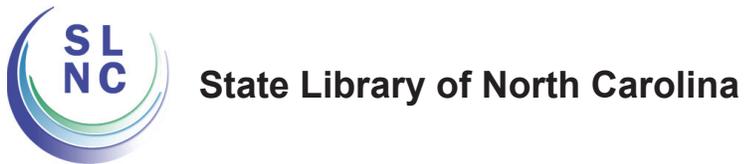




A year with Project Compass: Libraries provide direction in tough times



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September 2010

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Printed in the United States of America

Cataloged in WorldCat on September 3, 2010
OCLC Control Number: 660848062
ISBN: 1-55653-390-X
978-1-55653-390-7

Acknowledgements

Project Compass would like to acknowledge and thank the following for their contributions.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for enabling this project through their generous grant and for promoting it through their press releases.

The State Library of North Carolina for providing a powerful training model, a strong curriculum and a dynamic library development team.

WebJunction and **OCLC** staff for direct and supporting roles to make the project a success.

State librarians and state library development directors for their enthusiasm for the project and their direct or supporting involvement in the summits.

Employment and Training Administration (ETA) staff for sharing their workforce expertise and recognizing the vital role that libraries play.

All state library administrators and public library staff who engaged with the summits or the online community and who are the heart of library efforts to meet the needs of their communities.

A year with Project Compass: Libraries provide direction in tough times

Introduction

As we enter the last quarter of 2010, the U.S. economy is still in crisis and the workforce is still taking the brunt. Communities are struggling with continued job losses, high levels of unemployment and other problems related to the financial collapse of 2008. People are still turning to their libraries as their North Star, seeking guidance from this trusted community institution to help them navigate the storm. From the onset, state libraries and public libraries have responded with energy and leadership, and continue to do so as the crisis persists.

Project Compass launched on October 1, 2009, to investigate job seekers' specific demands on public libraries and what could be done to address their demands more effectively, particularly through state library initiatives. Funded by a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), WebJunction and the State Library of North Carolina (SLNC) formed a strategic partnership to complete this a one-year project. This white paper looks back at the year of activities and accomplishments by Project Compass. Over the past year, the project has spotlighted state and public libraries' value to the workforce, promoted the exchange of knowledge between state libraries, and concentrated participants' attention to future actions. Building on the experience state libraries have with pursuing partnerships, the project brought forward creative new insights on potential partners and strategies for successful collaboration with workforce agencies.

At the start, the team chose the name of Project Compass as an apt metaphor for the intention of assessing the present situation of workforce development in libraries and for setting direction toward future recovery. The compass is also symbolic of the direction that libraries provide to their patrons and their communities, especially in turbulent times. The SLNC team came on as training experts, having just completed a state-wide effort to increase library staff knowledge and effective use of resources for job seekers in North Carolina. In their Job Search Workshops, they had demonstrated a successful model for increasing staff knowledge and skills through peer learning, partnerships, and the collaborative building of a centralized online toolkit for job seekers and library staff. WebJunction brought its strong connections with state library agencies and deep experience with online community building to the table.

The Project Compass team set their sights on achieving the goals of the project through the design and delivery of the phases outlined in the grant.

Goals

1. Support state library agencies in maximizing the effectiveness of local libraries providing activities, services, and outreach to unemployed residents.
2. Promote strategic partnerships with other organizations that serve the unemployed.
3. Foster successful, ongoing collaboration and knowledge exchange among state library agencies.
4. Increase awareness of library services and demonstrate to key decision makers the critical role libraries serve during times of economic crisis.

