



Project Compass Lights a Path to Workforce Recovery

Year Two Project Report

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January 2012

By the **Project Compass Team**



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Introduction

Three years after the onset of the current recession, people in the United States continue to flock to their public libraries for critical information, resources, technology, training and guidance. Among the first responders to the economically impacted, libraries of all sizes offer support across the spectrum of needs arising from unemployment, the housing crisis and reduced incomes. Support sometimes means mustering empathy and calm when patrons whose lives are in upheaval unload their frustration, anger and distress on frontline library staff. The anxious query of one library staffer reveals the emotional strain and feeling of inadequate preparation: “What do you do at the service desk when someone is so desperate about their job situation that they start to cry?”

Libraries have long been prominent providers of workforce development, assisting patrons with basic computer skills, job-seeking activities, job training programs, career direction and business development. In the last three years of persistent high unemployment, demand for these services has risen dramatically. In a 2010–11 study, nearly 92 percent of libraries report that providing employment services is important to their communities, up from 65.9 percent in 2008–09 and 44 percent in 2006–07.ⁱ In the 2011 “State of America’s Libraries” reportⁱⁱ from the American Library Association (ALA), two-thirds of poll respondents indicated that the “[public] library’s assistance in starting a business or finding a job was important to them.” The recent “Opportunity for All” study,ⁱⁱⁱ conducted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and University of Washington iSchool, estimated that in a one-year period, 30 million Americans had used a library computer or wireless network for some form of job help. This intensified demand on library services has been coupled with cuts to library budgets and staffing levels, resulting in libraries stretched to capacity as they continue to extend a lifeline to their communities. Despite American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding, particularly around public access computing centers, lost tax revenue

“What do you do at the service desk when someone is so desperate about their job situation that they start to cry?”

and subsequent cuts in government services are translating into staff layoffs and reduced hours of service, just when libraries are needed most.

Project Compass, funded by a grant from IMLS, first launched in the fall of 2009 to investigate job seekers' specific demands on public libraries and what could be done to address their needs more effectively, particularly through state library initiatives. Over the course of four regional summits, state and public library leaders gathered to develop new insights about potential new partners for libraries and strategies to create successful collaborations with workforce agencies. Summit participants confirmed the variety of library services delivering support to the workforce, including legal and foreclosure support, workforce retraining, essential and social services access, basic technology skills and online access to government information. They also shared the realities of staff feeling overwhelmed by the influx of demands and insufficiently prepared to meet new challenges and devise new approaches to service.



Betty Jo Jarvis from the Tennessee State Library & Archives at a 2009 Project Compass Summit

With a follow-on grant awarded in October 2010, Project Compass turned its focus to training frontline staff, providing them with strategies and resources to enhance their services to job seekers and other workforce recovery efforts. The intent was to build upon existing endeavors, to renew their sense of purpose, and refresh their ideas about how to help patrons cope with the difficult challenges instigated by the economic recession. Over the course of the year, the project team developed curriculum and delivered direct training to more than 2,000 library staff. An independent evaluation of the project affirms that *“as a result of participating in Project Compass, library staff members across the country are now more strongly equipped than ever...to develop and deliver services that are relevant and needed in today’s complex economic landscape.”*

Activities by the Number

Project Goals

Project Compass set out to accomplish the following goals for year two:

- Increase the number of public library staff confidently offering services to the unemployed.
- Identify how libraries can prepare job seekers for the 21st century workplace.
- Increase partnerships between local libraries and other organizations serving the unemployed.
- Provide all library staff with access to reliable online resources and support networks to improve their service to the unemployed.
- Build a common understanding that the library is an essential and capable partner for workforce development.

The Workshops

The Project Compass team coordinated, facilitated and delivered workshops for workforce recovery that reached across the nation. The approach was tailored to meet the needs and capacity of each state.

