

The Library, the Workforce and the 21st Century

This is an introduction to the IMLS 21st Century Skills Framework and its connection to libraries serving the needs of the workforce.

IMLS embarked on the *Museums, Libraries, and 21st Century Skills* project to underscore the critical role that libraries and museums play in helping citizens adapt to the fast-changing world we live and work in. Their vision is summarized in an elegant publication, which is available for download at: www.ims.gov/pdf/21stCenturySkills.pdf.

As a grant recipient under the IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian program, Project Compass is guided by the IMLS 21st Century Skills Framework, with a particular focus on how the framework aligns with libraries serving the needs of the workforce.

What are “21st century skills”?

Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	Social & Cross-cultural Skills
Communication & Collaboration	Creative Thinking & Innovation
Technology Literacy, Media Literacy	Productivity & Accountability
Flexibility & Adaptability	Teamwork
Global Awareness	

Of the longer list identified by IMLS, these nine skill sets are the most pertinent to the workforce and their performance in today’s work world. Although we may instinctively think that 21st century skills are all about new technologies, notice that technology appears only once in the list above.

You might be asking yourself, “*What’s so new about any of these skills?*” It’s a fair question. All of these skills have been key to success for many years in some fields or professions. For those who work in libraries in particular, communication, collaboration, teamwork, adaptability and much more have been necessary ingredients for successful performance. Even the need to keep up with technology is certainly not unique to this new century.

Shifting nature of the workforce

Let's take a closer look at the shift from the traditional to the contemporary workplace. This chart from the IMLS report sums it up well.

	20 th CENTURY	21 st CENTURY
Number Jobs/ Lifetime	1–2 jobs	10–15 jobs (U.S. Department of Labor 2004)
Job Requirement	Mastery of one field	Simultaneous mastery of many rapidly changing fields
Job Competition	Local	Global
Work Model	Routine; hands-on; fact-based	Nonroutine; technical; creative; interactive
Education Model	Institution-centered; formal degree attainment is primary goal	Learner-centered; self-directed, lifelong learning is primary goal
Organizational Culture	Top-down	Multidirectional (bottom-up, top-down, side-to-side, etc.)

Consider the impact of holding many more jobs in a lifetime. At a minimum, it requires *heightened* productivity, accountability, flexibility and adaptability. The shift from routine, nontechnical work to highly technical, nonroutine, creative work requires *intensified* abilities in creativity, teamwork and technology literacy. The fact that job competition is now global rather than local requires a global awareness that may be entirely new to some segments of the workforce.

In this globally interconnected information economy, the demands for all of the 21st century skill sets are heightened and intensified by the accelerated pace of change and by the shift from a manufacturing economy to a knowledge economy.

*“Lifelong learning is not an option anymore;
it’s a necessity!
SMART is the new RICH.”*

– Bernie Trilling, *21st Century Skills*

This is what all of the heightened demand for skills boils down to—the *necessity* of lifelong learning. The 21st century workforce does not indulge complacency.

This is great news for libraries! They have always been in the “business” of lifelong learning. Libraries are in a particularly core position to encourage continuous learning and improvement for adults beyond whatever formal schooling they may have had. Working with patrons who are impacted by the economic turmoil offers excellent opportunities, not only to build skills, but to shift the mindset to a 21st century kind of thinking—one that is agile and ready to embrace a lifetime of learning and expanding. Everyone wants to be RICH. Libraries are pivotal to cultivating and enabling everyone’s desire to be SMART.

Shifting the mindset is about much more than learning this or that new technology. Certainly, it is important for people to learn to use current tools. Even the most menial jobs require some level of interaction with a computer. Just about every job application is now online. Competition for knowledge industry jobs rewards those who stay steps ahead on the technology learning curve. However, whatever technology tool you are learning today, it is likely to have been replaced by something else tomorrow, next year, 10 years from now.

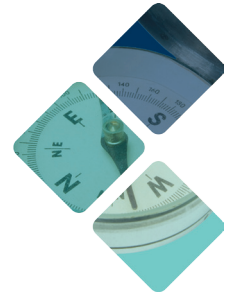
It's not about what to learn.

It's about HOW to learn.

As you consider programs and services that your library can deliver to support job seekers and entrepreneurs and to increase patrons' financial literacy, keep in mind the broader context of the 21st century skills framework. For each library response, think about preparing your patrons for the reality of continuous learning and helping them build the attitude and skills they need to know HOW to learn.

Use the *Project Compass 21st Century Skills Bridge* as a reference as you work through the *21st Century Workshop Discussion Guide*.

To learn more about the IMLS 21st Century Skills Initiative and access their free, online assessment tool, visit: www.imls.gov/about/21stCskills.shtm.

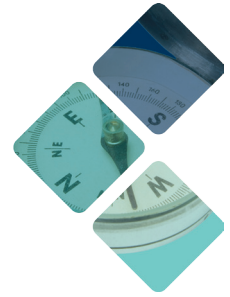


Workshop Discussion: 21st Century Library Shifts

How is your library responding to this shift? Place a check in the box that describes your library now. Discuss ways your library could demonstrate and nurture 21st century skills growth through workforce recovery efforts.

