, some libraries have developed workforce- or business development-specific efforts. In San Diego, for example, a State Library grant supports a marketing collaboration between the communication department at the library and the community's workforce board. The library and partnership meet quarterly to cross-promote events and strategize. They have developed a joint landing webpage and are creating a poster to promote service offerings.

Libraries may also promote workforce and business development services through more general library outreach events. For example, the Connect Team within Memphis Public Libraries handles outreach across the city.

This team often takes the library's programming into the community, for example, having story time at laundromats, the zoo, and central business centers, to promote early childhood literacy and make communities more aware of the resources, including broader library offerings such as workforce development, available to them through the library.

## IMPACT OF THE PANDEMIC

### Library response and operation during the peak of COVID-19

When lockdowns in response to the COVID-19 pandemic first occurred in the United States in March 2020, most case study libraries closed access to their buildings for several weeks or months. During this time, some libraries continued to have essential staff work in person. In some cases, the pandemic allowed time for library staff to participate in professional development, such as to improve fluency in online workforce development training programs, or to examine and adjust offerings, such as North Liberty, which conducted a diversity audit of its collections to better meet community needs. Even while closed to the public, libraries utilized curbside pickup and other no-contact services to provide books and other resources to the public.

During the pandemic, case study libraries transitioned many services from in-person to virtual formats, including workforce- and small business development-related services. Many libraries also saw increased participation in existing online workforce and small business development resources, such as LinkedIn Learning. Virtual programming included workforce and small business workshops, such as those libraries offered in partnership with organizations like SCORE. Many case study libraries also scheduled virtual one-on-one appointments to assist patrons with specific workforce or business needs, such as job search, resume support, market research, etc.

In some cases, such as in Memphis, libraries hosted workforce programming outdoors to support the ability to social distance.

While many programs and services transitioned to a virtual or hybrid format, there are also cases where the pandemic decreased demand or library capacity to the point where certain programs paused or stopped completely. For example, Bangor Public Library discontinued its Lunch and Learn workshops in partnership with SCORE during the pandemic because demand dropped. Additionally, South Bend struggled with launching Bendable during the pandemic because its in-person component was critical to program design. Particularly for patrons with the highest need, transitioning to a virtual format for programs and services was challenging because it required sufficient digital literacy and access to technology. For this reason, ESOL classes, in particular, often struggled to adapt to a virtual format.

As the pandemic made gathering in person risky or impossible and dramatically affected the economy and the way people work, libraries made significant efforts to increase access to online resources and technology. As an example, many case study libraries increased the availability of free resources on their websites, provided free printing or faxing services, and offered the ability for patrons to reserve time to use computers or other technology while social distancing, including the ability to reserve rooms for virtual meetings. In many cases, libraries also expanded WiFi to parking lots and offered hotspot lending to patrons. Some libraries also offered outdoor working spaces or outdoor charging stations.

In addition to transitioning or expanding more traditional library services, many case study libraries participated directly in their communities' COVID-19 recovery efforts. Libraries contributed by increasing access to unemployment assistance, connecting patrons to necessary social services, and

distributing food, COVID tests, personal protective equipment (PPE), and even serving as vaccination sites. For example, in Bangor and in Cambria County, library staff worked with their career centers to assist patrons with applying for unemployment assistance. Moreover, case study libraries expanded their role as a referral source during the pandemic, directing patrons to food, cash assistance, housing, and health insurance, among other resources. In particular, Memphis Public Libraries is home to LINC211, which remained open during the pandemic. LINC211 staff were able to direct callers to the information and services that were critical to supporting their health, safety, and stability. In some situations, libraries served as physical sites for food distribution, PPE and test kit distribution, vaccine clinics, and other pandemic relief efforts. San Diego Public Library leveraged its IDEA Lab in its central branch to print over 5,000 face shields to provide critical supplies to the city, hospital staff, and other emergency responders.

In some cases, libraries reported using Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) and American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for COVID relief or distributed funds. For example, Hartford Public Library used ARPA funds for equipment such as tents, tables, and heaters to enable staff to provide services outdoors. Memphis Public Libraries played a role in distributing CARES and ARPA funding. Memphis Public Libraries' LINC211 department analyzed data from 2-1-1 calls to identify neighborhoods vulnerable to socioeconomic risks. The library used that data to collaborate with the Memphis Division of Housing and Community Development and other partners to set up pop-ups to help Memphians submit applications for unemployment insurance, emergency rental assistance, and other pandemic-related funding.

## Ongoing recovery and shifts in services

As communities continue to recover and adjust to the “new normal” of the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries are beginning to resume more services. At the time of the interviews, most case study libraries were operating partial or full services, with some still operating at reduced hours. Many libraries opened their physical space to patrons more widely as lockdowns lessened in the spring and summer of 2021, although some paused reopening due to ongoing spikes in COVID cases. In some instances, library staff reported that foot traffic was still at levels lower than prior to the pandemic, even at the time of the interviews. In this new normal, many libraries continue to offer virtual and hybrid programming, outdoor programming, and services to support those working in the virtual environment, such as hotspots and laptops, and rooms to host or attend Zoom meetings along with the relevant equipment.

The pandemic continues to influence the demand for workforce and small business assistance that libraries provide. Many case study libraries reported that patrons continue to look for unemployment support, and there is less demand for job search services than before the pandemic. When patrons are seeking employment, they are more interested in remote work. However, many libraries shared that demand for small business development services increased since the beginning of the pandemic, often reflecting that many people saw the opportunity to pursue their passions or work for themselves to have a more flexible work life. There were some examples where libraries adjusted their services in response to increased demand from new entrepreneurs, such as a branch of Hartford Public Library that secured funding to support residents with entrepreneurial endeavors.

Overall, key learnings for the case study libraries during the COVID-19 pandemic include:

**Libraries strengthened and leveraged relationships with other organizations, increasing awareness of the libraries' roles in their communities.**

In response to the pandemic, several case study libraries collaborated with other community organizations to coordinate relief and recovery efforts and disseminate information. In certain situations, community agencies, including the libraries, met periodically to share and publicize messages related to testing, food, vaccinations, and mental health resources. For example, North Liberty Community Library was part of a cross-agency community effort with several economic development agencies in Johnson County, which increased awareness among the business development community about the role libraries play in relation to small business development services. The library also partnered with the city of North Liberty to provide childcare in its recreation center, which is co-located with the library, for healthcare, emergency, and city workers during the pandemic.

**The COVID-19 pandemic re-emphasized the importance of digital literacy and access to technology, which was already a key priority for many case study libraries.**

Even before the pandemic, libraries knew of and responded to gaps in technology access and digital literacy. Providing resources and programming related to these gaps is a meaningful way for libraries to contribute to their broader workforce and small business ecosystems. As people became more reliant on technology to work, attend school, and access basic services during the COVID-19 pandemic, this gap became even more severe. Libraries responded by ramping up their provision of online services and access to WiFi and other technology during the pandemic,

such as by using emergency funding for hotspot and laptop lending programs. In Asotin County, the library participates in a convening of community agencies seeking to expand high-speed internet in the region and even sent staff door-to-door to promote access to subsidies for internet access. While libraries already recognized digital literacy and digital access as significant barriers to address, the pandemic emphasized the importance of the library's role in serving patrons with those needs, and it continues to be a priority of the case study libraries.

**During the pandemic, libraries demonstrated a foundational culture of innovation and a strong connection to community needs that enabled them to adapt to the crisis and changing environment.**

Case study libraries reported that their experience during the pandemic reinforced how resilient and adaptive libraries are. The case study libraries demonstrated the ability to pivot their services to reach more patrons and respond to emerging needs throughout the pandemic. For example, libraries shifted to virtual and hybrid programming, increased assistance for patrons applying for unemployment insurance, utilized outdoor programming and services, and repurposed their resources to respond to the immediate needs of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as by using 3D printers to print masks.

### **SUMMARY: OBSERVATIONS OF LIBRARIES' WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES**

**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.**

Each of the case study libraries described how they assist patrons who are seeking a job, looking to enhance their skills, or have an interest in starting and growing a small business. While there were some differences in the level of knowledge that library staff had

of the workforce and small business development systems in their community and the depth and breadth of their collection and online resources, all sought to help meet the needs of patrons looking for employment, new skills, or interested in starting a business. Interviews revealed that other community organizations highly value these standard services. However, it is extremely difficult to measure the use of standard services or track the outcomes of individuals assisted through these efforts.

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

While there were a few examples of libraries operating specialized programs aimed at entrepreneurs, this was not as common as specialized workforce programs. The focus on the business development side seems more facility-based, with a number of libraries having space set aside for makerspaces, technology labs, and co-working.

**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.**

Responding to patron needs, many libraries have become involved in helping to improve the skills of patrons related to computers. This includes very basic support and workshops on how to operate a computer, set up and read e-mails, and operate basic word-processing software.

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

The experience of case study libraries that partnered with local career centers differed.

In some libraries, services were highly integrated with cross-trained staff. In other cases, the career center operated in a silo. There is some evidence that communities could better benefit from the co-location through increased attention to collaboration and better staff communications.

**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.**

In most case study sites with more than one branch, system-level staff directed workforce- and business development-related services. While librarians at the branches would assist patrons with basic information and provide smaller-scale programming, some tended to refer individuals to the main branch to address more complex needs. System staff often managed programs at the branches, rather than having branch staff provide the services. Community hub services were often concentrated at the main branch, but there were some examples where partner agencies provided workshops or other services at the branches.

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

In general, the case studies provide evidence of how adaptive and relevant public libraries are. This was especially true during the early days of COVID when they continued to provide services such as internet and computer access. The pandemic also encouraged some libraries to forge new relationships in their communities and develop new capacities related to virtual programming.

### 3. PUBLIC LIBRARIES' ROLE IN WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS

#### INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 outlined the types of services libraries provide patrons, from standard services to community hub services. The delivery of these services is within the context of the broader “systems” that operate within a community. As defined by the Urban Institute, “A local workforce development system encompasses the organizations and activities that prepare people for employment, help workers advance in their careers, and ensure a skilled workforce. These systems are complex, with multiple funding sources, programs, organizational missions, target populations, and labor market demands.”<sup>11</sup> The small business development system similarly includes the multiple governmental and nonprofit organizations involved in supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses as well as the policies that can influence business development and growth in a community. The breadth and depth of these systems can vary significantly across communities. While every community has some level of services related to workforce development given the federal WIOA Act, there are many communities that do not have a small business development “system.”

This chapter focuses on the more “indirect” role that public libraries play in their community’s workforce and small business development systems, not the direct services and activities that libraries provide alone or in partnership with other organizations. The initial theory of change for this project hypothesized that libraries contribute to community economic

outcomes directly through the services they offer (as outlined in Chapter 2) and indirectly through their role in the community’s workforce and business development systems (the focus of this chapter). (See Figure 13.) The case study libraries present some evidence that, while difficult to measure, public libraries can improve the community’s economic conditions more indirectly through the system role they play.

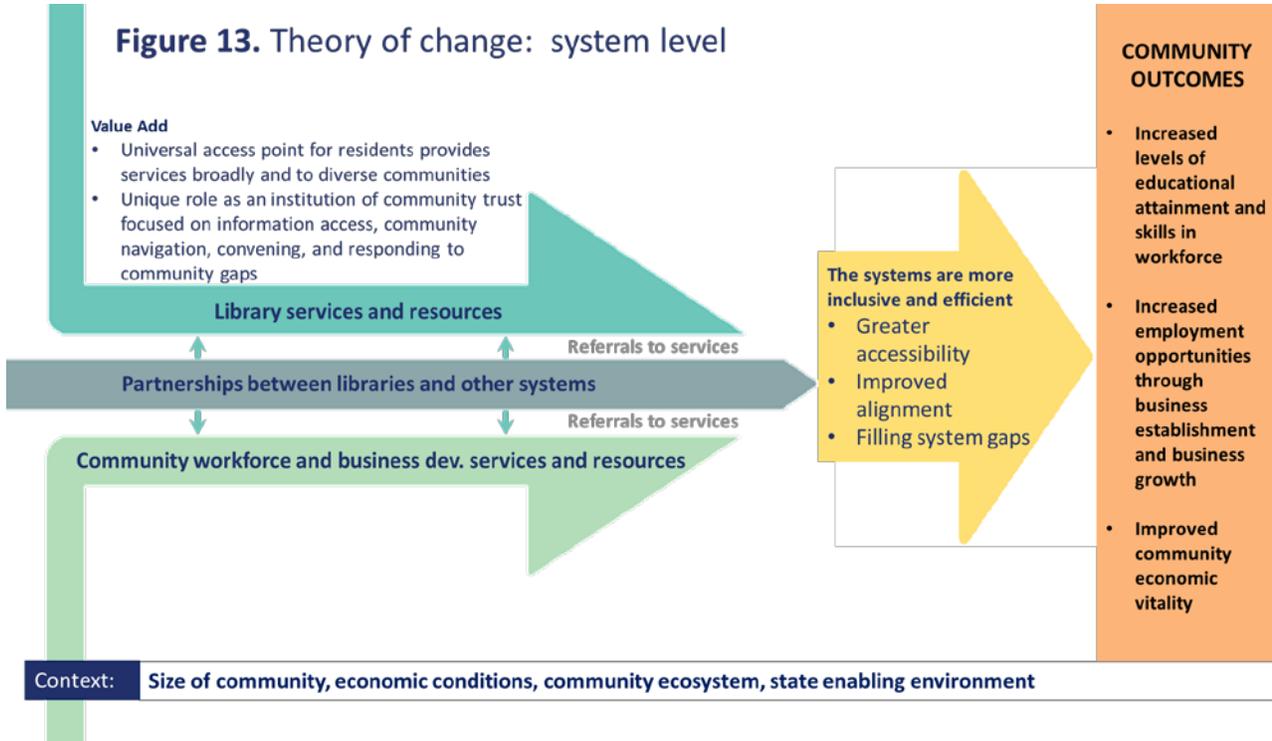
While there is not one readily accepted set of measures for economic wellbeing, the percentage of residents that are productively in the labor force and employed is clearly one such indicator. Similarly, having a diverse and growing base of businesses is widely accepted as one of the key components of a healthy economy. With an increasing focus on equity, there is also a growing belief that community wellbeing requires that all residents have access to the resources needed to succeed in the economy.<sup>12</sup> The workforce and small business development systems that operate in most communities rarely are able to provide the levels of support necessary to achieve the goals associated with inclusive regional economic development.

The relationships that libraries have with other community stakeholders and the types of services they provide can fill some of the gaps in workforce and business development system capacity by *broadening the reach of the existing systems* and *creating some efficiencies* in how the workforce and small

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.urban.org/projects/workforce-development-systems>

<sup>12</sup> Berube, Allen, & Bateman, N. (2021). *A Roadmap to Developing Inclusive Regional Economic Indicators*. Washington, DC: Metropolitan Policy Program, Brookings Institute

**Figure 13. Theory of change: system level**



business support systems function. These types of system outcomes, though not a deliberate goal of most public libraries, may actually be more critical in terms of leading to larger-scale improvements in the economic conditions in a community than the direct outcomes associated with some of the services that the public library provides directly to patrons.

Unfortunately, the role that public libraries play in the larger systems is not widely understood or appreciated by residents or political and civic leaders.

### RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SYSTEM

The library's role in the community's workforce and business development systems correlates to the types of relationships they have developed in the community. The types of relationships might vary depending on the depth of the system in the community. As noted, while every community has a workforce development system, there are communities with a very limited small

business development system. Across the ten case study libraries, the types of relationships fell within the following spectrum:

1. *Informal relationships:* The case study libraries offered examples of the informal relationships that public libraries often have with other service providers in their communities. As part of their standard services, librarians may be aware of some organizations in their community that provide job access-related support, training for career advancement, or support for starting a business. Librarians may have reached out to these organizations to better understand what they do and to share information. But this is most often on an ad hoc basis and may focus only on some of the organizations in their community. Similarly, some community organizations may publicize some of the services the library provides, and the library may have brochures and other material available for patrons on other programs available in the community.

2. *Formal partnerships:* Many of the library systems represented in the case studies have developed more formal relationships with other providers in their communities. The most common partnership the case studies identified was with the local WIOA one-stop system. In the business development realm, a number of the case study libraries had developed formal relationships with the SBA SCORE system or SBDC. The most common formal relationship involved providing space within the library facility for a community partner to serve individuals. The second type of formal partnership involved jointly designing and operating a training program or workshop.
3. *Multistakeholder 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.

## SYSTEM OUTCOMES

The case studies found that workforce and business development system outcomes related to public libraries could include:

**Contributing to system reach and inclusiveness:** Public libraries expand the number of residents served by making referrals to more traditional providers and serving the populations other workforce agencies are often not capturing.

**Contributing to system efficiency:** Public libraries are able to fill gaps in the existing system with limited resources and, in some cases, reduce duplication of services by contributing to system alignment.

## RELATIONSHIP SPECTRUM: CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

### INFORMAL RELATIONSHIPS

**Bangor Public Library** and **North Liberty Community Library** are examples of libraries with a number of primarily one-on-one informal relationships with other providers. In the case of Bangor, one staff person has reached out to other workforce service providers and, as a result, there is both cross-referral and cross-marketing of services. In North Liberty, the library leadership has forged many relationships throughout its community and in neighboring Iowa City.

### FORMAL PARTNERSHIPS

Four case study libraries, **Cambria County Library**, **Hartford Public Library**, **Kenton County Public Library**, and **San Diego Public Library**, have developed a formal partnership with the career centers in their community.

**Memphis Public Libraries** has an assistant director of strategic partnerships whose job is to develop new relationships with other organizations. This assistant director has forged relevant partnerships.

### MULTISTAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

**Brooklyn Public Library** has played a noteworthy convening role in the local workforce and business development systems. The library convened multiple organizations in the borough that were supplying adult literacy programs, and it also brought together many of the organizations involved in the small business support system.

**Asotin Community Library** spearheads or is involved in several regional consortia, including taking the lead in developing a Broadband Action Team. It is also part of a "career development team" that comprises representatives from many local organizations and participates in the Clarkston Pullman Business Services Team.

The **Kenton County Public Library** director serves on the board of the local workforce development board and the chamber of commerce. In addition, the library's career and job services manager participates in many workforce-related collaborative tables in the community.

**St. Joe County Public Library** staff, including its "chief engagement officer," sit on workforce and economic development-related committees of the chamber of commerce and participate in other collaborative groups.

## Contributing to system reach and inclusiveness

Perhaps the most significant role that libraries play in the workforce and business development systems is increasing the number of residents in a community who are receiving workforce or business development services. In some cases, this is because the library is meeting the needs of many residents, and they probably would not have pursued services from other providers. In other cases, the library assists patrons through the referral process and directs residents to services they might not know to exist. Finally, the library might serve specific segments of the population, such as various immigrant groups, that more formal systems are not reaching.

### Serving as the system's front door

In every one of the library systems involved in this study, external stakeholders noted that the library plays a critical role as the system's "front door." Perhaps the Memphis Public Libraries' Logo "START HERE" best illustrates this. This essentially promotes a concept that, for many residents of a community, a library is often the first place they turn for services, including when seeking employment, thinking about starting a business, or pursuing new skills or careers. Even adult patrons who visit the library for non-workforce resources, such as taking their children, often encounter opportunities to access workforce services. A number of factors position public libraries as the entry point in the systems:



Image with permission from Memphis Public Libraries  
<https://www.memphislibrary.org/>

- *The community perceives libraries as more accessible in terms of their location.* Residents often turn to their public library because branches are usually closer in proximity to where people live than many of the more traditional workforce or small business development services, and most people are already aware of and familiar with their library branch location. Workforce development stakeholders felt it was advantageous to have access to services in multiple places and that libraries were able to "meet people where they are." The accessibility of libraries is particularly important when organizations providing workforce or small business support are in a location not convenient to residents and when there are transportation barriers.
- *The libraries reported that the community considers libraries as safe and welcoming places open to exploration.* The fact that a resident can go into a library and request assistance without formally applying for access, filling out forms, or providing private information makes it a place where community members feel comfortable. This is especially true of job seekers with the highest needs who may feel intimidated by a more formal setting. As one partner organization shared about the library in its community, *"I do not think this place intimidates people... I don't think the library is a place that people are afraid of."* Numerous external stakeholders made similar comments during the interviews that were part of the case studies.
- *Libraries often provide system navigation,* helping patrons with basic workforce development needs, including job applications and resume support, but they also provide referrals to workforce and business development partners to meet patron needs. Individuals who have recently lost their jobs and want to file for unemployment insurance are likely to

seek services directly from career centers. However, some individuals might not know that benefits or program options exist until they see flyers at the public library or reference staff refer them to the local career center or SBDC.

- *Libraries facilitate access to other critical community services.* Just as libraries provide system navigation for traditional workforce and small business providers, they also refer patrons to the social services they may need to participate in the labor force. For example, library staff may refer patrons to housing assistance, increasing their stability level as they search for a job, or to a discounted bus pass, improving their ability to travel to search for or go to work. In Memphis, library staff reported referring patrons to organizations to help expunge their records, enhancing their ability to participate in the labor force.

#### **Addressing the needs of specific populations**

The case studies present evidence that public libraries often meet the needs of residents with more limited access to services in the community, either by facilitating access to existing services or providing the services themselves. Often, these residents represent population groups that face multiple barriers to getting a job or starting their own businesses. In Asotin, a group working with previously incarcerated individuals turned to the library for basic training related to technology. It reached out to the library because it understood the services that the library had available through its participation in the community and recognized that the community perceived the library as a trusted institution. In Brooklyn, the housing authority in one of the neighborhoods, knowing about the library's workshops on computer literacy, contacted the local branch to see if it could provide some targeted services to its residents. In Hartford, the public library provided entrepreneurial training in Spanish in

a largely Latinx neighborhood. Finally, in a number of the case study libraries, there was evidence that the public libraries were reaching out to and assisting individuals experiencing homelessness, an underlying challenge to any employment opportunity. In each of these cases, the libraries or other community organizations had concluded that the libraries were in a good position to help fill gaps in meeting the needs of underserved populations.

#### **Contributing to system efficiency**

The total amount of resources in a community to support the workforce needs of local residents or support entrepreneurs and small businesses is often limited. Having a more efficient system that can leverage existing resources as much as possible could lead ultimately to better outcomes and have a greater impact on community economic wellbeing. The library case studies present evidence that through their role in the workforce and small businesses system, public libraries are creating more efficient workforce and business development systems in their communities.

#### **Providing technology access and basic literacy services, including digital literacy, adult literacy, and ESOL**

Throughout the case study research, organizations involved in workforce development conveyed an expectation that individuals already knew how to use a computer. These providers were often at a loss of what to do when patrons requested services and stated that they did not know how to operate a computer or have internet access. As a consequence, almost every workforce system interviewee across the ten case studies viewed efforts by the library to provide these basic services as filling a gap that they were unable to fill. In almost all cases, there was a general sense that the libraries' services were complementary, not competitive. Having public libraries provide access to computers and basic computer

literacy created efficiencies in the system since staff at other service providers do not have the time and resources to provide these services.

**Reducing service duplication and inefficiencies through system alignment**

Interviewees with workforce development services providers in a number of the case study communities commented that because of the library’s efforts to build relationships across the system, it is less likely there will be a lot of duplication of services. Some specifically noted that, in particular, libraries are able to provide basic computer literacy assistance efficiently, thereby allowing them to focus on other types of training. By participating in multisector groups in their community or, most importantly, by convening organizations, public libraries help to further the alignment of the system.

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

All the case study libraries offer some free access to training and courses that individuals

seeking to advance their skills can utilize. (See Figure 14.) This includes courses and support for those pursuing their high school diploma as well as specialized credentials or certificates. Similarly, those interested in starting their own business or existing small business owners could access online training and resources related to writing a business plan or the many databases that businesses need to complete market studies. Many small business assistance providers working closely with their public library noted that once they became aware of the data available from public libraries, they no longer recommended to their clients that they purchase proprietary data. In many instances, the State Library agency provides access to and pays for these resources, often using IMLS funds. Some of the libraries also offered classes on how to use these resources. Stakeholders reported these online courses as a lower-cost alternative to meeting some of the workforce and business assistance needs of patrons, thereby contributing to system efficiency.

**Figure 14. Common online workforce training programs offered by case study libraries**

| Program Name             | Asotin | Bangor | Brooklyn | Cambria County | Kenton County | Hartford | Memphis | North Liberty | San Diego | South Bend |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|----------|----------------|---------------|----------|---------|---------------|-----------|------------|
| Brainfuse                | ✓      |        | ✓        |                | ✓             | ✓        |         | * ✓           | * ✓       | * ✓        |
| LearningExpress          | ✓      | ✓      | ✓        |                | ✓             | ✓        | ✓       |               | ✓         |            |
| LinkedIn Learning        | ✓      |        | ✓        |                |               | ✓        | ✓       | ✓             | ✓         | ✓          |
| Gale Courses             | ✓      | ✓      | ✓        |                | ✓             |          | ✓       |               | ✓         | ✓          |
| GCFLearnFree             | ✓      | ✓      |          | ✓              | ✓             |          | ✓       |               | ✓         |            |
| Grow with Google         | ✓      |        |          | ✓              |               |          | ✓       |               | ✓         |            |
| Niche Academy            |        | ✓      |          |                |               | ✓        |         |               | ✓         |            |
| Metrix Learning          |        |        | ✓        |                |               | ✓        |         |               |           |            |
| Universal Class          |        | ✓      |          |                |               | ✓        |         |               |           |            |
| Cisco Networking Academy | ✓      |        |          |                |               | ✓        |         |               |           |            |

\*Offers Brainfuse’s VetNow, a service that connects veterans to civilian employment

## **FACTORS RELATED TO LIBRARY APPROACHES TO INTERACTING WITH WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS**

Across the ten library case studies, there was significant variation in the role each public library played and the degree to which they were potentially contributing to system outcomes. This study is unable to identify with any level of rigor what factors may be related to how and why the efforts connected to meeting the workforce and business development needs of residents differed across the case studies, but the library case studies do present some limited evidence of factors that future research efforts could explore.

### **Library approach**

#### **Leadership and culture**

The most critical factor that seems to influence how the public library interacts with other entities in its community relates to the orientation of library leadership. The case studies surfaced evidence that the library director often sets the tone for the library related to its relationship with external stakeholders. Over time, a director can help institutionalize a culture of collaboration. This culture results in library staff believing that outreach to other community stakeholders involved in workforce development and business development should be part of their role in serving patrons' workforce and business development needs.

In the library case studies where there were multiple partnerships and deep relationships across sectors, interviewees often commented that library leadership prioritized

becoming immersed in the community's civic life and sitting on boards and tables of local organizations working to improve the local economy or address workforce needs. In Hartford, for example, one external stakeholder remarked, *"It feels like it has been in their DNA."* The business development reference librarian at St. Joe County Public Library in South Bend, for example, reaches out to economic development agencies to promote library services. This librarian is collaborating with a women's entrepreneurship organization to develop a roundtable for women to speak about their experiences as entrepreneurs, and partners with veterans' organizations to share resources.

One indication of the leadership's role is the structure of the library staff. In a number of cases, there was a specific staffing position that focused on community partnerships and relationships. For example, Memphis has an assistant director of strategic partnerships whose role is to help build new community partnerships and nurture existing partnerships.

#### **Library governance and funding**

The Mt. Auburn team specifically selected the ten case studies for this study to represent a range of types of public library systems. For example, the cases varied in their governance structure, size, and funding sources. (See Figure 15.) However, there was little evidence to suggest that these characteristics influenced how public libraries functioned within their community or their approach to workforce and business development activities.

Figure 15. Library characteristics of ten case study sites

|                                 | Organizational type | Number of branches | Percent local funding | Revenue per capita |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Asotin County Library           | District            | 3                  | 97%                   | \$40.16            |
| Bangor Public Library           | Nonprofit           | 1                  | 63%                   | \$70.73            |
| Brooklyn Public Library         | Nonprofit           | 60                 | 81%                   | \$61.29            |
| Cambria County Library System   | Nonprofit           | 14*                | 35%                   | \$12.85            |
| Hartford Public Library         | Nonprofit           | 7                  | 79%                   | \$83.92            |
| Kenton County Public Library    | District            | 3                  | 97%                   | \$84.89            |
| Memphis Public Libraries        | Municipal           | 18                 | 98%                   | \$27.01            |
| North Liberty Community Library | Municipal           | 1                  | 98%                   | \$58.42            |
| St. Joe County Public Library   | District            | 10                 | 84%                   | \$99.23            |
| San Diego Public Library        | Municipal           | 36                 | 87%                   | \$42.45            |

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

Anecdotally, some of the library staff working at nonprofit libraries believed that they benefited from not being part of the city or county administration. For example, some reported that the nonprofit status allowed them more freedom to pursue innovative activities without going through the public sector bureaucracy, and there were more fundraising opportunities outside the public sector. Some of the more innovative workforce and small business development programs involved philanthropic funding or corporate sponsors. Staff at some of the case study libraries that were nonprofit organizations believed that these fundraising efforts were easier outside of the public sector processes. However, no clear pattern emerged. Some of the libraries that were part

of the city or county were also very entrepreneurial in their approach.

### Contextual characteristics

#### Type of community

Almost all communities in the U.S. have some type of workforce development system (see description of this system in Chapter 1. Introduction), with a range of public sector, nonprofit, and business entities working to address the skills of residents and their access to employment as well as the workforce needs of the business community. In contrast, the small business support system varies significantly across communities. While many might have some access to SBA-funded services such as SCORE and SBDCs, entrepreneurs in many communities do not have easy access to organizations that support

individuals interested in starting their own businesses or small businesses needing assistance.

To some extent, public libraries respond to local conditions. An initial hypothesis in the research was that in smaller and more rural communities where there are not a large number of service providers, the public library may be more likely to develop partnerships to fill gaps in services and become a more critical player in the workforce or small business support system. Yet, the Brooklyn Public Library, one of the largest libraries in the country, has become deeply engaged in working with both the workforce and small business development systems. The case studies provide some evidence that the size of neither the library nor the community seems to influence the level of engagement in workforce or business development activities.

### **State support**

The State Library agencies are an important resource for public libraries striving to meet

### **SUMMARY: OBSERVATIONS ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES' ROLE IN WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS**

These case study libraries provide a deeper understanding of public libraries' role in the local workforce and small business development systems and their contributions to improved community outcomes. Libraries' influence on workforce and small business development systems may be less about the specific programs public libraries operate and more about their role in forging deep relationships with other organizations and public sector agencies.

The case study libraries also provide evidence of the spectrum of roles that public libraries play in the community and the types of relationships that have formed. There is some evidence that the more that public library staff

the workforce and business support needs of library patrons. (See Figure 16.) However, there is a lot of variation in the type of support that states provide to local public libraries. The most common type of support the case studies surfaced was funding for libraries to make online resources available to patrons. This access is a significant resource, particularly in the workforce development system. In addition, some states specifically encourage public libraries to provide workforce- or small business-related services in the five-year plans they submit to IMLS in order to participate in its Grants to States program. Finally, some states provide special programs and resources to support public libraries' capacity to offer these services.

The relationship between a state's enabling environment and the likelihood that a public library will forge formal partnerships with workforce or small business development organizations, however, requires further research.

understand and build relationships with the workforce and small business providers in their community, the more they are able to refer patrons for appropriate services and vice versa effectively. In addition, the services that the public library offers fill gaps in the system rather than duplicating services.

**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 wellbeing.**

Many residents do not know what services are available to help them obtain employment, advance their careers, or start a new business, but likely know where the closest branch to the public library is. Because so many people

use the library, particularly those who lack computer or internet access, the role library staff play as system navigators is crucial. Many residents never even reach the other service providers because the free assistance and access that the library provides enable them to conduct a job search or complete an online training course.

**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.**

Almost universally, the case study libraries added to the reach and efficiency of their local workforce and small business development ecosystems by providing access to technology and digital literacy. Stakeholders reported that job seekers and entrepreneurs must be proficient enough in basic digital skills in order to access the services the more traditional workforce and small business development organizations provide and to eventually secure employment or start a business. For example, job seekers often must be able to

access and use email for applications, interviews, and other correspondence with potential employers and service providers. Libraries are in a unique position to meet technology needs as they already provide free access to computers, the internet, and other necessary online resources. Effectively, libraries often fill a system gap and serve as the front door to the system.

**Public libraries that develop deep multistakeholder 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.**

These case studies demonstrate that it may be necessary for public library staff to go beyond one-on-one relationships or partnerships and aspire either to lead or to be part of some of the community “tables” that focus on workforce or small business development because they are more generally involved in driving the community’s broader economic development agenda.

**Figure 16. State policy environment in ten case study sites**

|                                 | State support category | State        | Department where State Library is situated | State support of library engagement in workforce                |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|--|---|
| Asotin County Library           | Strong                 | Washington   | Department of State                        | Online resources; mentioned in 5-year LSTA plan                 |
| Bangor Public Library           | Strong                 | Maine        | Independent Agency                         | Online resources; special program (Bendable)                    |
| Brooklyn Public Library         | Strong                 | New York     | Department of Education                    | Online resources; special programs                              |
| Cambria County Library System   | Very Strong            | Pennsylvania | Department of Education                    | Online resources; priority in 5-year LSTA plan                  |
| Hartford Public Library         | Moderate               | Connecticut  | Independent Agency                         | Online resources  |
| Kenton County Public Library    | Moderate               | Kentucky     | Department of Education                    | Special program   |
| Memphis Public Libraries        | Moderate               | Tennessee    | Department of State                        | Online resources  |
| North Liberty Community Library | Moderate               | Iowa         | Department of Education                    | Online resources  |
| St. Joe County Public Library   | Moderate               | Indiana      | Independent Agency                         | Online resources  |
| San Diego Public Library        | Very Strong            | California   | Independent Agency                         | Online resources; priority in 5-year LSTA plan; special program |

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

This cross-site analysis of the case studies attempted to surface any potential patterns relative to the type of community, library governance structure, or strength of the

state's support for encouraging public library involvement in workforce and business development. This research did not explore these relationships at that granular level and would require further study. However, the one factor that did arise during the study was the role of library leadership and the degree to which they instituted a culture of partnership and meeting resident needs among all staff.

## 4. MEASURING LIBRARIES' CONTRIBUTION TO WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

### INTRODUCTION

Public libraries are relatively adept at collecting data. They collect data on the number of visits, registered borrowers, staffing, number of programs, and other information that the annual IMLS Public Libraries Survey mandates, that states often require, and that help with justifying local funding. The chief officer of each state library agency appoints data coordinators to collect data from local public libraries and report the data to the federal IMLS, where the data are publicly available. Many states add their own questions to this survey to supplement the basic data they collect. In addition to the PLS, some tools in the field include patron self-reports on content learned or applied and behavior changed as a result of participation in library programming.