1. In-Person Workshops in Critical Areas



Project Compass Workshop attendees do ‘the wave’ in Frisco, Texas

By analyzing chronic (14-month) high unemployment rates by state, the percentage of high-unemployment counties within those states, and the number of library systems and staff within those counties, the Project Compass team identified 11 “target” states to receive the highest concentration of local, face-to-face workforce recovery workshops for library staff: Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon and Tennessee. Experienced library trainers in each of the target states worked with project staff to refine the curriculum developed by the Project Compass team, customize the content to meet local needs, and coordinate and deliver in-person workshops across their states. Fifty-four of these workshops were delivered to 1,242 library staff. Just over half (52%) of participants were from small or rural libraries (population size 1–24,999); 46% were from larger libraries (population size 25,000 or more).

2. In-Person Workshops Across the U.S.

Project Compass staff organized in-person workshops for library staff in 38 states (including the District of Columbia) outside of the target group; 703 library staff attended these sessions.

3. Online Workshops

In times of reduced staffing, online workshops are often the most accessible way for frontline staff to receive training. To extend its reach even further, Project Compass adapted the curriculum for two online workshops, each blending a live “kick-off” webinar with four weeks of facilitated,

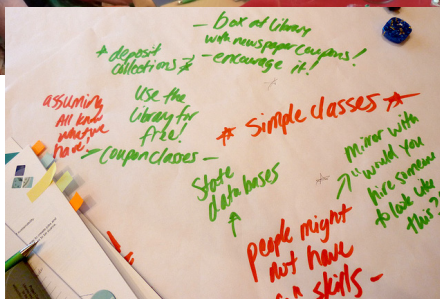
asynchronous assignments and discussions. The first online workshop—*Libraries at the Core of Workforce Recovery*—addressed core services and the specific needs of job seekers. The second online workshop—*Libraries Supporting Small Business and Financial Health*—expanded the notion of workforce recovery to consider the needs of entrepreneurs and to boost patrons’ personal financial skills. Public library staff from 22 states attended, with 133 participants in the first workshop and 206 in the second. The discussion activity from both workshops indicated a high level of virtual engagement, with a total of 52 topics, 542 responses and 16,146 views of the topics.



Webinar presenters at the 2nd Project Compass Online Workshop

The format for both the in-person and online workshops began with a broad look at the 21st century employment landscape and a viewing of the brief “Shift Happens” video^{iv} as a frame for the rest of the exploration of workforce recovery services. The video’s startling statistics highlight the outcomes of the rapidly changing world we live in and sparked group reflection about the very real challenges for everyone aiming to thrive in the future.

Although a detailed investigation of the Workforce Recovery Pathways occupied the bulk of the workshops, the group started with a lighter-weight “56 Things” exercise to stimulate their thinking without overwhelming them with possibilities. “56 Things You (Your Library) Can Do”^v offers a selected assortment of actionable ideas, many at low cost and small effort. Next, after a short introduction to the structure and use of the pathways, trainers employed the “world café”



World Café discussion and table notes at a Project Compass Workshop

model^{vi} of rotating discussion, in which participants focused on one or two pathways, identified priorities for their own libraries’ services, and then engaged in lively conversation with their peers. As they posed challenges, shared strategies and discovered new resources with each other, they left colorful notations on the table-sized paper provided. Groups rotated to new tables to get fresh voices and ideas into the mix, followed by a debrief with the entire assembly of the most salient insights.

In many workshops, all four pathways were covered, often expanding the participants’ notions of the variety of services possible and doable. Pursuant to the immersion in the pathways, participants mapped out individual action plans based on activities they had prioritized through the day. The action plan became a tool for going back to their libraries with a clear idea of what to do and how to get there.

