



Project Compass weighs its impact on local communities

Three-year program guides public library support of
job seekers during tough economic times



Project Compass is a partnership between WebJunction and the State Library of North Carolina, funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

In October 2009, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) funded Project Compass, an initiative to provide resources for libraries to meet the needs of their communities as they struggled to recover from the economic recession. WebJunction and the State Library of North Carolina formed a partnership to design and deliver the Project Compass curriculum and supporting resources. The initiative has provided in-person and online training for 2,500 library staff across all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

A unique aspect of Project Compass training was the opportunity for library staff to share their knowledge, resources and examples of programs and services they have devised to support the needs of job seekers and the unemployed in their communities. This on-the-ground expertise was collected and embedded into the curriculum, giving libraries access to innovative yet easy-to-implement solutions from their peers in the field. One participant noted, “With limited budgets I thought we were doing all we could to help our community. Unemployment rate is high in our county. After a half day in the Project Compass workshop I was wondering why we haven’t done more!!”

The curriculum addressed critical topics for supporting a 21st century workforce, such as:

- How to provide computer and technology training and support to low-skilled users
- How to help job seekers be successful in their search
- How to help patrons increase their personal finance savvy and budding entrepreneurs gain small business know-how
- How to successfully partner with agencies and other community-based organizations to strengthen services.

An independent evaluation of the Project Compass program reveals that the impact of the training has been profound. At least 3,120 new partnerships have been formed to augment workforce recovery programs and services, and at least 5,900 new or enhanced skill-building activities, outreach or other library services are being undertaken as a result of Project Compass.

“I’m also partnering with our local community college to hold a “Literacy Fair” in June for the public as well as for the participating agencies to start a conversation on forming a more formal coalition in understanding and sharing what we all do in terms of providing literacy services in our county. In the beginning, the community college was interested only in language literacy (e.g., ESL and citizenship), but at my urging, we will expand our scope to cover also financial and job search (21st century life) skills literacy! This is a direct result of what I learned at the Project Compass National Convening and my exposure to the other [Project Compass curriculum] pathways.”

—Project Compass participant



Project Compass National Convening participants exchange their workforce materials.

“People continue flock to their public libraries for resources and guidance during these economic hard times,” says Chrystie Hill, director of OCLC Community Relations. “Project Compass gave thousands of library staff the boost they needed to continue their support for people writing résumés, applying for jobs, creating networks or starting new businesses. I’m thrilled by the energy I’ve seen from state and public library participants; they’re literally powering economic recovery—and all Americans ultimately benefit from their commitment to this work.”

These new programs and partnerships are making a difference in communities across the country.

As of November 2012, the Project Compass grant has come to a close. However, libraries continue to use the Project Compass curriculum—available for free download on WebJunction.org—for staff training, and to develop new workforce recovery programs and services. In addition to local efforts, commitment at the federal level continues for libraries and workforce agency partnerships.

All Project Compass curriculum materials and supporting resources will be maintained on the Workforce Services section of WebJunction.org, and libraries should continue to use the #libs4jobs Twitter hashtag to share their ongoing accomplishments.

<http://webjunction.org/explore-topics/workforce-resources.html>



Project Compass poster session at ALA 2011, with OCLC's Jennifer Peterson and Project Compass trainers Bill Erbes and Lindsey Patrick Wesson.



OCLC's Betha Gutsche presents unemployment data to state library staff at a Project Compass summit.

“Prior to participating in Project Compass, we had a woman in daily searching for work. Most every day, she faxed several résumés, but clearly she was not even getting to the interview stage. Once into Project Compass, we saw more clearly the need to be more proactive, so we approached her with an offer to review her résumés. She was eager for help; perhaps she was just as eager for someone to take an interest in what she was trying to do. We did help make significant revisions to her résumés, and once that was done she was comfortable asking for more help. The new résumés did start to attract interview offers, and as of this writing she is back to work.”

—Project Compass participant

“Someone who has been attending almost all of our free workshops on new technology and social networking has really applied what’s he’s learned and more. Since attending the workshops he has built his own website, started using social media for marketing his website, and has shared some of his knowledge with attendees about his ideas for his business. He has given good feedback about the workshops and has made appointments for mentoring for his business with some of the other SCORE members... When he first came to the workshops, he mentioned not knowing how to proceed with his business and had questions regarding his next steps. He is now taking them. We are all really proud of the way he’s taken the reins of his business and is finally moving forward.”

—Project Compass participant



Project Compass workshop participants discuss local workforce recovery challenges and solutions for libraries.

“Working together, libraries and the workforce system are making a real difference in communities across the United States. Collaborations at the local and state levels are making it easier for citizens to access the services and resources they need. I am grateful for the excellent leadership of our partners at the Department of Labor on the federal level and to the leaders and many participants in Project Compass for making this project such a success.”

—Susan Hildreth, Director of the IMLS



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