Although there is interest on the part of some public libraries to better measure their outcomes, and the existing library outcome measurement tools provide flexible capacity to measure diverse program activities, there are limited examples in the literature of libraries pursuing more complex data collection or outcome measurement processes for workforce and small business development programming. For example, due to capacity limitations or mission objections, it is rare to find libraries collecting individual-level program or outcome data that includes personally identifiable information (PII) such as social security numbers, linking with other data sources to measure outcomes through secondary sources, or pursuing long-term follow-up to develop a longitudinal database of patron participation and outcomes. Equally as important, there are very few, if any, efforts to measure how the public library services

### DEFINING OUTPUTS, OUTCOMES, AND IMPACTS

Both outputs and outcomes are the results of projects or programs. However, when discussing tracking and measurement, it is important to distinguish between the two, as well as what impact means.

**Outputs** represent immediate results that an organization realizes and are indicators of what items are complete when a project or program ends. For example, outputs of a workforce development training program might include the number of participants attending a program, the number completing the program, or the number of classes the training organization hosted.

**Outcomes** are not always immediate and indicate what an organization has achieved or affected because of a project or program. For example, outcomes of a workforce development training program might include the number of participants that obtain or retain a job after completing training, the number of participants that increase their wage after completing a program, or participants' increased knowledge or capacity related to the training curriculum.

**Impacts** are longer term and the most difficult to attribute to a program and project. A program may contribute to a community-level impact, such as the unemployment rate or average wage of a particular population or geography.

contribute to extending the reach and improving the efficiency of the current workforce and small business development systems.

This chapter describes how the library systems included in the case studies are trying to measure their workforce and business development activities, what challenges they encounter in doing so, how they might

overcome these challenges, and what the implications are for better telling the story of how public libraries contribute to economic wellbeing in a community.

## **EXISTING EFFORTS TO MEASURE WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

### **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. While some libraries undertake more rigorous outcome measurement, this is largely limited to cases where outcome measures are part of a grant requirement and limited staff capacity generally hinders the process. Following are the various types of data collection activities the ten case study libraries reported.

#### **General library metrics**

Case study libraries universally collect general library data to support state and federal reporting requirements. Common metrics include the number of active cardholders, collection size and usage, computer and internet usage, interlibrary loan activity, and door or gate counts. The case study libraries, in general, collected and reported the data monthly, with some libraries following a bimonthly or quarterly reporting schedule.

#### **Information requests and referrals**

Seven of the ten case study libraries captured the number of requests made to the reference desk. And of those seven, with the exception of one library, this was typically a simple tally and not broken out programmatically to understand the scale of interest or request by different programming areas. Libraries typically tallied with pen and paper and later input the data into a spreadsheet that they may use to assess the pattern of peak reference demand to support staffing decisions or provide a broad picture of the

scale of aggregate requests for information at the library.

No libraries were tracking referrals to or from the library, except for the Hartford Public Library, which limited its tracking to those referrals to the in-house career center. Several libraries, including those in Asotin County and South Bend, were considering possible strategies to improve referral information and learning.

#### **Online databases and web-based analytics**

All case study libraries capture and report on the use of their online databases, though some libraries noted that each vendor has its own reporting format, so they are not collecting information consistently across resources. Libraries reported they may use this utilization information to help determine whether or not to renew a resource. Additionally, at least half of the libraries included in the case study sample reported conducting analytics on the library webpage visits to help them understand how many patrons are seeking services and to suggest patron interest in a topic based on the number of visits to specific library webpages.

#### **Program outputs**

All case study libraries collected key program outputs that illustrate service activity. Common data measures include the number, frequency, and duration of workshops, events, or outreach presentations held, and patron attendance at events. Less universally, libraries may also collect data on the number of individuals receiving one-on-one assistance from library staff, the number of patrons using a career or business center, and the number of people accessing digital navigation services.

#### **Program outcomes**

Program outcome collection and analysis were more limited across libraries. Except for the San Diego Public Library, which consistently uses Project Outcome surveys across its

programming, outcome data collection tended to be targeted and was often motivated by specific grant reporting requirements (see sidebar).

### **Anecdotal evidence of program impact**

Absent widespread collection and analysis of program outcome data, all libraries described the importance of anecdotal evidence of program impact in telling their stories and advocating for library support. At least six of the case study libraries record patron word of mouth or email correspondence that shares how library services helped them. In an explicit effort to capture these stories, the San Diego Public Library has created a “feel good folder” to hold these reports. Libraries are also increasing their capacity to solicit and convey these stories, including a new internship program in San Diego to build its audio/visual capacity to capture and showcase patron stories.

### **Tools and processes**

Libraries indicated using a range of tools to collect, analyze, and report on their data. Multiple libraries relied primarily on Microsoft Excel to track information. One library used Tableau for reporting, one used OrangeBoy for collection and reporting, and another used Google Data Studio for data reporting.

Use of Project Outcome surveys to collect patron feedback on program utility and perceived impact was limited. While San Diego uses Project Outcome consistently across programs, no other library in the case study sample was using the tool at the time of the interviews. One other library had tried but found the needed staff capacity and data utility to be unsustainable on an ongoing basis.

### **Staffing for data collection**

Responsibility for data collection and measurement generally fell to adult service coordinators, managing librarians, or a library’s communication department.

## **EFFORTS TO MEASURE OUTCOMES**

Four of the ten case study libraries made some effort to track outcomes, such as individuals who got a job, started a business, and advanced their skills. Most, though not all of these tracking efforts, were due to a grant requirement. Examples include:

In **Brooklyn**, to comply with grant requirements, 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. The other Brooklyn Public Library programs in which there is a deliberate effort to track outcomes are PowerUP! and the BKLYN Fashion Academy. Library staff administer regular surveys of the entrepreneurs who have participated in the program. 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.

In **Hartford**, for workforce grant-funded services, the library reports on occupation certificates attained as well as job placement, with follow-up at six months. In addition, specific grants, such as the WIOA youth program, require library staff to follow up with graduates six times.

**Kenton County Public Library** tracks the number of patrons who have secured employment through the Northern Kentucky Accountability Group (NKYAG), a job search support group. KCPL shares the information, along with the library’s aggregate information on workforce services, such as the number of hiring events held, the number participating in skill-building workshops, and the number taking their GED, with the Kentucky Career Center, which submits the information as part of its state WIOA reporting.

**The St. Joe County Public Library**, through its Bendable program, collects information on certifications achieved as well as interim outcomes internal to Bendable, such as Bendable badges and credit hours.

Libraries had minimal dedicated librarians or other staff focusing on data collection and management, with the exception of Brooklyn.

- At the Brooklyn Public Library, 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.
- In Memphis, if specific grants require specific data, the grant writer on staff will coordinate with the library's digital branch to compile relevant data from the "MPL by the Numbers" report to respond to grant needs. Otherwise, the digital branch manager compiles and shares data regularly.
- In San Diego, the program manager in the Division of Innovation and Engagement is involved in programming, community engagement, and program evaluation to ensure the library meets its key performance indicators. As noted above, San Diego Public Library regularly uses Project Outcome surveys for all library programming, so all librarians have a baseline capacity for developing, implementing, and analyzing results from these tools.

Outside of Brooklyn's dedicated data staff, ongoing capacity building related to data collection and measurement appears limited. In Memphis, the library participates in citywide peer learning about data, facilitated through periodic gatherings of representatives from each city division to discuss data collection and analysis.

### **Common challenges**

Like many service organizations, libraries face challenges in collecting, analyzing, and reporting data, especially data that connect library activity to patron outcomes. The challenges reported include:

### **Staff capacity**

All case study libraries cited staff capacity as a challenge in collecting data and reporting outcomes. Libraries stated that staff have limited time to assume data collection and reporting responsibilities on top of their other duties. Similarly, with the dynamic nature of library services, library staff may not be able to focus on program measurement consistently. Library staff may also lack the underlying skill sets related to indicator development, data collection systems, and reporting that would help facilitate the adaptation of a measurement culture. In one case study library, hesitation about how best to define and subsequently measure certain activities, such as the use of equipment, hindered its motivation to develop data collection processes.

### **Library culture of privacy**

Protecting patron privacy is one of the core principles guiding the approach of most libraries. In effect, their commitment to privacy is one of the characteristics that differentiates public libraries from many other public and private sources of information and services. This focus on maintaining patron privacy, however, is also a prominent barrier to data collection and outcome measurement. Librarians noted concern that more extensive data collection could erode the public's view of the library as a trusted institution. Library staff expressed concern that including data collection during program registration or implementation may deter patrons from participating in specialized programs or utilizing standard services more broadly.

Librarians were particularly concerned over collecting personally identifiable information, which allows programs to understand how a person interacted with services and to connect outcome measures with individuals, building hypotheses about variation in outcomes based on service experience to help modify program implementation. Collecting

PII also provides a mechanism for post-program follow-up to understand longer-term outcomes that patrons experience post-participation, which are otherwise impossible for libraries to capture.

### **Ability to attribute success directly to the library**

Libraries are integral members of their communities, and staff are aware of the many additional services that patrons receive through external providers that may contribute to the outcomes important to economic wellbeing. They recognize the challenge in collecting and reporting on outcomes related to employment and business growth *attributable* to the library's activities and recognize that, at best, they could use data to communicate a library's role in *contributing* to outcomes. For example, as library staff members in Brooklyn conveyed, attributing outcomes to the library's role in referrals is difficult to trace back to the library as an individual may be on a pathway with multiple interventions; the library cannot take credit for the entire outcome. This challenge is not unique to libraries but is common to all community and social organizations working within a broader service ecosystem.

### **Technology systems**

Libraries' technology systems may also impede data collection and outcome measurement. Libraries may rely on paper and pencil tallies of reference questions, which can be burdensome to transfer to electronic spreadsheets or other databases. Internal cross-program data collection within the library is limited, except for services linked to patron's library cards. Moreover, competing data requests from multiple funders may further impede program data collection.

In Hartford, for example, the library tracks TAP program participants starting at intake using its own Access database. Because TAP is the

recipient of many federal grants, each with its own reporting requirements, staff must follow specific guidelines related to data collection. As such, staff use a variety of databases to track program outputs, with each major grant having a dedicated database. Conversion of TAP's Access database to a cloud-based platform is under consideration. Similarly, Brooklyn Public Library uses multiple data platforms, some of which the funding agency requires. And, given the multiple reporting systems, this creates additional challenges for library staff. Stakeholders across libraries noted that the lack of common data systems and differences in privacy protocols across providers hinder external cross-agency data collection and sharing.

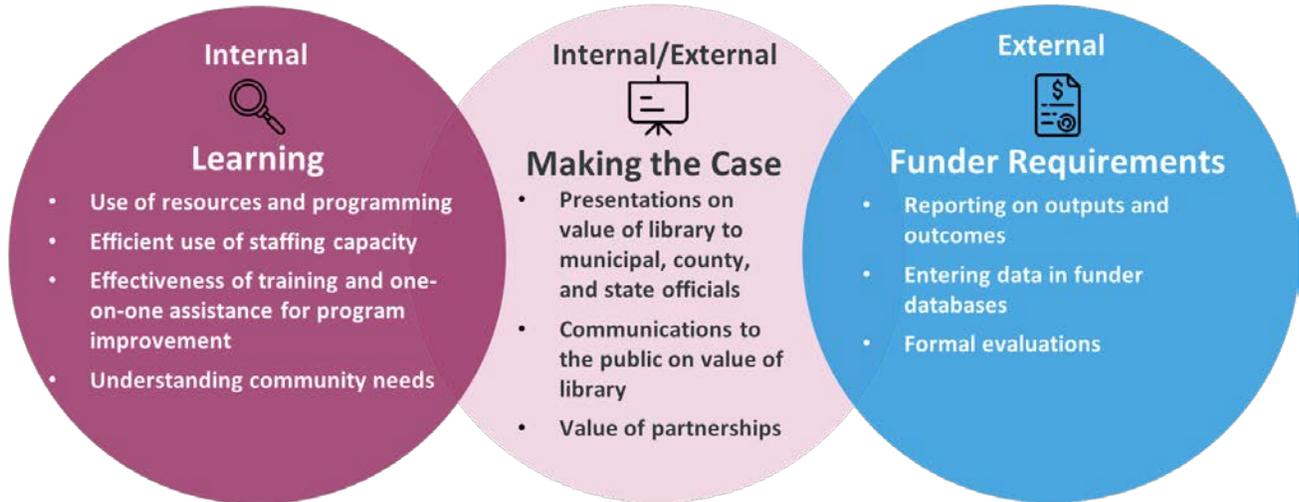
### **Difficulty collecting follow-up data**

Even some libraries that did collect limited contact information on program participants mentioned challenges in collecting follow-up data six months or more after program completion. Follow-up data are notoriously difficult to collect across all sectors. Patron mobility and the limited nature of some library programs can stymie attempts to connect with patrons beyond the life of the program. Several case study libraries had to collect follow-up data as part of a program grant. These programs tended to include more intensive interaction with library patrons, which can facilitate ongoing data collection after program completion. Additionally, some libraries noted that developing strong, ongoing alumni activities and networking for former program participants increased the ease of collecting follow-up data.

### **Motivation**

Given the many challenges associated with tracking performance and measuring outcomes, libraries may need a compelling reason to spend time and resources on data collection. The case study libraries doing the most work related to data and measurement had the internal motivation to prioritize data

Figure 17. Motivations and audience for measuring performance



collection or some external pressure that necessitated it. A public library's approach to tracking and measurement is often a reflection of its motivation in undertaking the effort. This report identifies three different types of motivation. (See Figure 17.)

- *Internal learning and innovation:* Libraries were perhaps most likely to engage in data collection efforts if there was an established culture at the institution around learning. Libraries that connect the process of data collection and measurement to their ability to understand and respond to community needs and more effectively create and adapt programs and services may be more motivated to build staff capacity around measurement and learning, and staff may see the benefits to them in doing so. In Brooklyn, staff dedicated to data measurement focus on collecting data for the system, analyzing the data, and providing support to staff in the system and the branches on how to use data for learning. There has also been an emphasis on helping branch staff use Census and other data to better understand their

neighborhoods and design programming aligned to community needs. In South Bend, the consulting organization FSG has conducted a developmental evaluation of the initial implementation of Bendable; the Bendable team has tentative plans to explore partnerships with local evaluation efforts to provide ongoing evaluation for continued learning. In San Diego, consistent use of Project Outcome surveys has enabled staff to adapt programs to better meet patron needs. In Memphis, because the library houses LINC211, it has access to the data gathered through 2-1-1 calls. Through analysis of the location of calls placed for information through 2-1-1, library staff can identify patterns of calls for specific types of information from particular zip codes within Memphis. This has allowed LINC211 staff to track and spatialize poverty within the city and to focus programming on the catchment areas of the highest-need branch libraries.

- *Making the case for the library's contribution to the community:* Libraries may also collect data as part of their efforts to make the case that their services

provide significant benefits to the community. This is often part of local budget review processes, where the public library may need to make its case to political leaders and residents. In some instances, libraries are trying to make the case to an existing funder of a specific program and may complete targeted evaluation efforts to better capture and communicate a specific program's success. In Kenton County, the library has contracted with the Center for Economic Analysis and Development at the Haile/US Bank College of Business at Northern Kentucky University to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of one of its programs to understand the net value to the community. In Brooklyn, the director of adult learning is working to identify specific population-level targets for the number of Brooklyn residents who have a high school degree, and then document the library's contribution to this metric through the number of individuals who have obtained a high school degree through the services of the Adult Learning Centers. Many of the case study libraries also noted that they often gathered anecdotal stories from staff for library leadership to use when presenting to elected officials as part of annual funding requests.

- **Funder-mandated data collection:** All libraries collect needed information to respond to national, state, or philanthropic funder requirements. This type of data collection and analysis typically follows funding reporting deadlines, but libraries may collect data on an as-needed basis to create specialized grant reports. As noted, many of the more rigorous outcome measurement efforts of case study libraries were because of specific funder requirements.

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES TO MEASURING OUTCOMES

While the aforementioned challenges are formidable, some of the case study libraries did develop mechanisms and tools to collect some data on the outcomes of their workforce and business development services. In addition, as part of the case study interviews, the Mt. Auburn team tried to get a better sense of not only what they are *currently doing* to overcome challenges but also what library staff thought was *potentially feasible* in terms of overcoming these challenges.

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

Among all case study libraries, San Diego had adopted the most universal implementation of program surveys based on Project Outcome methodology, integrating immediate patron feedback and perception of skill gain into its programming adjustments. Although Project Outcome surveys implemented at the start and close of programs do not provide information on longer-lasting effects of program services, they provide libraries with patron satisfaction of content, perception of skills gained, and intended utilization while protecting patron privacy.

Beyond Project Outcome, multiple libraries have developed special tools, ranging from dedicated Excel spreadsheets to more advanced databases for tracking specialized services. In Kenton County, for example, the library produces a monthly report with workforce development statistics that includes each workforce development program (e.g., NKYAG, Microsoft Word training, Open Job Search, career navigator meetings, personal career coaching sessions, etc.), the number of sessions held, the date of sessions held, and the attendance across sessions. The report also provides a count of the workforce development service responses (workforce development library staff emails

and phone calls to answer questions about resources, programs, services, community partners, and the job search process), outreach presentations, laptop usage, and career landings by NKYAG members.

### **Using creative approaches to address privacy concerns**

Libraries that participated in grants with other program partners, especially those that the federal Department of Education, Department of Labor, or analogous state agencies funded, were most likely to have developed mechanisms to collect PII and link PII data with administrative data to report on educational achievements (e.g., TABE scores, credentials, etc.) or program outcomes (e.g., immediate employment, employment six months post-program completion, etc.). 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. These programs aggregate and analyze broad library data to identify various library patron profiles that can then link to zip codes or community neighborhoods to help assess the variation in need across branches. Similarly, Bendable staff in South Bend developed community profiles by zip code to help understand community context and needs; Bendable patrons provide their zip code data to enable analysis of services by community and help Bendable staff adjust service participation strategies accordingly.