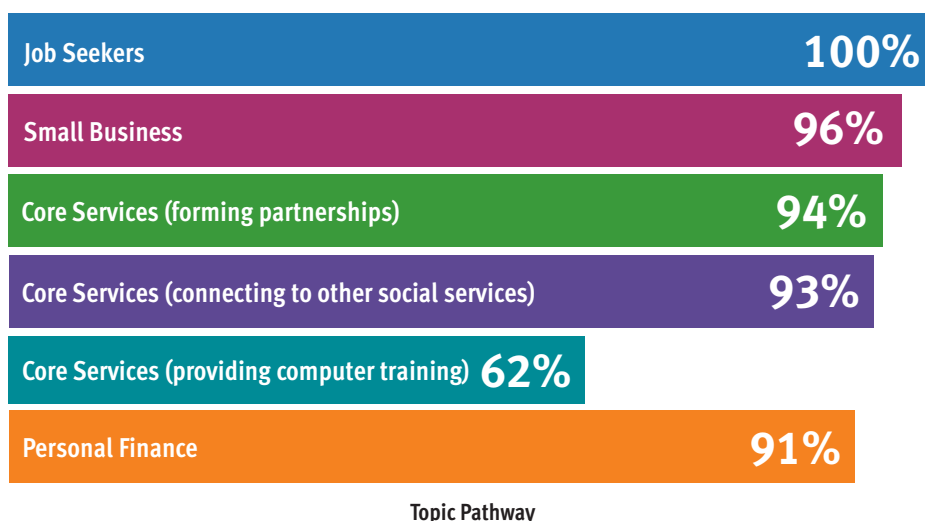
Many workshops included short presentations or panel discussions with representatives from local libraries and workforce or other community agencies. Not only did they add the value of community-specific perspectives, the presentations broke up the intensity of the pathway discussions.

In response to the question, “What activities or resources from this workshop were particularly useful?” one participant replied: *“Not to be glib, but everything. The videos, the readings, the discussion. It gave me ideas to begin to use immediately as well as ideas for longer term. It showed me how to better reach out to my patrons.”*

For trainers, the rewards of leading a Project Compass workshop include seeding conversation and watching them take off, feeling the energy in the room mount as the day proceeds, and harvesting the excellent ideas and observations that enrich the collective body of knowledge. As the project team had hoped, staff from libraries of all sizes and means found their footing in the pathways and proceeded forward with purpose.

Content Areas Covered by Trainers at Project Compass Workshops

(As indicated by the percentage of responding trainers)



Community of Online Resources

The Workforce Resources section of WebJunction’s website launched in the fall of 2009 as a community of practice to aggregate relevant resources and provide a point of connection for library staff involved in workforce recovery activities. New resources are continually added, both by Project Compass staff and by library staff contributing their ideas and successful strategies. Resources now include workshop curriculum materials, articles and videos on a host of workforce recovery topics. The team also hosted a series of five free topical webinars, which were recorded and preserved on the website for anyone to view.