20 th Century Library	21 st Century Library
<input type="checkbox"/> Primarily content-driven Library as repositories for resources for job seekers	<input type="checkbox"/> Audience- and content-driven Library enlists input to identify changing community needs and remains nimble and timely in responding to those needs
<input type="checkbox"/> Mostly tangible objects Library building as destination for resources	<input type="checkbox"/> Tangible and digital objects Library's electronic resources and online presence recognized as expanded collection of resources and services
<input type="checkbox"/> One-way Library uses website and newsletter to share information	<input type="checkbox"/> Multidirectional Library provides options for public input and develops cross-community partnerships, leveraging social media outlets
<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on presentation and display Library provides programs and exhibits	<input type="checkbox"/> Focus on audience engagement, experiences Library enlists community representatives to help teach, mentor and exchange skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Acts independently	<input type="checkbox"/> Acts in highly collaborative partnerships Library develops lasting and impactful partnerships on behalf of community needs
<input type="checkbox"/> Located in community	<input type="checkbox"/> Embedded in community Library is recognized as community hub
<input type="checkbox"/> Learning outcomes assumed, implied Library provides training in basic skills	<input type="checkbox"/> Learning outcomes purposeful Library programs include consideration of 21 st century skills as learning outcomes for audiences

Informed by IMLS *Museums, Libraries and 21st Century Skills* Report.



21st Century Skills Bridge

This document builds the bridge between a library’s responses to the needs of the workforce and the infusion of 21st century thinking at every step.

Shift the mindset.

Libraries have a critical role in helping citizens build skills and knowledge that will keep our nation strong and viable on the world stage.

The great news for libraries is that they have long been focused on many of the skills listed in the 21st Century IMLS project report.

As libraries step up to help the unemployed build skills, it is equally important to introduce a mindset that grasps the new economic realities and is prepared for a competitive workplace.

The 21st century skills framework can underwrite all efforts to provide lifelong learning experiences. Even a basic introduction to computers class can include a discussion of the online and digitized nature of our modern world.

Build the skill set.

Critical Thinking & Problem Solving	Social & Cross-cultural Skills
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Discovery & Assessment

Discover and assess top needs of the community for workforce recovery.

- Understand how the 21st century economy has impacted the needs of the unemployed and how the library can help patrons adapt.
- Use current technology tools for research and community assessment; make exploration of new tools and platforms an ongoing effort.

Identify what the library can do to help.

- Provide online information about programs, services and events.
- Enable two-way communication with audiences about special events and programs, using current technology tools (blogs, Twitter, online forms, etc.).
- Engage in lifelong learning, modeling 21st century skills to patrons and the community, as well as keeping abreast with change.
- Encourage and integrate community input in planning and decision-making.
- Enable community stakeholders to participate in evaluation and refresh library responses.

Collections

Provide a current and relevant collection of online and print materials.

- Provide resources for the economically impacted that help them grasp the changing demands of the workforce.
- Provide resources that increase users' global awareness and understanding of the impact of globalization on the workforce.
- Provide guidance to support new users' effective use of online and digital resources.

Develop topical bibliographies and pathfinders.

- Provide guides and pathfinders that encourage patrons' exploration of new tools and technologies.
- Work with patrons to personalize and customize guides for the particular needs and priorities of target audiences.

Training & Programming

Connect patrons with online self-directed learning.

- Identify learning opportunities that enhance 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving or collaboration.
- Educate information seekers about the value of self-directed and online learning.
- Provide support for learners to develop skills and attitudes for success with self-directed learning.

Offer programs and classes that explore new ideas and opportunities.

- Customize programs to heighten audience engagement; offer at times when target audiences can easily participate.
- Design programs and classes to include consideration of 21st century skills as learning outcomes (interactive, focused on project-based learning, emphasis on teamwork, etc.).
- Ensure that programs provide 21st century context for the unemployed in the current job market.
- Provide opportunities for patrons' peer-to-peer knowledge sharing and networking.
- Encourage the use of current technology tools for virtual connection through online communities and social networks.
- Seek to stimulate creative thinking and encourage innovation.

Collaboration

Build relationships with community-based agencies.

- Reinforce the role of the library as community leader through networking and engaging in community activities.
- Pursue continuous improvement in communication skills and social and cross-cultural fluency.

Collaborate with partners to develop programs and services.

- Build coalitions of multiple partners to achieve program goals.
- Identify nontraditional partners.
- Work to achieve partnerships that are scalable and sustainable over time.
- Build toward a community-wide vision of a workforce that is able to thrive in the 21st century.
- Engage audiences, partner organizations and the wider community in lifelong learning.

Connect patrons with community agencies.

- Become familiar with community agencies; maximize the role of the library as a hub of the community.
- Engage community stakeholders and other institutions where appropriate.
- Coordinate with other agencies to make collections readily accessible by patrons.

Communication

Promote library services and programs.

- Use social networking tools to market programs and services.
- Reach new or underserved audiences through the library website and other online venues.
- Embrace the concept of the library's "virtual branch."

Communicate the value of the library as an essential support system for economic recovery.

- Participate actively in the community and use these experiences to inform and deepen interactions with patrons.
- Track metrics over time for measurable outcomes of services and programs for the unemployed.
- Collect and broadcast stories and anecdotes about patrons' successful acquisition of 21st century skills and concepts.