Some libraries have also developed the capacity for more rigorous data collection based on funder requirements. For example, for its TAP program, Hartford Public Library has participants sign a waiver authorizing data collection; this upfront transparency increases

library and patron comfort in more detailed data collection. Despite these strategies, staff in Hartford still noted challenges in defining and collecting long-term outcomes, especially for programs focusing on skill development versus programs focusing on employment or connections with employers.

### **Developing specialized instruments to track patron use of standard services**

During case study site visits, the interviewers asked library staff to reflect on whether an integrated pop-up survey on library computers or a more comprehensive collection of reference desk requests would provide useful data on the purpose of patron visits, including their utilization of standard workforce and small business development services. While this could not take place on a national level, individual libraries could find it useful for learning and making the case for their importance to the larger workforce and small business development systems. Measuring participation in standard services (e.g., use of computers, use of circulation materials, ad hoc referrals and assistance by librarians, etc.) is more challenging, yet these more universal access services characterize libraries' unique role in providing workforce development service by nature of the breadth and reach of these offerings. In general, library staff respondents were more comfortable capturing reference desk requests than initiating pop-up surveys.

- *Pop-up surveys:* While most staff understand the value that these data could have in conveying the diversity and scale of service requests, both for seeking additional funding and modifying existing staffing allocations, there was widespread hesitancy to adopt such a tool. In general, librarians were concerned that patrons would perceive this tool as tracking their activities and that it may dissuade patrons from accessing library services. As this report previously mentioned, librarians

also noted an underlying philosophical concern about having access to data on a more granular use of library computers, which felt in conflict with libraries' general philosophy of universal access. Additionally, some library staff expressed concern that such a survey would present a challenge to patrons, given the low rate of computer literacy and skills among the typical patron who comes in to use a computer in some case study libraries. Furthermore, some patrons come to the library with urgent needs for information in various states of emergency. In these instances, patron willingness to take a survey could be low and prove frustrating if it prevents speedy access to critical information. To assuage some of these concerns while still enabling this potential tool, case study respondents suggested a short, targeted, easy-to-opt-out survey. However, they noted that given the priority for easy opt-out, it may not collect or communicate reliable data about computer/library use.

- *Reference desk requests:* During the case study site visits, interviewers asked library staff if collecting more granular reference assistance information would be useful to illustrate the breadth of service requests. This tool could take the form of simple pencil/paper tallies, which some libraries currently use, or could integrate a program ticker or cell phone apps that would enable program staff to immediately categorize patron interaction into key service categories to codify reference activity. While this effort would not be at the national level, it could be useful to individual libraries. In general, case study librarians were more philosophically comfortable with this type of measurement activity, but they expressed concerns about staff burden. They suggested limited implementation periods, such as two- or four-week windows, to alleviate the burden while still

## MEASURING SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

Most library efforts to track performance focus on the direct individual outcomes of specific programs, such as how many participants gained employment or started a business. The case studies, however, revealed that some of the potentially more impactful roles of public libraries are expanding the reach and efficiency of the broader systems through being the front door of the system and providing some basic competencies that individuals need before they can access other training resources.

Many of the standard services libraries provide are most relevant to the system outcomes, yet few, if any, libraries track these standard services. The case studies provide some evidence of the type of measures that could be useful in making the case for the library's role in the system:

*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.

*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.

*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.

providing useful information. Alternatively, one stakeholder described the use of poster board dot voting to gather community consensus on new databases, the purpose of their visit, or preferred time for library programming. The library left the posters up for a limited time, and librarians directly encouraged patrons to participate before they left the building. While not systematic, they described this process as effective in gathering information and resonant with both staff and the community.

### **Tracking referrals by library staff and by other service providers**

Libraries are deeply integrated within their communities and serve as an information referral clearinghouse, providing direct connections to external community agencies. Libraries' position as a "front door" for services may facilitate further referral to career centers or other workforce development providers and may provide significant "low-touch" capacity that prevents the need for higher-level workforce development services. Despite this potential system effect, no case study library had developed a mechanism to track the extent or direction of referrals between the library and the broader workforce and small business development system. Such an instrument could include a time-limited daily log in which librarians track the number of referrals they make to external workforce development or business development organizations. It could also be a paper or online survey in workforce development/career centers that asks workforce development customers if a library referred them or a daily log in which workforce development staff track how many customers report referrals from libraries and how many customers they referred to libraries for services over a two-week period. Staff from several case study libraries, including Asotin County Library and St. Joe County Public Library, described emerging conversations

with community partners to develop a way to track and understand referrals across providers and capture some of this system-level effect.

### **Working with partners for hub services**

Perhaps the most effective mechanism for robust collection of direct outcomes related to library service offerings is partnering with agencies with the ability, capacity, and experience to collect PII and required outcome follow-up. Working with partners for hub services may enable libraries to delegate more extensive data collection to partner agencies to limit library staff burden and maintain their trusted role in the community by providing universally accessible services. It also may optimize each agency's existing capacity in data collection and measurement. In Hartford, for example, Capital Workforce Partners collects data on services provided through the AJC co-located in the library and shares this information with the library.

### **SUMMARY: OBSERVATIONS ON TRACKING WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES**

The case studies provided a new understanding of how libraries measure their results, the challenges they face, and what may be possible in the future. Many of these findings have implications beyond workforce and business development and more broadly underlie public libraries' approach to measuring their role in improving economic and social conditions in their communities.

**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.**

Workforce development service providers and small business assistance organizations, whose core mission is related to employment or business growth in their community, find it extremely challenging to develop methodologies and then execute effective

data measurement systems. And these organizations often have data specialists or hire contractors for evaluation services. In the case of public libraries, the workforce and small business services are not the core elements of their mission, and they have much more limited resources and capacity for evaluation. Moreover, they believe rigorous tracking of individual outcomes could compromise a significant characteristic that defines their value in the community—a trusted place for accessing information. While there are ways to enhance the types of data that libraries collect, there is a need to be realistic about what is possible.

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

There was often a connection between the case study libraries' efforts to track the performance of their workforce and business development programs more rigorously and a relatively strong motivating factor driving their actions. In some instances, the motivation was from an external source, frequently a funder requirement. Outside of the funder-driven efforts, staff working on specific programs often felt motivated to collect outcomes in order to improve their practice.

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

The type of data libraries collect, the level of rigor involved, and how they analyze the data look very different based on the library's purpose in measuring and tracking its workforce and business development activities. For example, if the audience is a funder of a specific workforce program that requires rigorous outcome measurement, such as the case in Brooklyn's Adult Learning Centers, this would determine the tools and process the library would need to pursue. On

the other hand, if the focus is on internal learning for library leadership, board, and staff, such as efforts by some of the case study libraries to better track reference requests, the library would need to custom design some specific data elements based on its learning goals. This could involve collecting data to test different types of virtual learning and in-person workshops or facilitating focus groups with patrons who accessed one-on-one assistance or used online learning platforms. Finally, if the purpose is to make the case to potential funders, anecdotal evidence and stories may be as effective as rigorous outcome studies.

**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.**

Whatever the purpose or audience, staff are most likely to embrace increased attention to measurement if the culture at the library supports learning. Leadership can set a tone in which data are part of the decision-making process and support library staff in their efforts to better meet patron needs. As described above, few case study libraries had staff positions dedicated to program measurement. Those that had established these positions were more likely to focus on building staff capacity in data collection, measurement fluency, and data utilization. Several library stakeholders noted the importance of developing staff capacity to view data collection as a tool for more strategic program implementation and better patron experience and outcomes, rather than invading patron privacy and collecting unneeded information. One stakeholder urged library staff to open themselves up to the idea that more strategically exploring community data and library patron service outcomes could improve library programming beyond librarians' existing assessment of needs.

**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.**

Very few libraries have staff with deep expertise in evaluation, including how to design effective surveys and maximize

response capture skill improvements, and manage complex databases. Yet, this is the type of capacity needed to track and report on program outcomes. Most public libraries would require considerable new or expanded investments in technical assistance and resources to get to this capacity.

## 5. KEY THEMES AND HYPOTHESES FOR FURTHER TESTING

### INTRODUCTION

This pilot project, part of Measures that Matter, an effort of COSLA with funding from IMLS, intended to develop a meaningful approach to the measurement of library-based workforce development activities and assess whether libraries could use this approach to measure other library activities as they relate to different components of community wellbeing. The findings for this effort extend beyond the measurement questions to consider the types of workforce development and small business development services that public libraries provide and how they administer these services, how the COVID-19 pandemic affected the work of libraries in these areas, and the role that public libraries play in the systems operating in their communities.

As a pilot effort, the intention was not to reach firm conclusions or to rigorously evaluate outcomes. Its focus was on conducting ten case studies to better describe the work of libraries and identify fundamental questions related to measuring outcomes. Rather than firm findings or recommendations, this work revealed key themes across case studies and suggested some areas where further research could move the public library field and thinking further.

### KEY THEMES

#### **Observations about the type and administration of workforce and business development services**

The case studies the Mt. Auburn team completed for this study provide a clearer picture of the types of services that public libraries have been providing that are relevant to meet the workforce-related needs of patrons and the needs of individuals

interested in starting or growing a small business. The framework for this study considered *standard services*, those activities that are part of the normal operations of most libraries, such as access to computers and collections; *specialized services*, which involve programming that library staff designed and implemented; and *community hub services*, which involve partnerships with other stakeholders in the community.

These case studies provide evidence of the types of activities across the libraries, the diversity of approaches that public libraries may take, and the various ways libraries may administer these services. Most notable was the prevalence of efforts to provide digital literacy services to patrons and the observation that libraries manage most of the services at the system level. Key observations include:

- Standard services relevant to job seekers and entrepreneurs, which all libraries offer with different intensity levels, remain a critical under-measured and under-tracked service.
- Examples of libraries providing specialized services relevant to workforce development seem more prevalent than entrepreneurship and small business type programming.
- One of the more common services public libraries provide is supporting digital literacy through technology such as basic computer access, one-on-one assistance, or specialized workshops.
- While locating a one-stop career center in a library can be an effective strategy, library and career center staff would benefit from cross-staff training, collaboration, and enhanced integration.

- Most case study libraries concentrated their specialized and community hub services in the central branch. Library branches tend to respond in a more ad hoc fashion to address localized needs.
- While the COVID-19 pandemic clearly presented many challenges for the libraries, it also led to some learning and new opportunities related to providing workshops virtually and better meeting residents' computer and internet access needs.

### **Observations about the role libraries play in the workforce and small business development system**

Work conducted prior to the case studies that examined the role of public libraries in meeting workforce and small business needs in the community focused on programmatic activities. The case studies looked beyond the services to the various roles that public libraries play in the workforce and small business development systems and identified a spectrum of roles, from *informal relationships* to *formal partnerships* to *deep multisector engagement*. The case study libraries provide some evidence that public libraries can contribute to *workforce and business development system reach* and inclusiveness and contribute to *efficiencies in how resources are being used* in the workforce and small business development systems. In many ways, public libraries that have forged deep relationships with other workforce, small business, and civic organizations may be able to play an important role in contributing to community economic wellbeing. Observations about public libraries' role include:

- Libraries' role in the workforce and small business development systems may be less about the specific programs public libraries operate and more about forging deep relationships with other organizations and public sector agencies.

- The most important role that many libraries may play in their broader workforce and small business development systems is providing access to technology and services to strengthen digital literacy.
- Public libraries that develop deep multistakeholder engagement may contribute to greater system-related outcomes because a broader set of community stakeholders understand the resources that the library could provide in the community.
- Expanding the reach of the existing workforce and small business development systems, in terms of numbers of residents and involvement of underserved populations, may be one of the more significant outcomes of public libraries in contributing to community wellbeing.
- Dynamic, proactive leadership can help integrate libraries into the community and create a culture of collaboration among the staff.

### **Observations about tracking outcomes**

One of the driving forces behind this study was MtM's interest in looking at the challenges that libraries face in collecting and analyzing the data that could be critical to demonstrating the outcomes of their efforts. The findings from the ten case studies provide new insights into how leadership and staff at public libraries think about data and measurement and the specific approaches that different libraries are taking. One of the key themes that emerged is that there are different motivations for collecting data and tracking outcomes, and the commitment to measurement and the type of data collected correspond to these motivations. There are libraries that are tracking outputs and outcomes as part of their *commitment to internal learning and strategic decision making*; there are libraries that are looking for

qualitative and quantitative data to help *make the case* for public sector support and stakeholder engagement; and, finally, there are libraries that are collecting the specific data that a *specific funder of a specific program requires*. Libraries may be driven by one or more of these motivations. Moreover, the case studies also found that what may be the most important role that libraries play—expanding system reach and efficiency—is also probably the most difficult to measure. Specific observations include:

- Given the multiple challenges libraries reported, it is unrealistic to think that public libraries, particularly small systems with limited staff capacity, will be able to complete a rigorous analysis of the outcomes of their workforce and business development activities.
- Libraries need a compelling motivation to engage in often time-consuming and complex efforts to track outcomes.
- The approach to data collection and measurement should align with the library's goals related to the audience and purpose.
- 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.
- 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.

## BUILDING ON THE LEARNING

In addition to observations based on the case study libraries, this report offers potential topics for further exploration or research.

## IMLS could support pilot efforts to explore some possible new strategies for tracking outcomes.

Libraries' commitment to patron privacy is a precept for maintaining their role as a trusted community institution that provides universal public access to resources. This underlying principle may hinder a broader library embrace of personal data collection and outcome measurement that libraries fear could dissuade individuals from seeking library services. Yet, the ability of libraries to collect and analyze program data to inform services and communicate value is important for the quality of delivery and future funding. Observations from the ten case studies suggest possible opportunities to increase library capacity to capture and communicate the progress that interested libraries could support as pilot efforts.

- *Expand use of existing data collection tools.* Libraries may increase their ability to report on program outputs and interim program outcomes through increased uptake of existing data collection tools, such as Project Outcome, which offers anonymized collection of immediate post-program outcome data.
- *Explore strategies to collect anonymized, individual-level data.* Staff from some case study libraries recommended that libraries more closely investigate sister outcome efforts in the workforce development field to understand options that may avoid the collection of personally identifiable information by assigning case numbers to program patrons versus collecting personal contact information.
- *Increase capacity to utilize existing data.* Instead of developing new strategies to capture program data, staff from several case study libraries proposed increasing staff capacity to better utilize existing data collection processes. This may include increasing skills to develop underlying

theories of change or logic models that will help libraries articulate how measurable outputs and activities lead to program outcomes that are more elusive for libraries to collect.

- *Leverage partner agency data collection and sharing capacity.* To maintain their role as a trusted community institution and avoid directly collecting individual-level data, libraries may leverage partner agencies' data collection experience and capacity.
- *Experiment with systems to capture referrals.* Multiple libraries expressed interest in focusing on this aspect of standard services to better tell their story and communicate their impact. If partner organizations are able to share outcomes data back with the library related to referrals of library patrons, the library could better understand its contributions to its reach and efficiency related to workforce and small business development.
- *Pilot a network survey.* One hypothesis that emerged from the case studies was that public libraries with a strong network in their community might have a more significant role in meeting the workforce and small business development needs in their community. IMLS could support developing and fielding a network survey in a sample of communities to test this hypothesis.
- *Collect qualitative stories more systematically.* Besides quantitative program data, libraries value qualitative information that more descriptively articulates patrons' unique relationship with the library. Stakeholders reported

interest in more systematically collecting stories from patrons to communicate their impact compellingly. Stakeholders from multiple libraries noted the importance of patron experience narratives to personalize the impact of library programs on individuals.

**IMLS can support some further research efforts to enhance learning by testing some of the hypotheses that emerged through this research project, such as:**

- Libraries' system-related outcomes, such as expanding the breadth and efficiency of the workforce system, can contribute to community economic wellbeing.
- State Library and workforce policies that support library participation in the workforce and small business development systems may contribute to the likelihood of partnerships across the systems at the local level.
- Partnerships between libraries, SBDC, and SCORE are effective strategies to address the needs of entrepreneurs and small businesses in a community.
- Partnerships between WIOA-funded workforce entities are most effective when there is cross-training and alignment of services.
- Free access to virtual learning programs may be a valuable contribution to community economic wellbeing.
- Digital literacy is one of the most important workforce-related services public libraries provide and contributes to the ability of residents to access the training and support needed to access employment and advance in their careers.

# APPENDIX A: SUMMARY CASE STUDIES

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# SUMMARY: Asotin County Library

## Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

### INTRODUCTION

Asotin County Library (ACL) is a small library system in a rural area in eastern Washington State on the border with Idaho. The Mt. Auburn team selected it as a case study for the role it plays in filling gaps in access to services for job seekers in a rural workforce development system and its direct workforce development service provision through its Job and Career Catalyst Center.

### COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

ACL serves Asotin County, part of the Lewiston, ID-WA Metropolitan Statistical Area in the southeasternmost corner of Washington State. Asotin County's 2020 population was 22,285, and it is predominantly white (89.9 percent) with small Hispanic or Latino and Native American populations. It has two cities, two Census-designated places, and five unincorporated communities, spanning 641 miles. Historically a three-branch library system, ACL recently closed one of its branches to enable more classroom space in a high school. The system's two open branches are in the town of Clarkston. ACL is an independent taxing district, and 97 percent of its FY19 \$904,351 revenues came from county property tax assessments.

### WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

ACL is a valued community institution, and staff are broadly and deeply engaged in the community. Its signature workforce development service, the Job and Career Catalyst Center, is in the main branch. A career coach staffs the center and offers 12 to 16 hours per week of one-on-one counseling. Services include resume development, skills inventory, and practice tests for GED and licenses. ACL's reference librarians assist patrons with basic job search questions, and

the library provides online training and employment databases. ACL received a grant to provide "job and career kits" that include information on the resources ACL offers and information from partners, including local colleges and universities and Washington and Idaho state employment offices. It also offers specialized training classes such as Microsoft Office, runs a digital navigator program, and serves as a work placement site for youth participating in a WIOA-funded program. Its services focus on Asotin County, but it never denies service to visitors outside its service area, including residents of Lewiston, Idaho.

ACL does not currently provide small business development services outside of standard offerings in its print collection and online training platforms and refers patrons to a small business development center in Lewiston. ACL leadership expressed tentative interest in expanding business-related resources and collections in the future but did not identify anything concrete.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ACL identified a lack of internet access and digital literacy skills in the community and focused on addressing these deficiencies by increasing its WiFi signal to its parking lot and loaning patrons hotspots. It continues to focus on

|                        | Workforce development  | Small business development   |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to basic technology</li> <li>Online training programs &amp; employment databases</li> <li>Assistance with basic job search questions from reference librarians</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to basic technology</li> <li>Business skills &amp; entrepreneurship courses in Gale Courses and LinkedIn Learning</li> </ul> |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One-on-one counseling through the Job &amp; Career Catalyst Center</li> <li>Job &amp; career kits</li> <li>Specialized training classes</li> <li>Digital navigator assistance</li> <li>Work placement through WIOA</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None currently</li> </ul>   |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None currently</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None currently</li> </ul>   |

providing these services to the community in the post-pandemic period.

### **ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS**

ACL has cultivated relationships with many workforce development, economic development, and social service providers in the region. Other than a partnership with Connect Washington on a new digital navigator program, ACL does not have formal partnerships with other service providers; however, its informal partnerships and collaboration with other regional actors allow it to provide additional capacity in the workforce system by providing services for those underserved or unserved by traditional workforce development providers. It offers easy and open access to career development services, and staff spend time with clients who may not be eligible for WIOA services or have higher levels of need. Community service agencies and public workforce development providers regularly refer patrons to the library's career center for workforce development services and standard services like computer access and printing. Public workforce system interviewees noted the importance of ACL in augmenting service workforce development capacity in the region considering the limited presence, schedules, and proximity of more traditional providers.

ACL also participates in several consortia in the region, including a partnership striving to increase broadband access for residents and a "career development team" involving several local educational institutions and workforce development providers. ACL expressed interest in more formal partnerships and has pursued them in the past, and workforce system stakeholders expressed interest in partnering with ACL more formally in the future.

### **TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT**

ACL mainly uses networking and storytelling to communicate its value to the community and the local workforce development system. It

collects basic data related to the career center, such as number of people served and type of services provided. Staff noted difficulty maintaining contact and following up with former career center clients, making outcome measurement difficult. Staff reported challenges around deciding what to track and implementing data collection or tracking systems given limited staff capacity.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the ACL case study include:

***Relationship-building and extensive external engagement may be effective strategies to market library career services.*** Because of ACL's networking and relationship building, ecosystem partners are aware of its workforce development offerings. Partners value the additional capacity ACL provides and regularly refer patrons to the library.

***Libraries may not necessarily need to prove their value in the workforce system through systematic outcome measurement.*** Despite a lack of outcome measurement, workforce system stakeholders view ACL's offerings very favorably, in part due to networking and storytelling.

***The skills of specific coaching staff may be a key factor in the success of a library in meeting its patrons' workforce needs.*** Several stakeholders felt that ACL's career center's success was due largely to the current career coach's skills and experience.

***Library leadership focusing on workforce development, combined with state financial support, may be key drivers for a library taking on specialized workforce development services.*** The ACL case suggests that dynamic leadership supported by State Library funding was critical to creating the career center. A theme for further research may be the extent to which both, or one or the other, are essential to promote library engagement in workforce development.

# SUMMARY: Bangor Public Library

## Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

### INTRODUCTION

Bangor Public Library (BPL) is the second-largest public library in Maine and has a single location serving residents in Bangor. The Mt. Auburn team initially selected BPL as a case study because of its specialized Business Center that provides co-working space for entrepreneurs and small businesses in the community. The center has proven to be underutilized due to a mismatch in the services it provides and community need. It, therefore, may serve as a cautionary tale for other libraries. The BPL case is also an example of a single-outlet system in a small city.

### COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

BPL's single outlet is in Bangor, Maine, a small town with a 2020 population of 31,735. Bangor is predominantly white (89.6 percent). A nine-member board governs BPL, a nonprofit organization. The city funded 63 percent of BPL's FY19 \$2,281,847 revenue, with additional funding coming from its endowment, the state, and fundraising organizations.

### WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

As a single-outlet system, a relatively small staff at the main library design and implement all BPL service offerings. The library has historically played a prominent role in the community and values having its staff develop relationships with other local organizations. Reference librarians provide the majority of BPL's workforce development services. They consider job seekers a core demographic and assist with basic job search activities. BPL's specialized workforce services focus on computer literacy, as the library views this as a particular gap in the community's workforce development system. BPL partners with SCORE, a small business support provider, to

offer a Lunch and Learn series for local small business owners and regularly refers entrepreneurs to SCORE for assistance.

After a major renovation BPL started in 2016, it opened the Robert C. and Linda Sutherland Allen Business Center in 2021. BPL planned the center as a co-working and resource space for local entrepreneurs and small business owners, operating under a membership fee model. Although BPL conceived the center in response to a perceived need based on 2016 community outreach, it has proven to be underutilized. There are several reasons that may have contributed to this. First, the renovation took five years, and community resources and needs shifted during this time. Second, there was insufficient attention paid to the practical needs of entrepreneurs; for example, the library's limited hours do not align with how entrepreneurs would like to use the space, and its membership fee model may be a deterrent. Finally, community outreach about the center has been limited, suggesting that the target clientele may be unaware of the services the center offers.

BPL initially closed its physical doors to patrons during the COVID-19 pandemic, and eventually shifted some of its workforce development services online. Library staff reflected that in-person services and

|                        | Workforce development   | Small business development   |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology &amp; digital resources</li> <li>• Assistance from reference librarians, incl. digital media reference librarian</li> <li>• Referrals to CareerCenter &amp; resources from Maine State Library</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Business-related resources (print &amp; online)</li> <li>• Two-way referrals to SCORE</li> </ul>  |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classes on technology skills run by digital media reference librarian</li> <li>• Technology workshops on variety of topics</li> <li>• One-on-one technical assistance on computers &amp; software</li> </ul>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services offered through the Allen Business Center, including:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Co-working &amp; meeting space</li> <li>• Computers &amp; high-capacity printer</li> <li>• Business-related software</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None currently</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lunch &amp; Learn sessions for small business owners &amp; entrepreneurs through partnership with SCORE</li> </ul>  |

workshops may be more effective for the population they serve.

### **ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS**

BPL leadership have long promoted building relationships with other workforce and business development organizations in the community. BPL hired a new digital media librarian in 2020 who enhanced these relationships by doing considerable community outreach to strengthen existing and build new relationships with ecosystem actors. As a result, staff at the Bangor CareerCenter and Bangor Adult Education Adult Literacy Center are more aware of BPL's services and often refer their clients to BPL for digital literacy resources. BPL also has a long-standing relationship with SCORE, and hosts its Lunch and Learn sessions at the library. SCORE and BPL mutually refer clients to each other's services. Workforce development service providers consider BPL's digital literacy services to fill a critical gap in the system. There is less evidence that BPL expands the workforce or business development system's reach other than providing job seekers with access to computers and information.

### **TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT**

In general, BPL's data collection primarily consists of what the state of Maine mandates for reporting. Efforts to show value to funders are more informal, often through anecdotal data that librarians provide. Obstacles to improving tracking and measurement include the time and effort that it would require of reference staff and concerns about patron privacy. Staff expressed some interest in more formally tracking anecdotal evidence of outcomes and developing a more functional system for tracking how many people other service providers referred to the library and for which services librarians were making referrals.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the BPL case study include:

***Proactively seeking out relationships with other organizations involved in workforce and business development in the community can contribute to changing external perceptions of the library's role.*** BPL's digital media librarian has been deliberate in developing relationships with ecosystem actors, resulting in new and mutually beneficial partnerships.

***If there is a long time period between the design and launch of a new program or center, it may be necessary for a library to be aware of the changing context within which it is operating.*** BPL did not build flexibility into its plan for the Business Center to account for potential changes during construction, resulting in a mismatch in patron needs and service offerings.

***Buy-in from staff directly involved in the data collection process may be important to expanding data tracking efforts.*** BPL staff indicated they are unclear if and how the library uses data they collect, resulting in less buy-in.

***While libraries play a prominent role in navigating residents through complex services, there is often little awareness of this role in the community.*** Many service providers were unaware of BPL's role in the local ecosystem.

***Directly engaging community residents through surveys, focus groups, or interviews in program design could potentially improve programs and their outcomes.*** It is not clear if BPL gathered adequate insights from its target clientele to understand their needs prior to the construction of the Allen Business Center.

# SUMMARY: Brooklyn Public Library

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

## INTRODUCTION

Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) provides services to residents of the borough of Brooklyn in New York City and is a central institution in the economic lives of the borough's residents. The Mt. Auburn team selected it as a case study for its innovative business support and workforce development programs and as an example of a library in a major city with a complex system involving many branches.

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

BPL is one of the country's largest public libraries, with 60 branches and four bookmobiles serving approximately 850,000 active cardholders. Brooklyn's 2020 population was 2,736,074, and it is almost equal parts white (36.8 percent) and Black (33.8 percent), with large Hispanic or Latino and Asian populations. A board of trustees governs BPL, a private nonprofit entity. The city provides a significant portion of BPL's funding (81 percent of total resources in 2019), with additional funding from the state as well as federal and philanthropic grants. BPL has undertaken comprehensive renovations and projects in the past several years, including a major renovation of the Central Library and construction of a new branch. Its strategic plan clearly outlines a role for BPL in serving the workforce and business development needs of the borough's diverse residents and businesses.

## WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

BPL has a robust set of workforce and small business development programs and strong relationships with other organizations in the borough that offer workforce and entrepreneurial services. BPL leadership plays a significant role in broader civic and economic development activities in the community and has often developed new programs in

response to larger economic challenges in New York City.

The cornerstone of BPL's workforce development services is its Business & Career Center (B&CC) in its Central Library, which provides online resources, one-on-one support to patrons, and a range of workshops. The branches also provide some of these services based on needs of residents in their neighborhood. BPL hosts Adult Learning Centers that deliver basic education classes, case management, and some specialized occupational training at the Central Library and four branches. BPL works with other community organizations to serve the workforce needs of residents, such as its partnership with Bard College that allows patrons to earn a two-year associate degree at the Central Branch.

BPL provides a range of small business development services at the B&CC. It administers two innovative business development programs to support entrepreneurs, *PowerUp!* and *BKLYN Fashion Academy*. BPL also partners with a number of small business assistance providers to offer small business support programs, meeting space, and onsite support.

|                        | Workforce development  | Small business development   |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Business and Career Center offers specialized collections</li> <li>• Resource Librarians for one-on-one support</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialized Business Library with free access to business &amp; investment resources</li> <li>• Additional resources through Business and Career Center and virtually</li> </ul>  |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops through Business and Career Center &amp; at local branches</li> <li>• Drop-in and virtual assistance from Job Information Resource Librarians</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>PowerUp!</i> offers classes, individual counseling, visibility, &amp; financing for entrepreneurs</li> <li>• <i>BKLYN Fashion Academy</i> offers an intensive program to prepare designers for launching fashion businesses</li> </ul> |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult Learning Centers at Central Library and 4 other branches</li> <li>• Bard Microcollege offering two-year associate's degree</li> <li>• Other services offered through partnerships w/ workforce providers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnerships with local business assistance providers</li> <li>• Examples include counseling to clients on-site (prior to COVID) &amp; meeting space for the Women's Business Center (WBC)</li> </ul>                                     |

## ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS

BPL has robust relationships with workforce system stakeholders across the city, particularly with organizations involved in adult literacy and training, and B&CC staff conduct considerable outreach to system actors in the community. BPL encourages branch staff to build relationships with neighborhood organizations to extend these relationships. The library fills system gaps by providing access to computers and basic digital literacy classes and assistance, which allows job seekers to access more specialized workforce and business development supports across the system. It also expands the system's reach by serving as the first stop for individuals seeking employment or starting a business.

Similar to other libraries across the country, BPL provided residents essential access to WiFi and technology during the COVID-19 pandemic. BPL is currently focusing on shifting its resources to meet patrons' changing needs, including offering more online resources while retaining in-person services for those who lack access to basic technology.

## TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT

BPL has two full-time employees working on data collection at the system level and uses data as a tool for learning and refining its approach to achieving better outcomes and documenting successes for funders. There has also been a focus on helping branch staff use Census and other data to better understand their neighborhoods and design programming that aligns with community needs. However, systematically tracking outcomes of its workforce and business development activities is limited due to concerns about patron privacy, staffing capacity, and challenges around compiling data across multiple data sources and different data

collection practices among vendors. Unfortunately, some political and civic leaders do not have a clear picture of the key role that the library plays in the larger system because of challenges around tracking and measuring outcomes.

## OBSERVATIONS

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the BPL case study include:

***Having a strong champion for outcome measurement in the library may help build a culture of measurement and tracking.*** BPL senior leadership's deliberate approach and support have created a culture of understanding and using data for learning.

***Having a highly successful initiative involving multiple partners is a potentially effective pathway to creating better awareness of the library's resources and its role in the community.*** BPL's PowerUP! and the BKLYN Fashion Academy have helped to deepen understanding of the library and its services in the community.

***Receiving funding from state and federal programs that mandate data tracking could be a driver to getting libraries to track outcomes more consistently.*** As in BPL's case, developing tracking systems in response to funder requirements can be a first step in thinking more broadly about measuring workforce or business development programs.

***Developing innovative and effective workforce and small business activities at the public library may be more likely if there are businesses and philanthropy in the community willing to support these efforts.*** Funding from philanthropy, local businesses, and state and federal sources support many of BPL's workforce and business development programs.

# SUMMARY: Cambria County Library System

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

## INTRODUCTION

The Cambria County Library System (CCLS) serves Cambria County, Pennsylvania, residents. The Mt. Auburn team selected CCLS as a case study because of its co-location and collaboration with CareerLink, its associated workforce development services, and because it is an example of a library system that encompasses a small city and rural regions.

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

CCLS serves Cambria County, which had a population of 133,472 as of 2020 and is predominantly white (92.6 percent). CCLS is a federated library system with a main library, Cambria County Library, in the city of Johnstown. The system includes 13 other independent public libraries across the county that all feature their own programs, missions, and boards of directors. Additionally, a board of directors oversees Cambria County Library and member libraries. Overall library revenue is \$1,340,561, with approximately 35 percent coming from local governments and 45 percent from the state. Friends of the Cambria Public Library raises additional funds.

## WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

CCLS is a trusted resource that works to fill gaps in the workforce and small business ecosystems to address community needs. In 2018, Cambria County Library became the first public library in the state to co-locate with a full-service CareerLink, the local one-stop WIOA-funded career center. CareerLink provides the bulk of the specialized services available at the Cambria County Library location, such as one-on-one support for job seekers, skills assessments, and resume and interview assistance. CareerLink offers on-the-job training programs and upskilling. Prior to the pandemic, some CCLS independent libraries collaborated with CareerLink to have

staff periodically provide patron services onsite in their respective locations, and CCLS also partners with CareerLink to offer workshops and other programming. CCLS staff tend to refer patrons to CareerLink for workforce development services. However, the libraries provide supplemental services and resources, including access to computers and other technology, digital literacy workshops and assistance, and online job search and training resources.

CCLS focuses less on small business development but offers access to technology, print, and online resources related to business development. Cambria County Library works collaboratively with Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI), which serves entrepreneurs in the Johnstown area, to facilitate referrals in both directions. Cambria County Library also offers ad hoc workshops and information sessions for business owners. System libraries sometimes collaborate with other organizations to host workshops or advertise business development-related workshops other entities are hosting. Many smaller libraries in the system are interested in expanding workforce and business development programming but have limited funding and staff capacity to do so.

|                        | Workforce development  | Small business development   |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access to basic technology</li><li>• Assistance from reference librarians</li><li>• Online workforce databases and resources</li><li>• Referrals to basic services through CareerLink</li></ul>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access to basic technology</li><li>• Books, materials, &amp; online resources related to small business development</li><li>• Two-way referrals with Johnstown Area Regional Industries (JARI)</li></ul> |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Services through CareerLink, including one-on-one job search support, on the job training programs, GED classes, &amp; unemployment registration</li><li>• Ad-hoc services at independent libraries based on patron need</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information sessions or workshops on business development topics (i.e. Google Docs for business owners) at Cambria Public Library</li></ul>  |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Host site for CareerLink one-stop career center, including collaboration on workshops &amp; programming</li><li>• Collaboration with community partners to host on-the-job training placements and job/ resource fairs</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborations with other organizations to host workshops</li><li>• Advertisement for workshops held at other locations</li></ul>  |

## ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS

CCLS takes a collaborative approach to workforce and small business development services, partnering most intensely with CareerLink as well as JARI and Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies. The organizations collaborate actively on programming. They are highly aware of each other's services, making referrals and connecting job seekers and entrepreneurs to the most relevant resources. Library staff are actively involved in community events and convenings, and the library is a community asset and a relevant partner in the ecosystem. Stakeholders acknowledged there is limited funding in the community and aim to collaborate closely to avoid duplication of services. Evidence suggests that CCLS fills system gaps by providing resources and services to increase access to technology and improve digital literacy. It also expands system reach by providing an accessible, centrally located, and welcoming space where many community members, particularly those with the highest needs who may be intimidated by more formal settings, feel comfortable coming for resources.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CareerLink played a critical role in helping community members apply for unemployment benefits. Library and ecosystem partners plan to move forward by continuing to collaborate and address community needs, mainly access to the internet and technology, digital literacy, and workforce participation.

## TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT

As a smaller library system, CCLS's data collection is primarily around reporting system-required data and tracking foot traffic and program participation. Notably, stakeholders used a Goodwill of the Southern Alleghenies survey to inform the decision to locate the CareerLink site at Cambria County

Library in 2018. However, further tracking and measurement is challenging due to capacity limitations and the library's commitment to patron privacy. Staff expressed interest in improving measurement to more accurately capture their work and better understand patrons' needs.

## OBSERVATIONS

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the CCLS case study include:

***Taking a collaborative approach to delivering workforce and small business development services may help libraries have more impact, especially small library systems.*** CCLS is a small library system with limited funds and staff capacity, operating in a region with challenges related to internet access and transportation. To overcome these barriers, it works creatively and collaboratively with partner organizations to streamline efforts and meet community needs.

***Locating a career center at the library may be mutually beneficial as it could readily offer workforce services at the library and attract job seekers to the career center.*** The location of the CareerLink site at the Cambria County Library is compatible and beneficial for both parties. The library provides a central location, foot traffic, and supplementary resources and services, while CareerLink offers a full range of career services that expand the library's offerings and allow library staff to focus their resources where they can be most impactful.

***Smaller libraries may have to take a unique approach to data and measurement efforts.*** The Cambria case suggests that for a library with limited capacity in a relatively small community, anecdotes or qualitative data may be more impactful than quantitative data alone.

# SUMMARY: Hartford Public Library

## Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

### INTRODUCTION

Hartford Public Library (HPL) is a seven-branch library system serving residents of Hartford, Connecticut. The Mt. Auburn team selected HPL as a case study because of its unique programming for immigrants and refugees, numerous certificate training and technology courses, and planned workforce training and business expansion buildout of the Swift Factory, an adaptive reuse development project in Hartford’s North End neighborhood.

### COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

HPL serves residents of Hartford, Connecticut, which had a population of 121,219 as of 2020 and is predominantly Hispanic or Latino (44.7 percent) with a large Black population (37.2 percent). At 21.1 percent, its foreign-born population far exceeds that of the total United States (13.5 percent). The library system is a nonprofit entity with a board of directors consisting of community members and officials, including the mayor. The city of Hartford provides the majority of its funding (79 percent of its \$10.2 million in revenues in FY19) with additional funding from donations and investment income related to endowments.

### WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

HPL has long played a significant role in the city’s workforce development system. The system’s main branch operates as the primary source of workforce development services and is home to the library’s The American Place (TAP) program. Launched in 2000, TAP initially focused on helping immigrants and refugees adjust to life in America. It has since expanded to include U.S.-born individuals and provides a range of workforce development services, such as adult education (GED preparation, English as a second language, and

computer literacy), a nationally recognized U.S. citizenship program, and training for industry-recognized certifications. The main branch also hosts a satellite of the region’s American Jobs Center (AJC), which Capital Workforce Partners (CWP), the region’s workforce development board, operates, and offers a suite of career services. Finally, individual branches provide basic access to technology and job search support along with specialized programming based on community need.

More recently, HPL is taking on an increasing role in the city’s small business development system and deepening its workforce services through an exciting transformation of the former Swift Factory in North Hartford. Once completed, the facility will include a new library branch and center for workforce training and small business support. HPL’s Park Street branch, located in the heart of a Latinx neighborhood, already provides specific small business development programming. This branch operates Mujeres Emprendedoras, a program aimed at female entrepreneurs that offers Spanish-language workshops on topics responsive to community

|                        | Workforce development   | Small business development   |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Online workforce development databases &amp; programs</li> <li>• Support from librarians with job search activities</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ad-hoc support from librarians with questions related to small business development</li> <li>• Print resources &amp; online databases</li> </ul>  |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialized workforce development services through The American Place (TAP) program</li> <li>• Programming based on community need at individual branches</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mujeres Emprendedoras program at Park Street branch</li> <li>• Engagement with other community stakeholders to support entrepreneurs &amp; creatives</li> <li>• YOUmedia program &amp; maker’s space</li> </ul> |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Job Center location</li> <li>• Host to year-long youth workforce development program &amp; Jobs First Employment Services program (JFES)</li> <li>• Space for job fairs &amp; other events hosted by community organizations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space for community organizations to offer workshops and programming</li> </ul>   |

need. Beyond this specific program, HPL also supports Hartford's creative industries by developing platforms for local artists and offering a small maker's space for teens at the central branch.

### **ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS**

HPL is a critical anchor institution in the region and plays a key role as a connector and convener in the community. It has a close partnership with CWP, the entity overseeing the AJC at the main branch, and the two organizations work closely together to meet the needs of library patrons. While HPL's relationships with other workforce and small business development stakeholders are somewhat more distant, the new Swift Factory project provides an opportunity for ecosystem stakeholders to collaborate more closely. As a trusted space, HPL currently fills system gaps by delivering free basic skills and industry-specific credential training, particularly for immigrant and refugee populations in the region. It is also expanding its system reach by providing a welcoming space for these populations and connecting them to services at the AJC and other organizations across the ecosystem.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, HPL was a hub for social services and basic needs. The city leveraged HPL's strong ties to the immigrant community to help distribute COVID tests and other resources. The library transitioned its workforce and small business development services online, highlighting its ability to be nimble and meet the needs of residents.

### **TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT**

HPL primarily collects data to track and report on general library operations, meet state and federal grant requirements, and inform staff members' program-related decisions. However, data on workforce development programming is not as streamlined, and the library collects limited data specifically related to outcomes of workforce and small business

development activities. Staff capacity is a primary barrier to outcome measurement. TAP program participants consent to data collection for research and grant programs, but staff are cognizant that tracking personally identifiable data for other services and programs may pose risks to the large population of undocumented immigrants that the library serves. Staff expressed interest in improving outcome measurement for its workforce and small business development programming as long as they could mitigate privacy concerns.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the HPL case study include:

***Libraries can develop targeted workforce and small business development programming to fill gaps for specific populations.*** By establishing itself as a trusted institution in the community, HPL is able to reach immigrant and refugee populations and provide services that are responsive to their needs.

***When done intentionally and collaboratively, co-locating a career center within a library can offer substantial benefits for residents.*** The strong partnership between HPL and CWP allows the two entities to offer a continuum of workforce development services at the library's main branch with minimal duplication.

***Libraries can be a valuable partner in the redevelopment of new facilities and new programming that enhances the community and offers greater opportunities for local residents.*** HPL is well-positioned to partner with other stakeholders on the Swift Factory redevelopment project because of its status as a trusted institution and community hub. This project will also allow HPL to partner with other organizations to expand its small business development services.

# SUMMARY: Kenton County Public Library

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

## INTRODUCTION

Kenton County Public Library (KCPL) is a three-branch library system in Kenton County, Kentucky. The Mt. Auburn team selected it as a case study as an example of a small system in a suburban community well known for its innovative workforce development programs.

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

KCPL serves residents of Kenton County, with branches in the cities of Covington, Erlanger, and Independence. Kenton County is in north central Kentucky and is predominantly white (88 percent). A board of trustees governs KCPL, which operates as a quasi-public library district with its own taxing authority under Kentucky law. The majority of its FY19 \$14,040,893 funding came from city tax revenue, with additional support from the Kenton County Public Library Foundation. KCPL's 2017-2020 strategic plan outlined several goals for local workforce development, including providing direct services and collaborating with other entities.

## WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

KCPL serves as a direct service provider, referral agency, and strategic partner in the development of community workforce policy via its engagement in the underlying workforce development system. Along with basic job search resources, its Career and Job Services division offers a range of entry-level digital literacy courses and more advanced online training and skill credentialing. The library's website has a landing page for Career and Job Services that links to a wide range of workforce development resources. KCPL added two dedicated career navigators to its staff during the pandemic who, along with a dedicated workforce development librarian and workforce development programming specialist, provide one-on-one job search

assistance to patrons across its branches. KCPL's most unique and visible program is the Northern Kentucky Accountability Group (NKYAG), a networking and job search support group for mid-career professionals. Besides its own programs, KCPL also hosts a Kentucky Career Centers (KCC) access point at its Erlanger branch. KCC staff offer a limited number of job search skills classes at KCPL, and the two entities collaborate with other local organizations to host career fairs. KCPL also provides space for GED preparation and testing at its locations through a partnership with Kentucky Adult Education.

KCPL offers fewer small business development services, in part because it aims not to duplicate services available elsewhere in the community. It provides a range of print and online resources to entrepreneurs, and librarians can assist with basic small business development-related questions. KCPL houses a makerspace, hosts small business council meetings, networks with small business community partners, and refers patrons to outside resources, such as SCORE and the local Small Business Administration office.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, KCPL staff quickly pivoted many services online and responded to community need by adding the career navigator positions. A key learning was

|                        | Workforce development   | Small business development  |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access to basic technology</li><li>• Print &amp; online workforce development resources</li><li>• Basic assistance from librarians</li><li>• Landing page for Career &amp; Job Services with links to resources</li></ul>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wide range of circulation materials &amp; online resources</li><li>• Assistance with basic resources &amp; questions from librarians</li><li>• Referrals to outside organizations (i.e. SCORE, Small Business Admin office)</li></ul> |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One-on-one support from career navigators &amp; other specialized staff</li><li>• Job search skills classes</li><li>• Computer &amp; online training classes</li><li>• NKYAG for mid-career professionals</li></ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Small business courses through Google</li><li>• One-on-one support from Covington branch career navigator</li><li>• Maker space at Erlanger facility for marketing, printing, fabrication, &amp; product development</li></ul>        |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• KCC access point at Erlanger branch; job search classes offered by KCC</li><li>• Career fairs in partnership with other organizations</li><li>• GED preparation &amp; testing offered by Kentucky Adult Education at branches</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Erlanger branch hosts weekly Erlanger Business Council meetings</li><li>• Prior to pandemic, small business counseling through SCORE at branch locations (not currently operating)</li></ul>  |

that moving services online can expand program reach, as was the case with NKYAG, which saw extended geographical participation in these services during the pandemic. KCPL would like to expand its workforce development services and concentrate on the needs of young adults and individuals looking for a career change.

### **ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS**

KCPL is deeply integrated into the local workforce development ecosystem and has a primary seat at the regional workforce development table during strategic conversations. Along with hosting a KCC access point, library staff serve on key committees and are involved with local workforce development entities. For example, the library's director is the treasurer of the Northern Kentucky Workforce Investment Board. These relationships allow KCPL to refer patrons regularly to all system partners, and partners, in turn, refer their clients to the library for job search needs. External stakeholders noted that KCPL's classes fill system gaps. NKYAG, in particular, fills a niche by offering services to mid-level professionals whom no other providers serve. The library expands system reach by providing direct services to higher-need populations that might not be as comfortable or familiar with traditional workforce development services. It also serves a key role in coordinating referrals to other system entities.

### **TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT**

KCPL primarily measures key direct services in aggregate with minimal participant data and no personally identifiable information. It produces a monthly Excel report on its workforce development services and has a contract with the Center for Economic Analysis and Development at the Haile/US Bank College of Business at Northern Kentucky University to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of NKYAG to understand the net value of the program to the community. However, privacy concerns that may deter participation in

programming and concerns about user and staff burden may impede further outcome measurement or analyses.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the KCPL case study include:

***Dynamic, proactive leadership can help integrate libraries into the broader ecosystem.*** KCPL's leadership continually seeks opportunities where the library may provide capacity, fill a gap in services, or connect partners to improve the system. The resulting relationships have led to KCPL becoming a voice in the workforce development system.

***Clear communication can reduce duplication of services across providers.*** Because of KCPL's engagement and ongoing communication with key actors across the system, services are continuous and not duplicative.

***Libraries' position as the first point of contact for patrons may provide advanced insight into workforce development trends.*** Stakeholders noted that the high traffic volume and diverse patron population help the library identify workforce development trends and reveal service barriers or gaps in the system unnoticed by other providers.

***Libraries may capture new audiences for workforce development services.*** KCPL's high traffic volume and diverse patron population give it a unique insight into community need. Therefore, stakeholders look to KCPL as a thought leader on emerging workforce development trends.

***WIOA regulations may impact partnership and data coordination between libraries and traditional workforce development services.*** WIOA guidelines may restrict public workforce agencies to include libraries (as in the case of KCPL) on their eligible provider lists. This may limit referrals to library services and hinder the potential for data collection.

# SUMMARY: Memphis Public Libraries

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

## INTRODUCTION

Memphis Public Libraries (MPL) serves residents in Memphis, Bartlett, and unincorporated Shelby County, Tennessee, and is a valued community institution with workforce and small business development among its core services. The Mt. Auburn team selected MPL as a case study primarily because of its innovative workforce development services, including a mobile career center, and an example of a midsize library system in the southern U.S. Its public data reports are instructive for how libraries can effectively use data for program development and to demonstrate impact.

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

MPL is a city library system with 18 outlets, including the central branch. All but one of the system’s branches are within the city of Memphis, a predominantly Black (64 percent) city with a population of 633,104 as of 2020. MPL is part of Memphis city government. In 2019, its total operating revenue was \$22,248,275, with a significant portion (98 percent) coming directly from the city’s general funds. The current director has been in place since 2008 and has overseen the development of many innovative initiatives, including workforce and business development programs, a television and radio station, and the teen learning facility Cloud901. MPL’s 2020 strategic plan describes a vision to “create inviting and engaging public spaces that offer programs and resources for all Memphians.”

## WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Business and 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. Notable offerings include the JobLINC Career

Center, a 38-foot bus equipped with internet access, digital resources, and specialized staff who provide workforce and small business services, and the Small Business Center at MPL’s central branch. MPL also hosts LINC211, the region’s 2-1-1 system, and facilitates connections to social supports and services. The JobLINC Mobile Career Center aims to increase community engagement with MPL’s career services without requiring residents to travel to the central branch. Adult services staff across the branches oversee workforce and small business development programs and refer patrons to available resources.

## ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY’S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS

MPL serves as a hub for workforce development services across the city, collaborating with a robust network of community partners on programming and often hosting events and job fairs in its space. MPL’s assistant director of strategic partnerships is responsible for connecting with new community partners and maintaining existing community relationships, and other staff forge and maintain

|                        | Workforce development  | Small business development  |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online job search &amp; training platform</li> <li>• Access to technology resources (i.e. computers, wi-fi hotspots)</li> <li>• Referrals to local workforce development organizations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive collection of physical &amp; online materials on business development</li> <li>• Online resources to help with market research</li> </ul>  |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One-on-one career counseling &amp; job search support via JobLINC career counselors</li> <li>• JobLINC Mobile Career Center</li> <li>• LINC 211 Resource Center</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small Business Center at MPL’s central branch</li> <li>• Programming for small businesses (i.e. guidance on how to access COVID relief funds, free legal clinics for business owners)</li> </ul>       |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A; most services offered directly through JobLINC rather than through partner organizations</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space for community organizations to host events</li> <li>• Workshops for small business owners through partnership with the Memphis chapter of Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)</li> </ul> |

connections with ecosystem partners. The evidence suggests that MPL is filling system gaps by directly connecting patrons to accessible services and expanding system reach, functioning as an entry point to the broader workforce development ecosystem.

MPL's role as a convener of community resources increased during the pandemic via its high-profile role in emergency response and recovery. Operating at the library, LINC211 remained fully operational during the pandemic and was essential in connecting residents to resources. Pivoting to a hybrid model shifted engagement in programming and allowed MPL staff to envision new ways of delivering services to residents. Perhaps most impactful, the pandemic broke down traditional siloes and broadcast to the entire city the wealth of resources available through MPL. Library staff are optimistic that the pandemic has created an opportunity for increased collaboration across sectors in the future. LINC211 hopes to expand its staff capacity, increasing its information and support hub for residents.

### TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT

MPL collects and distributes system-wide statistics that it compiles and posts on its website as a bimonthly *MPL by the Numbers* report. This report primarily includes general library operations data and high-level information, such as numbers of library card signups, programs, and program attendance. Its annual edition contains data related to database usage, items patrons check out of the library, and changes in program attendance. MPL has access to 2-1-1 call data that it has used to make informed decisions about where to concentrate pandemic support based on need.

MPL has been less successful in measuring the impact of its programming. The primary

barrier to tracking and measuring outcomes is MPL's commitment to maintaining its position as a neutral, trusted entity, which leads it to collect virtually no personally identifiable information. It also struggles to utilize surveys and other methodological approaches to assess program impacts due to limited staff capacity. Moreover, staff viewed surveys that gather participants' perceptions of outcomes as limited in value. Staff prioritize staying neutral and non-evaluative to remain effective at serving the community, expressing little interest in implementing new outcome measurement systems.

### OBSERVATIONS

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the MPL case study include:

***Housing social services in a library location can provide benefits to both systems.*** MPL's role as a trusted community partner has only grown by housing the LINC211 program.

***Creating mobile resources that meet patrons in their communities can enhance workforce development services that libraries provide.*** MPL's Mobile Career Center allows the JobLINC program to reach residents in their communities more proactively and responsively.

***Having strong coordination from the central branch, balanced with deference to community librarians, can allow for appropriate and effective service delivery across a library system.*** MPL's adult services librarians, located at each branch, coordinate workforce and business development services. This model allows for both branch autonomy and system-wide coordination and referrals.