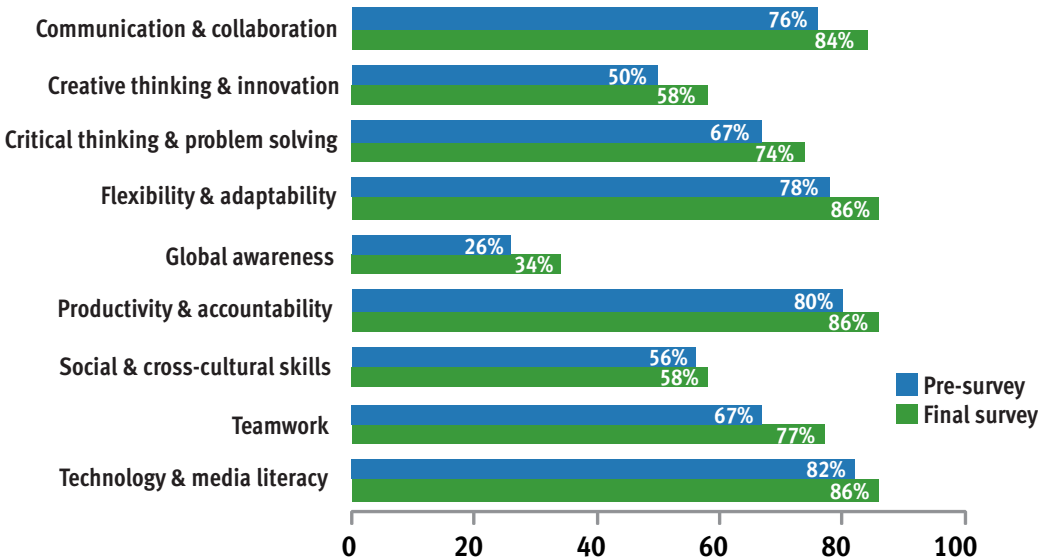
21st Century Skills Conversation

The current recession came with some impacts that reflect how the employment landscape has transformed. Job turnover is now the rule, with the expectation that the average person will have nine jobs from ages 18 to 34.^{vii} Job searching is accomplished largely online and is often more effective through the use of social networks. Most job applications are online, and may be further complicated by employers’ use of automated keyword searching software. The qualities employers seek in an applicant are also more complex and demanding. In an era of high unemployment rates, competition is intense and employers favor those with a full array of personal skills, such as leadership, accountability and teamwork, as well as pertinent technology skills.

In alignment with the IMLS framework for 21st century skills,^{viii} Project Compass has facilitated a national conversation about the skill sets critical to a successful workforce. It was crucial to delineate the bigger picture in which job seekers are struggling to find footing before diving into the specific details. Success in this era is less about what is learned and more about how to learn, how to discover and how to keep learning for life. Working with patrons who are impacted by deep shifts in the economic and employment landscape offers excellent opportunities, not only to build skills, but to encourage a 21st century mindset—one that is agile and ready to embrace a lifetime of learning and expanding.

Library staff themselves need to embrace and model these skills in order to foster them in their community members. Participants in the workforce recovery workshops exhibited a range of 21st century skills—communication, teamwork, problem-solving, creative and critical thinking—as they engaged in conversation focused on how they support their communities. In the three-month

Percentage of Responding Participants Identifying Key 21st Century Skills as “Absolutely Important”



follow-up workshop surveys, nearly 90 percent of participants reported that their “understanding of the relevance of 21st century skills to patron success *increased* as a result of participation in the Project Compass workshop.”

“Project Compass really charged my batteries and gave help in pushing 21st century skills to the forefront of our services.”

“I’ve started to think more, in the wake of the workshop, about the professional nature of 21st century skills and not just the technical aspects. My patrons do have computer skills, but no idea how to use them in a global economy, and I can try to teach them that.”

Helping patrons shift their mindset toward a 21st century understanding is ultimately a community effort, requiring a “community reinvention,” as one of our workshop participants astutely observed. Developing an embrace of lifelong learning and an excitement about adapting to change should not be a solo endeavor, as if one were studying for a math or a typing test. It takes the proverbial village to instill the attitudes, experience the teamwork and collaboration, and stimulate each other to strive and achieve. The richer the network, the faster all members of the community will rise to the challenges and celebrate achievement. As John Seely Brown said at the 2011 Internet Librarian conference, “[The desire to learn continually] requires new dispositions. And dispositions cannot be taught. But they can be cultivated in the right settings...like libraries.”

“The discussion of 21st century skills reminded me that current job seekers need to develop not only specific technological skills but a whole new mind-set which is more open to constant change, learning and creative problem solving.”

Pathways to Workforce Recovery

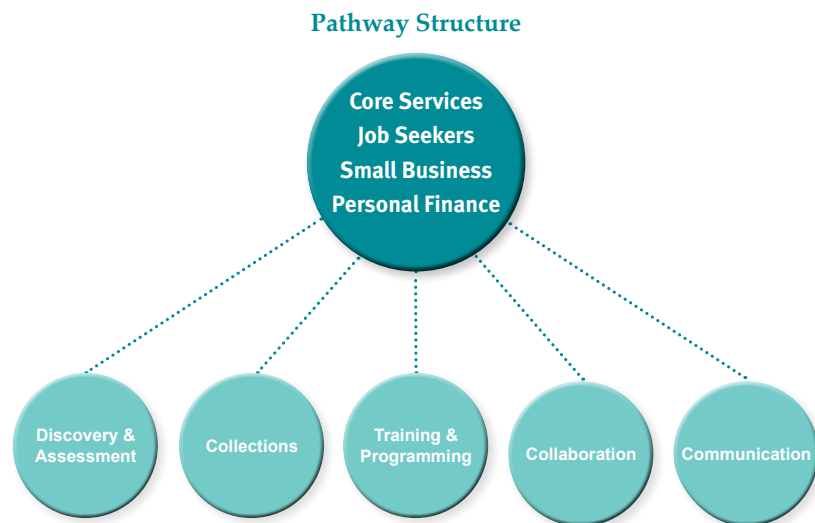
“We are just trying to get people on a path to *something*.” This comment from a state library development director provided inspiration for the structure of the Project Compass curriculum. As a national project, the team had to address the levels of need and capacity of the whole gamut of public libraries—from those serving tiny rural communities to large metropolitan libraries. We were challenged to develop a framework that would highlight the work already accomplished by the library and help staff prioritize their next efforts. The curriculum avoids being fixed or prescriptive by creating a scaffolding to build upon, seeding ideas for potential growth, and connecting to resources to initiate actions.

The core of the curriculum consists of four “pathways to action.” Each pathway functions as a checklist of actions on many levels that a library can take to augment services to those impacted by the economic tough times. The format encourages the library staff participant to identify items that have not yet been attempted, are a high priority and align with the capacity of the library to achieve them. This has helped participants focus on what makes most sense for the size and

means of each library, reducing the feeling of being overwhelmed by too many possibilities. In this time of severe budget and staff cuts, the emphasis is on moving forward with workforce recovery one doable step at a time.

“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!!”

Statistics from the surveys conducted three months after each face-to-face workshop reveal that 77 percent of responding participants had taken meaningful action toward improving patron services in their libraries, with 9 percent having completed implementation of their stated goals. In the words of the independent evaluator, there was *“an overriding sense that participants were immensely proud of what they had been able to achieve in the few short months since the trainings.”*



Core Services Pathway

Throughout the project, the team heard about libraries that are facing a large number of people with basic needs that must be addressed before they can even begin to look for work, such as basic computer and literacy skills, or access to social services. In response to an October 2010 needs assessment, 75 percent of library staff said they had noticed an increase in the previous year of the need for core skill training. The Core Services pathway covers assessing community needs, providing basic skills training and connecting with community agencies to meet the immediate needs of the economically impacted.

A crucial step in building digital literacy in patrons is to understand the context of their needs. Once there is a deeper acknowledgment of the disorientation of job loss for someone who has not kept pace with technology, services can be better tailored to help. Workshop participants committed to a host of actions relating to boosting basic computer skills, and to strengthening ties with other community agencies to get people to the right source of support more seamlessly.

“We’re thinking outside the box a little more. We’re looking for opportunities to be of greater assistance to our patrons, as they deal with unemployment issues and other related issues that have occurred as a result of the economic downturn.”

“The staff is more aware of the needs of our patrons after attending the [Project Compass] workshop. It has made us more empathetic. Providing computers and help with skills on a daily basis is one thing that our library staff does. Providing the brochures, answering questions, directing people to the places that can provide for their specific needs are other examples of how our patrons have benefited. We try to be there for them every day.”

To raise technology literacy levels, libraries are offering new or renewed computer classes, creating illustrated instruction sheets and connecting patrons to quality online training programs. Many are now offering one-on-one tutoring for those who are not ready or can't wait for a formal class. Although often short-staffed, they are devising ways to do this by scheduling drop-in labs, using “book a librarian” strategies and recruiting skilled volunteers as tutors.

“Each month, I am conducting beginning computer training for interested patrons. The curriculum includes basic computer skills, an introduction to the Internet, and also what patrons can do to utilize the information available on the Internet. These classes are very well-attended and patrons leave with a sense of accomplishment, feeling more adequately prepared to use the computer/Internet as a valid job-seeking/business tool.”

“A recent laid-off employee came in and had no idea of how to use the laptop to complete her paperwork. She was almost in tears when she found out it all had to be done over the Internet. After spending some time and explaining how the laptop works and the info she was going to need she felt better. Now every two weeks she comes in and acts like a pro on it and has even helped others on how to use the e-gov computer.”