# SUMMARY: North Liberty Community Library

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

## INTRODUCTION

The North Liberty Community Library (NLCL) is a single-outlet library serving the small city of North Liberty, Iowa. The Mt. Auburn team selected it as a case study for its dynamic library leadership, early adoption of Brainfuse, and example of a single-outlet system in a small city.

## COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

NLCL serves North Liberty, a small town near Iowa City and south of Cedar Rapids. North Liberty's population as of 2020 was 20,479, and it is predominantly white (84 percent). Notably, 98 percent of its residents have a high school degree or higher, and 56 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. NLCL is a valued community institution co-located with the city's community center and benefits from dynamic leadership and a dedicated staff. The city manages NLCL and funded 98 percent of its FY19 \$1,141,457 budget.

## WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

NLCL benefits from a dynamic leader who encourages a dedicated staff to engage in community initiatives and organizations. The library's interest in workforce and business development stems from the relationships it has forged through community engagement, and leadership maintains an openness to fill community needs as they arise.

In part due to its small size, NLCL sees its role primarily as a connector and information resource rather than a direct service provider in the areas of workforce and small business development. Workforce development, business development, and community stakeholders affirmed this view.

Library staff do not receive any formal training in workforce or business development.

However, staff are broadly knowledgeable in these areas and are able to help patrons with basic needs. The library offers standard services to support workforce development, including access to internet-connected computers and printing and specialized print and online collections. NLCL piloted the use of Brainfuse, a resource for career services, test prep, and software tutorials. The State Library now funds this program for all libraries in Iowa. Librarians also provide digital navigation services and referrals to outside agencies that can meet patrons' needs. NLCL does not offer regular specialized workforce development services, but it has provided ad hoc services in the past and plans to do so in the future. Its services in the area of business development are more limited and centered around relationship building and engagement with the local chamber and other economic development agencies in the region.

The library is in the city's community center, alongside a fitness center, swimming pool, and other municipal offices and offerings. As such, it serves as a community hub, providing meeting space for working professionals and local businesses and hosting partner events. Library staff expressed interest in expanding

|                        | Workforce development   | Small business development  |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access to computers and printing</li><li>• Print and online workforce development resources, including Brainfuse</li><li>• One-on-one walk-in and appointment support from adult services librarian</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Current focus is on expanding business-related collections</li></ul>  |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information kiosk for pamphlets and brochures from IowaWorks</li><li>• Volunteer and practicum student programs</li><li>• Other ad-hoc services such as free headshots</li></ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None currently</li></ul>  |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting space for businesses and working professionals for trainings, interviews, or meetings</li><li>• One-time partner events such as job fairs and financial planning workshops</li></ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meeting space for local businesses</li><li>• Currently focusing on ways to provide space as a regional hub for the community, with specific focus on nonprofit businesses</li></ul> |

the use of their space as a regional hub for small businesses, particularly nonprofits. NLCL is currently undergoing a strategic planning process and has aspirations to increase its workforce and business development offerings.

### **ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS**

NLCL has a strong inclination for community engagement, and local workforce and business development stakeholders consider it a valuable partner. The library's director and public services librarian have participated in the local chamber's community leadership program, and staff serve on the boards of several community organizations. NLCL regularly communicates with and engages in reciprocal awareness building with IowaWORKS and other local workforce and business development agencies. Because it does not offer workforce or business development services, NLCL plays a limited role in filling system gaps. However, it plays a valuable role in expanding system reach by providing universal internet access, helping patrons with basic workforce development needs, and making referrals to other local organizations. Stakeholders see the library as a safe, unimposing place for community members to seek resources and support, and they had a hard time imagining the need for an increased role for NLCL in the ecosystem.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, NLCL was a critical access point for job seekers, while other state and local workforce development offices remained closed. It continued to provide WiFi, laptops, printing services, and one-on-one support, and it expanded partnerships to meet community needs.

### **TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT**

NLCL's data collection and reporting focuses primarily on outputs and is largely internally facing aside from an annual community report. It collects data related to general library operations (i.e., attendance at events and use of resources) and tracks usage

statistics on online databases and collections. Barriers to improving outcome measurement include staff capacity and concerns about patron privacy. NLCL has no current plans for new tracking or measurement systems, but staff expressed some interest in a survey to measure patrons' satisfaction with library services.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the NLCL case study include:

***Having a culture and leadership committed to external engagement may lead to increased awareness of a library's workforce- and business development-related services.*** NLCL's director fosters a culture of community engagement, which leads staff to proactively conduct outreach to market the library's services among community stakeholders.

***There is a tension between wanting to be of service and fill gaps and the reality of capacity in a small library system.*** Because of its small size, NLCL faces limitations in the amount of workforce and business development services it can offer, particularly direct service offerings.

***Regional context influences library systems' workforce and business development offerings.*** Because of North Liberty's proximity to two larger cities and a large university that offer formal workforce and small business development services, there is limited demand for specialized services locally.

***In small suburban communities, it may be more essential than in larger communities to base workforce and business development offerings on directly identified community needs.*** In a small community, a "build it and they will come" approach may not be effective because of capacity, budget, and staffing limitations. Instead, intentional community engagement and listening may be more fruitful approaches to fill needs and capture community participation.

# SUMMARY: San Diego Public Library

## Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

### INTRODUCTION

San Diego Public Library (SDPL) is a large municipal system with 36 outlets. In partnership with the San Diego Career Center Network (SDCCN), SDPL hosts the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Career Center, which offers the community free job search and career development resources. The Mt. Auburn team selected SDPL as a case study as an example of a large system in an urban community well known for the co-location of workforce development services.

### COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

SDPL serves residents of San Diego, California, a rapidly growing city with a population of 1,386,932 as of 2020. Forty-two percent of San Diego residents are white, 30 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and 25.6 percent of its residents are foreign-born. The city manages SDPL, with 87 percent of its approximately \$6.3 million operating budget coming from city funds. Its central branch houses the Career Center along with the country's only library-based charter high school, a literacy hub, veterans center, and mental health office. SDPL's 2021 master plan focuses on addressing inequities among branches across the city in terms of access to services, technology, spaces, and resources.

### WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

SDPL serves as a primary access point for residents seeking workforce and small business development services. Workforce development resources that SDPL provides directly through the library system include access to basic technology, reference librarian support, digital resources, computer and technology courses, and certifications. SDPL hosts job fairs in partnership with local community organizations and has partnered

with READ/San Diego to offer an adult literacy program, with San Diego Futures Foundation to deliver weekly tech training, and with the city of San Diego on a job training program for underserved youth. Small business development resources include reference help, digital resources, a patent and trademark center that offers targeted resources and assistance for entrepreneurs, and a new Microbusiness Center to provide centralized access to the library's small business resources.

San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP), the region's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provider, operates a Career Center at SDPL's main branch. The Career Center offers a range of services, including job search databanks, workshops and training, and one-on-one job search assistance. Traditionally, the relationship between SDPL and the Career Center has been around sharing resources and referrals, but with a 2020 California State Library grant, the library aims to create more dynamic collaboration between the two entities. Grant activities have included cross-training for staff, a new website landing page that serves as a

|                        | Workforce development  | Small business development  |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic technology resources</li> <li>Reference librarians able to answer basic job-search related questions</li> <li>Online workforce development resources and test preparation courses for target industries</li> </ul>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reference librarians able to provide basic small business support</li> <li>Access to wide range of circulation materials and online resources</li> <li>Referrals to specialized library centers</li> </ul> |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeted certification courses</li> <li>Digital navigators at 5 branches, fluent in several locally spoken languages</li> <li>Career Online High School (COHS) and career certification program</li> </ul>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patent and Trademark Resource Center (PTRC)</li> <li>New microbusiness center</li> <li>IDEA Lab makerspace with tools and resources for exploration in science, technology, &amp; design</li> </ul>        |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-location of SWDP Career Center</li> <li>Job fairs</li> <li>Joint workforce development landing page &amp; Family Career Exploration days</li> <li>Additional partnerships with the city and community organizations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Partnership with College of Continuing Education to offer Google Suite, Microsoft Suite, and other basic business platform training</li> </ul>   |

one-stop-shop for workforce development services, and Family Career Exploration Days that allow individuals of all ages to explore SDPL and SDWP job workforce development resource offerings.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SDPL pivoted to a limited set of standard services for walk-in patrons and provided outdoor computer lounges, take-home laptops, and hotspot access. Stakeholders reflected that one of the biggest learnings from the pandemic was the ability of the system to quickly and robustly pivot to online delivery of workforce services.

### **ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS**

The primary way SDPL collaborates with other workforce development entities in the community is via the Career Center. Apart from this, SDPL's involvement in the greater workforce and business development ecosystem mainly involves referring patrons to community partners and developing programming in response to partner requests. SDPL fills system gaps by providing basic digital literacy and other resources, including specific certification options the Career Center does not offer. Many of its small business development services are unique and available elsewhere in the system. SDPL expands system reach by exposing patrons who may be interested in, but not actively seeking, workforce development services. Stakeholders expressed interest in continuing to improve collaboration between library and career center staff to increase community awareness of SDPL and SDWP services.

### **TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT**

SDPL's tracking and measurement is largely around data on general library operations and patron feedback. It uses Project Outcome to measure satisfaction with events and services and fields an annual satisfaction survey to patrons via an iPad as they exit the library. Other data come from tracking of information

requests and referrals, analysis of database and website traffic, tracking of outputs related to specialized and partner services, including attendance and number of classes or workshops offered, and anecdotal evidence. SDPL staff report that the main barriers to improving data collection are staff capacity limitations and patron survey fatigue. Like other libraries, staff shared concern that collecting personally identifiable patron information may threaten its ability to be an open, trusted space in the community. SDPL staff indicated that they are interested in improving data collection, particularly in ways that can help them improve programming and seek additional funding.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the SDPL case study include:

***To maximize benefits, locating a traditional workforce development service provider in a library may also require cross-staff training and collaboration.*** Although the SDWP Career Center is co-located at SDPL, the entities are offering services in silos. Planned cross-staff training may help to address this challenge.

***Libraries' basic foundational skills efforts, such as digital literacy, can prepare individuals to optimize the traditional workforce development system.*** Job seekers may require foundational or digital literacy skills before entering the workforce development system. SDWP Career Center staff often refer patrons to SDPL to meet these needs.

***Program measurement may be more successful and meaningful when it provides utility to program staff.*** Feedback from SDPL staff indicates there may be opportunities for broader capacity building to help library staff select program measures that add value to their understanding of the implementation and inform program decisions.

# SUMMARY: St. Joe County Public Library

## Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

### INTRODUCTION

The St. Joe County Public Library (SJCLP) is a district system with ten outlets serving South Bend, Indiana, and other areas across St. Joseph County, Indiana. The Mt. Auburn team selected it as a case study as an example of a midsize system in a small city and for its recent implementation of Bendable, an innovative lifelong learning initiative developed in partnership with the Drucker Institute.

### COMMUNITY CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

SJCLP's ten branches serve some but not all of St. Joseph County. The county had a population of 272,912 as of 2020, and encompasses two cities, seven towns, and 13 townships. South Bend, the location of SJCLP's main branch, is the most populated city in the county and is predominantly white (71.8 percent) with large Black and Hispanic or Latino populations. Under Indiana state law, SJCLP is a municipal corporation with taxing authority, and the majority of its FY19 \$13,589,289 operating revenue came through the property tax levy. Its 2020-2024 strategic plan lays out a firm commitment to meeting community needs through providing programmatic and service support to small businesses, entrepreneurs, and individuals in the workforce, including immigrants and non-English speakers.

### WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

SJCLP recently completed a major renovation of its main library, including the construction of a Community Learning Center building that serves as a community hub with space for individuals, businesses, and nonprofits to meet and hold meetings. Along with the renovation, SJCLP aligned its education and programming, communications, development, and venue departments into a single division under a chief engagement officer. These changes recognize

SJCLP's central role as providing a space for community services, activities, and engagement.

Historically, SJCLP has delivered workforce and business development services primarily through its standard offerings. All SJCLP librarians have a foundational level of knowledge to provide basic workforce and business development assistance. SJCLP also employs a full-time research librarian who focuses on small business and business development. To supplement these services, SJCLP partnered with the Drucker Institute to launch Bendable, a signature workforce development platform designed to provide locally driven, lifelong education and training opportunities responsive to regional employer needs and community interests. Bendable offers Career Collections, virtual and in-person training and curricula developed in partnership with local employers to meet employer needs and fill workforce gaps. It serves as a hub for community engagement and will eventually be a clearinghouse for all local workforce development resources.

### ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY'S WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS

Bendable is currently driving much of the synergy between SJCLP and the local workforce and small business development

|                        | Workforce development   | Small business development  |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Standard services      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology</li> <li>• Staff support with basic job search activities &amp; workforce-trained librarians for specialized support</li> <li>• Landing page for unemployment resources &amp; job training resources</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to basic technology, business databases, and reference books</li> <li>• Advanced digital technology through Studio 304</li> </ul>   |
| Specialized services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited digital literacy classes &amp; targeted trainings</li> <li>• Bendable workforce development platform, including wide range of locally-responsive training &amp; curricula</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance with marketing &amp; promotional materials at Studio 304</li> <li>• Full-time research librarian supporting small businesses &amp; business development</li> </ul>  |
| Community hub services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integral community space for individuals, businesses, &amp; nonprofits</li> <li>• Classroom space for South Bend Community School Corporation Adult Education program</li> <li>• Space for trainings by local providers</li> </ul>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small business training in partnership with local agencies</li> <li>• Partnership with SCORE to facilitate business development classes through GROW with Google</li> <li>• Meeting spaces for businesses</li> </ul> |

system. The Bendable team has engaged and collaborated with local employers, community-based organizations, and workforce development providers to develop specialized Career Collections for the platform. It has partnered with the local chamber of commerce and business groups, the region's American Job Center (*WorkOne*), and the local community college to mutually promote events and develop material for Bendable. Stakeholder feedback suggests that Bendable is filling system gaps by offering highly localized, relevant training materials that meet resident needs and employer demand. Through both its traditional offerings and Bendable, SJ CPL is expanding system reach by referring individuals to resources across the system and serving portions of the population other providers are not always capturing, such as those who are lower-skilled or unhoused.

SJ CPL increased its community presence during the COVID-19 pandemic. It created an "Ask A Librarian" service to help patrons cope with job loss, mental health issues, and other hardships. It also stepped in to help residents apply for unemployment, SNAP, and other social service programs. Stakeholders reflected that although the pandemic initially stalled the rollout of Bendable and renovation of the main library, SJ CPL's flexibility in programming allowed it to respond nimbly to community needs during this time.

### TRACKING AND MEASUREMENT

SJ CPL's measurement activities are output and activity driven. It uses the OrangeBoy platform to collect and report on library collection and distribution trends, developing different library profiles based on aggregate data to help staff understand and respond to usage patterns. Bendable tracks user information, such as how many people complete courses. The pilot included a developmental evaluation, and stakeholders are interested in possibly partnering with the

University of Notre Dame for ongoing evaluation. However, privacy concerns over collecting personally identifiable data and staff burden are barriers to more outcome-driven data collection.

### OBSERVATIONS

Some observations the Mt. Auburn team made while conducting the SJ CPL case study include:

***Co-creating a robust, continuous learning and workforce development platform such as Bendable takes considerable time and commitment but may provide a unique value add to traditional workforce development services and yield increased collaboration and capacity.*** Bendable was a multi-year effort of many ecosystem stakeholders. In the long-term, it will permit SJ CPL to offer robust and diverse trainings not available elsewhere in the workforce development system. It also increased SJ CPL's collaboration with community partners and helped build its capacity for workforce development.

***Providing autonomy to library staff can build system capacity.*** SJ CPL's model of allowing library staff to develop knowledge and services in response to patron demand can help libraries nimbly fill critical community gaps in real time. For example, increased patron requests for help applying to public assistance programs during the pandemic prompted one SJ CPL librarian to educate herself and build capacity within the system around this demand.

***Hiring staff with diverse external experience may increase community connection and library innovation.*** SJ CPL's adult programming and Bendable staff have expertise outside of the library system and may be able to bring in new program strategies from other sectors and leverage previous experience to provide connections to new community partners.

# APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY

## RESEARCH DESIGN

Given the exploratory nature of this research effort, the Mt. Auburn team selected a case study methodology. The approach involved identifying a purposive set of public library systems representing diverse workforce and business development activities and community contexts using a criteria-based selection process.<sup>13</sup> The goals of the case studies were not to be representative of the entire library universe but to explore in more detail libraries that have been innovative in their approach to workforce and/or business development, with the purpose of identifying how these libraries have pursued this work and if and how they have sought to measure the outcomes of this work. In-depth case studies would help build an understanding of how these types of efforts are established, how they are designed and implemented across a variety of structures, why measurement may be a barrier, and what hypotheses are emerging that could be more systematically studied in the future. The following provides details about the case study design.

### Research questions and design of interview protocols

The Mt. Auburn team worked closely with COSLA and IMLS staff to develop specific research questions to guide the case study process.

#### Figure A1. Research questions

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

- What are examples of roles libraries play in the workforce and business development systems in their communities and how, if at all, is this changing as a result of COVID-19?
- What are the key partner relationships and in what ways do they influence community engagement? What are examples of the types of workforce and business development activities being undertaken, and are there differences in the level of engagement of different types of libraries (by size, type, state, etc.)?
- How do library systems with multiple outlets plan, organize, and implement their workforce and business development activities? Are there any benefits or challenges with different approaches?
- How are libraries utilizing the new federal CARES and ARPA funds related to recovery for workforce and business development activities?

<sup>13</sup> Palinkas LA, Horwitz SM, Green CA, Wisdom JP, Duan N, Hoagwood K. Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Adm Policy Ment Health*. 2015 Sep;42(5):533-44. doi: 10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y. PMID: 24193818; PMCID: PMC4012002.