Awareness of the power of connecting with other community agencies increased noticeably as a result of the workshops. With the insight of how these connections extend the library's community relationships, augment service to the patrons and alleviate some of the staff stress and workload, many participants resolved to be more proactive in learning about and establishing relationships with the available agencies. Many vowed to start or update a directory of community agencies. One popular action went a step further to create a spreadsheet of agencies, matching the services of each to the array of needs stated by library patrons.

“I realized I don't have to try to do it ALL here at the library. There are organizations in the community that are specialists providing these services to patrons. We just need to know about these resources and be able to refer patrons.”

“One lady came to our library and asked if there was an agency in town that provided food for people who needed it. We have partnership with such an agency so I put her in my car and took her to the Pantry Kitchen, introduced her to the manager and immediately he put her at ease. He talked to her a few minutes to determine what she needed and she left with five large grocery bags of food, not just can goods but several roasts and plenty of dairy goods. She was overwhelmed! If we had not been in partnership with this agency, I would not have been able to help her.”

“We are much more aware of how we need to streamline our own efforts and direct our patrons to the RIGHT resources. We realize that we HAVE to get outside our walls and find out what is going on and how people are looking for jobs and then examine our resources and priorities to help with this effort.”

Job Seekers Pathway

The Job Seekers Pathway lays out actions and resources to guide patrons in their active job search and preparation. The pathway begins with discovery of local unemployment conditions and the stages of the job search process, and then covers collections, services, training and programs directed to job seekers. It also investigates the possibilities of partnerships with local workforce agencies to extend and complement library services. Although these government agencies concentrate their efforts on workforce recovery, many people turn to the library first for its lack of stigma, welcoming atmosphere, longer hours, more computer stations and general support for the whole family. Additionally, workforce offices are losing funding themselves in a tight economy and referring clients to the library.

“I found it interesting to learn about the different type of job seekers and their different needs. I realized how little I knew about how to help people impacted by job loss, and learned how my library can, in spite of a tight budget, provide services and programs by partnering with community agencies.”

Libraries have been energetic in getting patrons work-ready and on the track to find jobs. Some actions involve creating a welcoming and resource-rich environment by placing a job search center near the reference desk, offering free faxing of job applications, providing free (often donated) coffee, and giving out free flash drives so patrons can keep their job search process information in one portable place. More in-depth services include resumé-writing workshops, interview practice sessions, and classes on job search tactics and using social media to leverage a person’s network of possibilities.

“Library patrons responded favorably to workshop handouts. For example, the form for Google mail sign-ups was a simple but elegant solution to one of our patrons’ most persistent and frustrating problems: forgotten e-mail addresses and passwords! Thank you very much for this and all the other excellent resources which the workshop provided.”

Encouraged by Project Compass, the level of collaboration with workforce agencies increased, as library staff gained confidence in the value they bring to the table and realized how much these partnerships extend the capacity to meet patron needs. The exchange of knowledge and resources includes cross-training between library and agency staff, coordination of assets to avoid duplication of efforts, and even opening workforce center stations within the library.

“I contacted and spoke with our local Workforce Center. We have exchanged information, and are able to refer patrons to one another. In addition, they have helped provide training for my staff in the new Unemployment Compensation regulations, and are helping publicize the people we have coming from Florida Rural Legal Services to help patrons with these new regulations.”

Frontline staff help a wide variety of patrons with an array of needs on a daily basis. They may provide the impetus to propel a patron toward success, but too often they don’t hear about the final outcomes for the people they help. That makes it especially gratifying to see direct success from all the thought and energy that goes into serving the needs of a patron.

“One patron got a job after using the Internet and library resources for about two weeks. Another patron was able to move to the Chattanooga area for further education and a job after using the library and Internet here.”

“We recently had assisted a young man with his resumé and we helped him learn some basic interview skills as well as how to dress appropriately for the interview. He went to the interview and did well enough that he got a second and third interview. He was offered and accepted the job, he had been out of work for almost 2 years and he was doing any type of odd job to try and make enough money to take care of his family.”

“At a resumé clinic, we assisted a middle-aged woman in updating her resumé. She had been out of work for over two years. After she sent out her new resumé, she found a job within 3 months. At a resumé clinic, an underemployed woman was inspired to start her own business.”

Small Business and Entrepreneurs Pathway

The impacts of outsourcing and large companies leaving town on local workforces precede the current recession, but are now exacerbated by high unemployment rates. When there are no jobs being offered by large businesses, an alternative is to make one’s own opportunity—start a small business. The Small Business and Entrepreneurs pathway illuminates how new or existing local businesses create jobs and stimulate the local economy, and the important role the library can play to support the small business community.

For many workshop participants embarking on this pathway, the discovery phase was a key action, as their eyes were opened to a new perspective on the library embedded in its community. The library is part of the local economy, not something aside from it. Supporting small business opens a two-way door with local business, raising their appreciation of the value of the library and often repaying the support by affirming the library’s vital contributions to the stability of the community.

“Showcasing library business information resources to those organizations and agencies directly supporting small businesses raises the value of the library to those community stakeholders and also is an effective way to market the library’s resources. By marketing business resources to the general community, we are publicizing a service that some may be unaware of and demonstrate the library’s efforts to assist in helping the local economy.”

For many library staff, this pathway was a new and unfamiliar direction for the library. Hesitation and lack of confidence on the part of staff posed an initial hurdle to surmount. The actions and resources proffer ideas and examples to build incrementally toward offering appropriate levels of support for entrepreneurs. Christine Hamilton-Pennell, who is a thought leader in this area of library service, shared many valuable insights and recommendations, including “25 Ways Your Library Can Support the Small Business Community.”^{ix}

“My first priority is to encourage and train my staff in answering questions we might already be getting from entrepreneurs and small business owners. I would like to help them overcome any hesitancy in answering these questions and make them feel more empowered to do so. We are, after all, information experts and what is more rewarding than helping someone to get the information they need? Especially when this information could be really life-changing for someone.”

Once the enthusiasm caught hold, workshop participants pursued a number of actions. They compiled collections of business resources, created new sections on the library website with links useful to entrepreneurs, and initiated new classes, such as Entrepreneurs 101 and Social Networking for Small Business. There is an undercurrent of excitement conveyed in the participants’ reports of their progress as they explore new territory.

“We have developed a bibliography of small business materials, begun attending the Chamber Small Business Development Council, and made a presentation to the Hispanic Business Council.”

“Since we have a good base of small business services at my library system, my next priorities would be to increase and diversify training opportunities. We currently offer seminars on topics relevant to small businesses, but I really liked the idea of doing a program on using social networking and other online resources. ...I also enjoyed reviewing the list of best blogs for young entrepreneurs—there is so much information available at no cost to the user—I would love to provide the opportunity to connect entrepreneurs with the information available.”

Personal Financial Skills Pathway

The Project Compass team was formulating the staff training curriculum two years into the collapse of the economy. By then, plenty of stories had emerged about communities where the jobs were just not materializing. Job seekers, having gained skills and submitted numerous applications, faced the discouraging reality of no opportunity. The Personal Financial Skills pathway looks at the bigger picture of other ways in which the library can help patrons impacted by a continued weak economy. Although it may not lead directly to a job, it is a path that can increase self-reliance and restore a patron’s feeling of being in control. The peer discussions around this pathway seemed particularly valuable to workshop participants, perhaps because of the more sensitive aspects of interacting with patrons and their personal financial situations.

“The sharing of experiences others had in presenting financial education to their patrons. The ideas that others proposed for effecting change in their communities through financial planning. Example: Having patrons form their own investment clubs that they run with library staff assistance.”

Some participants from rural libraries spoke of the subsistence level of their community economies, where people had narrow skill sets and a long haul to becoming 21st century ready.

Library staff appreciated the resources in the pathway that would help patrons take small steps to find some financial balance. Libraries have offered information on healthy low-cost food options, workshops on backyard gardening and raising chickens, and living on a shoestring budget. One simple idea that caught fire with rural library staff was implementing a coupon/discount exchange to help defray grocery and other costs for community members. One library advertised on its Facebook page for a local coupon enthusiast to give a workshop on taking full advantage of coupons and discounts.