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

- What types of evidence are there that libraries fill system gaps by providing low-cost, universal services?
- What types of evidence are there that libraries can contribute to system reach by providing referrals to workforce development and business development service providers?
- What types of evidence are there that libraries contribute to small business development through more indirect reasons (such as library location, etc.)?

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

- Are there any examples of how libraries measure and communicate their roles in contributing to workforce and business development services within the communities? If so, what are key challenges to measurement, including use of technology, staffing capacity, etc.? What are some of the potential factors affecting these challenges?
- What are potential measurement tools for capturing libraries' roles in providing business services and workforce development services?

What are key hypotheses that are emerging about the role of libraries in addressing their communities' workforce and business development needs that could be further tested through more rigorous research methods?

Once the Mt. Auburn team identified the research questions, the next step was to determine the type of stakeholder in each community whom the team would need to interview to address the questions. The Mt. Auburn team identified the following types of stakeholders:

- library system staff, including leadership, staff overseeing specific workforce or business development activities, and individuals responsible for data and measurement;
- library branch staff (if applicable);
- staff from local or regional workforce development and business development organizations; and
- other civic leaders, such as funders and municipal and county leaders, with a perspective on the library's role in the community.

Mt. Auburn developed customized interview protocols for each category of stakeholder that the team intended to interview. The team designed the protocols to address the research questions above.

### Case study selection

There are 9,237 public library systems operating in the United States, many with multiple branches or outlets, for approximately 17,000 branches in total.<sup>14</sup> This study does not focus on this entire universe of libraries but instead focuses on a subset that the Mt. Auburn team determined to be "influential." As discussed in the literature on qualitative methods, findings from case studies are not intended to be generalizable to the population.<sup>15</sup> Rather, case studies will identify some best

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.imls.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-survey>

<sup>15</sup> Yin, R.K. (2016). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, Second Edition. New York: The Guilford Press.

practices, highlight key challenges that libraries face in seeking to measure outcomes, provide a deeper understanding of the range of services and roles that libraries may play related to workforce and business development services, and, finally, highlight some hypotheses that may be tested more rigorously. The Mt. Auburn team's selection process identified influential systems that included a range and variety of contexts and implementation strategies to understand in more depth the project's specific research questions and uncover potential hypotheses about the position of libraries and workforce/business development services for further testing. Consistent with best practices in qualitative methodology, any findings may be generalizable to understanding the range of workforce and business development services public libraries provide and the potential for measuring the outcomes of these services, not to specific populations.

This study defines the universe of influential libraries as library systems that the literature noted or stakeholders identified. Specifically, the process involved:

- conducting a literature scan for library systems that a national journal article, book, or blog post reported as having a noteworthy approach to meeting the workforce or business development needs of patrons; or
- querying the project's Advisory Group about its knowledge of library systems with a notable implementation of workforce or business development services and/or innovation in delivering or measuring the work.

This process identified 85 library systems that met these criteria.

After identification of the 85 library systems, the research team conducted a second process to select ten preferred case study sites that illustrated a diversity of contexts. The Mt. Auburn team used maximum variation sampling to provide a set of case studies that would provide variations related to approaches emerging from a set of different conditions.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, the team further categorized the identified libraries based on the following criteria:

- **Diversity of administrative structures**, including a selection of single-outlet systems, multi-outlet systems with less than 11 outlets, and multi-outlet systems with more than ten outlets.
- **Diversity of state policy contexts**, including examples of systems in states with a range of enabling environments with specific state policies or programs that encourage the inclusion of public libraries in their workforce development systems or provide direct support for libraries to provide these services.
- **Variety of workforce and business development programs**, including sites with robust workforce development programs and sites with robust business development programs.
- **Variety of administrative entities**, including sites that a municipality or county run, sites that are part of a special library district, and sites that are nonprofit entities.

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<sup>16</sup> Palinkas LA, Horwitz SM, Green CA, Wisdom JP, Duan N, Hoagwood K. Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Adm Policy Ment Health*. 2015 Sep;42(5):533-44. doi: 10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y. PMID: 24193818; PMCID: PMC4012002

- **Geographic size**, including sites in rural communities, small and midsize cities, and larger cities or metro regions.

Finally, to reduce the burden on specific library systems, the Mt. Auburn team excluded libraries that were recently part of a case study-related research effort that the American Library Association conducted.<sup>17</sup>

This process led to the identification of ten preferred case study sites (see Figure A2) and five alternate sites.

Figure A2. Ten case study sites

| Name of Library system          | Main library city | State | State enabling | # of outlets | Outlet category    | Region       | Type of community | Program type                | Administrative entity |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------|----------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Asotin County Library           | Clarkston         | WA    | Medium         | 3            | Multi less than 11 | Far West     | Rural             | Strong workforce            | Library District      |
| Bangor Public Library           | Bangor            | ME    | Medium         | 1            | Single             | New England  | Small City        | Strong business             | Nonprofit             |
| Brooklyn Public Library         | Brooklyn          | NY    | Medium         | 60           | Multi more than 10 | Mid Atlantic | Large City        | Strong business & workforce | Municipal Gov't       |
| Cambria County Library System   | Johnstown         | PA    | Very Strong    | 14           | Single             | Mid East     | Small City        | Strong workforce            | Nonprofit             |
| Hartford Public Library         | Hartford          | CT    | Medium         | 7            | Multi less than 11 | New England  | Midsize City      | Strong workforce            | Nonprofit             |
| Kenton County Public Library    | Fort Mitchell     | KY    | Weak           | 3            | Multi less than 11 | Southeast    | Midsize City      | Strong workforce            | Library District      |
| Memphis Public Libraries        | Memphis           | TN    | Weak           | 18           | Multi more than 10 | Southeast    | Large City        | Strong business & workforce | City/County           |
| North Liberty Community Library | North Liberty     | IA    | Medium         | 1            | Single             | Plains       | Rural             | Strong workforce            | Municipal Gov't       |
| San Diego Public Library        | San Diego         | CA    | Very Strong    | 36           | Multi more than 10 | Far West     | Large City        | Strong business & workforce | Municipal Gov't       |
| St. Joe County Public Library   | South Bend        | IN    | Medium         | 10           | Multi less than 11 | Great Lakes  | Midsize City      | Strong workforce            | Library District      |

The Mt. Auburn team notes that the process of identifying “influential” sites through the literature review and Advisory Group recommendations did lead to the selection of a couple of sites that, while providing some relevant data, were not necessarily influential or exemplary in any way. This reveals the value of conducting in-depth case studies since the process led to some examples where perceived exemplar practices (e.g., the development of the Bangor Business Center) proved to be less successful than anticipated. In other case study libraries, there was more focus on standard roles of the public library rather than any exemplary program. Often, the literature cites cases with very shallow understanding of the reality of the work on the ground. This suggests that some further research is required if the goal is to ensure case studies represent examples of exemplary practice.

## Data collection

To maximize the likelihood that a system would agree to participate, the research team worked collaboratively with COSLA in the outreach process. As a first step, COSLA worked with the state administrative entity to ensure that there was interest in the selection at the state level, identify the appropriate contact person in each library, and request their outreach to the libraries. The research team then introduced themselves to the library lead to explain the content, the expected burden in terms of time of library staff, and the expected final products to encourage interest. Through this process, eight of the original ten sites agreed to participate, one site had limited its workforce development services and did not think it would be a strong case study, and another felt it did not

<sup>17</sup> American Library Association (2021). American’s Libraries Essential Partners in Workforce Development and Career Services.

[https://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/Workforce/Workforce\\_web\\_032621-1.pdf](https://www.ala.org/advocacy/sites/ala.org.advocacy/files/content/Workforce/Workforce_web_032621-1.pdf)

have the time to participate. The Mt. Auburn team substituted these sites with two of the five alternate sites with similar contextual characteristics.

The data collection process included two major components:

- 1) **Analysis of the operating context:** The first step in the case study process was to conduct secondary research on the communities in which the libraries reside. This research included a demographic and economic overview of the market area that the library system operates within, an overview of the library system operating structure, an analysis of the state policy environment relevant to libraries and workforce development, and background information on the workforce development and business development ecosystem in each community.
- 2) **Site visits and interviews:** After gathering the contextual information, the Mt. Auburn team had an introductory phone call with the library system lead to further the team’s understanding of the library and identify the internal and external stakeholders that system leaders believed would be critical to interview to best address the research questions. The team then scheduled a one- or two-day site visit with the lead from the library. For each site, the Mt. Auburn team interviewed library system staff, including leadership at both the system and outlet or branch levels, library staff directly involved in workforce or business development activities, and communication- and technology-related staff. The external interviews focused on stakeholders in the workforce and business development ecosystem in the library’s service area, including “partner” organizations engaged in active collaboration with libraries, organizations providing workforce or business development services in the region but not engaged in a formal library partnership, and other civic leaders, such as stakeholders from the public sector, philanthropy, and community-based organizations. The Mt. Auburn team sent an introductory email to all proposed respondents to introduce the project and describe the opportunity and estimated burden level for their participation. Interviews were primarily onsite and in person; however, to accommodate respondents’ availability and being sensitive to COVID-related concerns, the team conducted some of the stakeholder interviews via Zoom.

The Mt. Auburn team conducted between eight and 15 interviews per case study site. (See Figure A3.) There was 96 percent participation from the stakeholders whom the team contacted. Of the total 114 interviews, 92, or 81 percent, were in person as part of the site visit, and the remaining interviews were via Zoom.

**Figure A3. Case study interviews by site**

| Library case study                   | Library outlet/<br>branch staff | Library system staff | Small Business actor | Workforce actor | Civic leader | Other    | Grand Total |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------|-------------|
| Asotin County Library (WA)           |                                 | 4                    |                      | 5               | 1            |          | 10          |
| Bangor Public Library (ME)           |                                 | 5                    | 1                    | 2               | 1            |          | 9           |
| Brooklyn Public Library (NY)         | 1                               | 6                    | 2                    | 1               | 4            |          | 14          |
| Cambria County Library System (PA)   | 3                               | 1                    |                      | 2               | 2            |          | 8           |
| Hartford Public Library (CT)         | 3                               | 2                    |                      | 4               | 3            |          | 12          |
| Kenton County Public Library (KY)    | 3                               | 4                    |                      | 6               | 2            |          | 15          |
| Memphis Public Libraries (TN)        | 7                               | 3                    | 1                    | 1               |              |          | 12          |
| North Liberty Community Library (IA) |                                 | 4                    | 4                    | 2               | 3            |          | 13          |
| St. Joe County Public Library (IN)   |                                 | 6                    | 1                    | 1               | 2            | 1        | 11          |
| San Diego Public Library (CA)        | 4                               | 4                    |                      | 2               |              |          | 10          |
| <b>Total</b>                         | <b>21</b>                       | <b>39</b>            | <b>9</b>             | <b>26</b>       | <b>18</b>    | <b>1</b> | <b>114</b>  |

The Mt. Auburn team used semi-structured protocols to guide stakeholder interviews. The team recorded all interviews, with the consent of participants, and then transcribed them for data analysis purposes.

## **Data analysis**

The research team used the data collected as part of the contextual analysis and the transcripts of the site interviews to complete the case studies. Each case study followed the same outline to ensure that the team covered the research material in a consistent manner. The Mt. Auburn team designed the outline to align with the research questions. Following completion of a draft of each case study, the team sent the draft case study to the library system lead and a representative of the State Library administrative agency to vet for accuracy.

To ensure rigor in the cross-site analysis, the research team used NVivo coding software to analyze transcripts. The team aligned the coding system with the research questions and then used the nodes to analyze for key themes and emerging trends across sites as well as variation based on site characteristics. Following are the specific NVivo nodes:

- 1. Workforce development programs and services**
- 2. Small business development programs and services**
- 3. Effects/changes due to COVID**
- 4. Library administration and coordination**
  - a. System and branch roles**
  - b. Staffing**
  - c. Funding**
  - d. Marketing and communication**
- 5. Support from state or local government**
- 6. Workforce and small business ecosystems**
  - a. Awareness of organizations**
  - b. Partnerships/collaborations**
- 7. Data and measurement**
  - a. Examples of tracking**
  - b. Challenges to tracking**
  - c. Use and motivation of data collection**
  - d. Emerging ideas/opportunities for tracking**

Once transcript coding was complete, project staff then sorted, clustered, and compared codes between and across case study libraries. The team addressed data validity by exploring inter-rater reliability and directing different researchers to interpret the same data. In addition, the Mt. Auburn team sent the full case studies to each site's library director who reviewed all of the data in the case study for accuracy. The research team met throughout the data collection and analysis process to discuss emerging themes with input from all site visit staff. The Mt. Auburn team documented site findings in each case study report and then aggregated the findings in a final cross-site report.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The Paperwork Reduction Act requires that any federally funded research project that collects information from ten or more respondents must have approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). As a result, the Mt. Auburn team developed a Paperwork Reduction Act Submission for this project, and OMB approved the plan. In addition, when inviting libraries to participate in the research effort, the research team had an introductory meeting that made clear the purpose,

benefits, and risks associated with participating as a case study site. Finally, the Mt. Auburn team gave a key staff person at each of the libraries the opportunity to vet the full case studies when they were in draft form to ensure that they did not contain information that was either incorrect or included sensitive information that they would not want disclosed in a public study.

The Mt. Auburn team also provided interviewees with adequate information to make an informed decision regarding whether or not to participate in the research, allowed respondents the option of declining to answer questions with which they were uncomfortable, and confirmed to participants that the report would not identify or attribute responses to individual participants.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY DESIGN

One of the limitations to the study design was that the selection of case study sites depended upon the literature review and Advisory Group to be able to identify libraries that were doing noteworthy work in the area of workforce and business development. As noted, in some cases, the information was either not up-to-date or did not provide enough depth to fully understand the degree to which the library's services were either exemplary or influential. While there was important learning from each case, the project might have missed some innovative services or approaches in libraries that the team did not select.

A second limitation was that the team selected the cases based upon the services that they were providing not the experience they had in data or outcome tracking. There was very limited information in the literature review about specific libraries that had exemplary or influential practices in this area. While there might have been better examples, from a learning perspective, of libraries that have really focused on how to track and measure their outcomes, the case selection process did not have enough data in this area of what libraries were doing, and thus might have missed some interesting cases.

The final limitation involved the timing of the project during the pandemic. The case study libraries were all at various stages of reopening and many had not yet returned to providing the workforce and business development services that they had prior to the pandemic. As a result, it was not fully clear how the case study libraries were going to deliver these services once they were fully back to pre-pandemic operations.

## APPENDIX C: ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

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### MEASURES THAT MATTER: WORKFORCE ADVISORY GROUP PARTICIPANTS

**Stacey Aldrich**, State Librarian, Hawaii State Public Library System

**Larra Clark**, Deputy Director, Public Library Association and American Library Association's Public Policy & Advocacy Office

**Sharon Comstock**, Teaching Assistant Professor, Library and Information Science, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

**Larry Good**, Co-founder, President, and CEO, Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

**Elizabeth Iaukea**, Workforce Development & Adult Basic Education Program Manager, the Seattle Public Library

**Megan Janicki**, Deputy Director, Strategic Initiatives, American Library Association

**Cassandra Leepport**, former Program Development Specialist, State Library Services, Minnesota Department of Education

**Ryan McCrory**, Executive Director, Lititz Public Library

**Lisa Shaw**, Small and Rural Libraries and Workforce Development Specialist, Maine State Library

**Jack Tilney**, Branch Manager, Noe Valley/Sally Brunn Branch, San Francisco Public Library

## APPENDIX D: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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- **AJC/CareerOneStop.** American Job Center, run through CareerOneStop. Funded through the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, AJCs provide free help to job seekers for a variety of career- and employment-related needs.
- **ALA: American Library Association.** ALA is the oldest and largest library association and aims to provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services.
- **ARPA: American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.** This Act was a \$1.9 trillion stimulus package Congress passed to support Americans and help stimulate the economy during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **CARES: Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act.** Congress passed the \$2.2 trillion stimulus package in March 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **COSLA: Chief Officers of State Library Agencies.**
- **ESL: English as a Second Language.** Classes for non-native English speakers. Also referred to as ESOL or English to Speakers of Other Languages.
- **IMLS: Institute of Museum and Library Services.**
- **LSTA: Library Services and Technology Act.** The LSTA of 1996 is a federal grant program exclusively for libraries, administered by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).
- **PLA: Public Library Association.** A division of the American Library Association, PLA is a professional association of public librarians and supporters dedicated to the “development and effectiveness of public library staff and public library services.”
- **PLS: Public Libraries Survey.** PLS is a national survey of public libraries. The data that libraries submit to IMLS includes information about library visits, circulation, size of collections, staffing, electronic resources, operating revenues, etc.
- **SBA: Small Business Administration.** This U.S. government agency supports entrepreneurs and small businesses.
- **SBDC: Small Business Development Centers.** SBDCs provide counseling and training to small businesses, including working with the SBA to develop and provide informational tools to support business start-ups and existing business expansion.
- **SCORE (formerly Service Corps of Retired Executives):** SCORE is a volunteer network that offers free and confidential business advice to entrepreneurs and small business owners.
- **ULC: Urban Libraries Council.** ULC is an action tank of North America’s leading public library systems, which provides a forum for library leaders to share best practices.
- **WDB: Workforce Development Board.** WDBs (also referred to as WIBs or workforce investment boards) serve as connectors between the U.S. Department of Labor and local American Job Centers. Their role is to develop regional strategic plans and set funding priorities in their area.
- **WIOA: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.** Signed into law in 2014, WIOA replaced the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and serves as the primary federal workforce development legislation.