“A coupon clipping club was started to help those out of work learn how to save money on variable expenses. The club has ten members and we hope to increase our numbers with more promotion. I am looking to partner with a bank to host a financial awareness program sometime in October.”

As with the other pathways to workforce recovery, partnership opportunities abound to enhance library services that foster development of personal financial skills. Available online resources are also abundant, reducing the need for libraries to create from scratch. Financial literacy is a family affair, allowing programs to be dovetailed with existing services to children, teens and parents.

“Partnered with Directions Credit Union and they provided four weeks of hour-long financial literacy sessions to our summer readers in lieu of our normal Math Buddies program. This was widely utilized with over 20 patrons attending each session and the kids told us that they loved the games and prizes and stories relating to how money works. Very useful and well-received.”

Conclusion

While the goal of changing perceptions is a momentous one, it is one that is hard to tackle head-on. Like so many of the actions in the workforce recovery pathways, it is something that is achieved step by deliberate step as libraries of all sizes articulate their unequivocal value to themselves and to the community. Statistics about increased traffic show the public voting with its feet. IMLS Director Susan Hildreth says, “Libraries are the nation’s de facto digital literacy corps,”^x and reports from the Project Compass field verify the number of library staff who are working to build patrons’ technology skills. Project Compass workshop participants showed a statistically significant increase in understanding, skill and capacity to form partnerships outside of the library. As they take actions to connect with and form partnerships with community service agencies, workforce agencies, local businesses and financial agencies, they solidify perceptions of the pivotal role that the library plays in its community.

A resounding testimony to an elevated level of esteem for the value of libraries was delivered in a speech by FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski^{xi} as he announced the multipartner nationwide effort to accelerate broadband access and digital inclusion, “Connect to Compete.”

“For millions of Americans, libraries are the only place where they can get online. For millions more, libraries are an important complement to at-home connectivity, and they remain, as they always have been, a trusted resource in communities. During the day, libraries have become job centers and librarians career counselors and after school a place where many students go to do homework online. Last year, more than 30 million Americans used library connections to seek and apply for jobs, and 12 million children used them to do homework. Millions of others are using library connections for health information. Many but not enough of America’s 16,000 public libraries have become vital centers for digital literacy.”

A humbler but every bit as meaningful testimony comes from a small library and its community.

“Patrons express their gratitude for the help they received in conquering the computer to write a resumé, applying for a job online, securing information on finding a job. All information that is needed to have a successful outcome. They truly give credit to the library. The staff is gathering their stories to share with others at the library’s 75th Anniversary Celebration. A celebration of how important libraries are to your town, state and country. Your workshop played a part in this endeavor!”

One inspiring story that exemplifies the spirit of getting patrons on a “path to something” is told by Bill Erbes, Library Assistant Director of the Bensenville Community Public Library District and project coordinator/trainer for the Illinois workshops. The story is about the Earlville Public Library, which is run by four part-time staff and serves a small community of 1,500 people 80 miles west of Chicago. When a staff member from the library showed up at one of his workshops, Bill wondered how such a small library could focus any time or attention on workforce recovery. He heard about the particular challenges of a quiet small town so far from where the jobs are and the strain on the library staff seeing so many members of their tiny community come into the library looking dejected, feeling that they had no options left. So the plucky little Earlville Library set its top priority to find those options, no matter how small, to develop a positive attitude with the motto “Heads up, shoulders back!” and the message that there is hope and that the community is going to get through this tough economy together. As Bill says, in deep admiration:

“This little library is doing it all; they’re doing everything. They are living proof that if they can do it, anybody can do it.”

[All quotations are from workshop participants, unless otherwise noted.]

- More information about the project is available at <http://www.webjunction.org/project-compass>
- Resources for workforce recovery are available at <http://www.webjunction.org/workforce-resources>
- The project curriculum materials are available for accessing, downloading and customizing (with attribution) at <http://www.webjunction.org/workforce-resources/-/articles/content/115124010>

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