Phases

1. Conduct a survey of state libraries to determine the increases in patron needs and public library responses to those needs, and to create a snapshot of each state's unemployment status by county. View all state snapshots at:
<http://www.webjunction.org/compass-snapshots/-/resources/wjarticles>
2. Organize and facilitate four regional in-person summits and one online summit to bring state library representatives together to deliberate the challenges of libraries meeting workforce needs.
3. Create an online community of practice where resources and discussions for ongoing peer support of libraries' workforce recovery efforts can be collected and shared.
See Workforce Resources: <http://www.webjunction.org/workforce-resources>

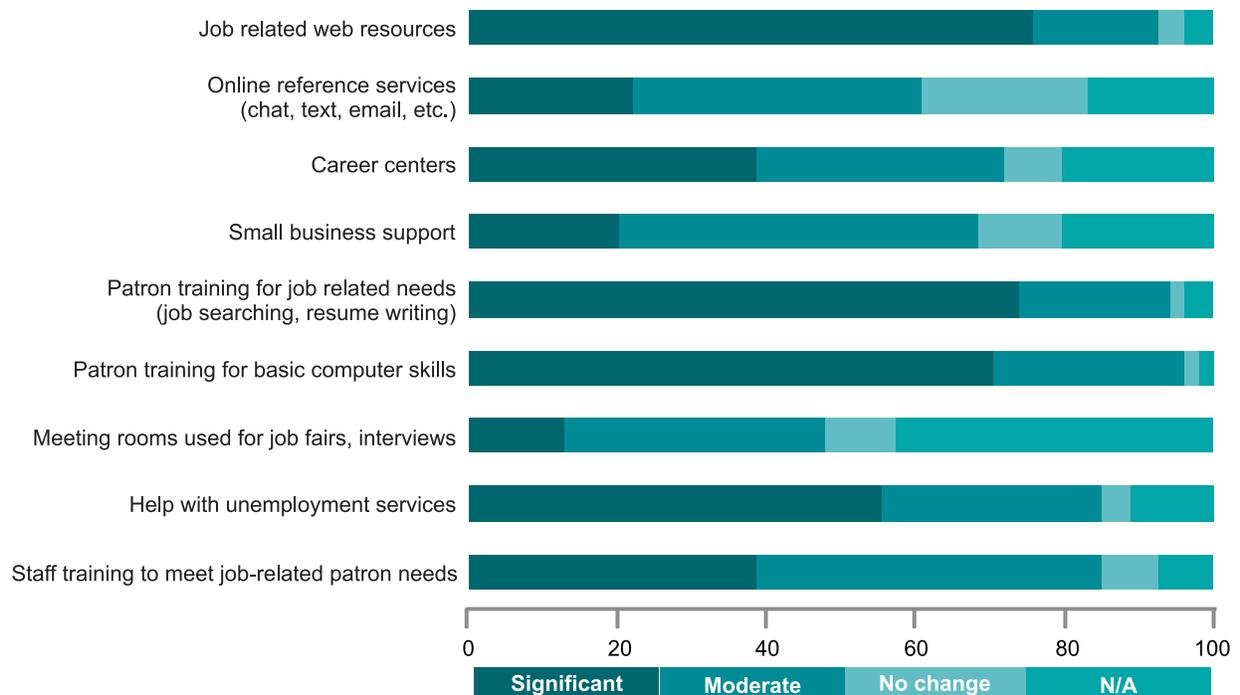
Who needs the public library?

Getting the project started in the right direction meant first understanding the needs. Through an online survey, *Library Responses to Economic Tough Times*,¹ we asked state library representatives to report their *perceptions* of the increased demands on libraries in the previous 12 months of economic turmoil. The survey gathered input about the urgency of patron demands on public libraries, libraries' responses to those demands, and the state libraries' support of the public libraries' work.

The results of the survey validated the perception that, across the country, there were increased, urgent patron needs related to the economic downturn and an increased demand for corresponding library services. The survey also verified that state and public libraries had already risen to the demand in a number of ways.

The highest increases were reported for patrons' job-seeking needs—finding and applying for jobs, writing resumes, developing interview skills, and preparing for tests. 98% of respondents reported a significant increase in the demand for instruction in basic computer skills.

“There is a HUGE demand for basic computer skills because many of the people who have lost their job have never used a computer. They can't apply for a job at McDonald's without knowing how to use a computer.”



Responses to the Project Compass survey question about the level of increased demand for public library services related to the economic downturn over the previous 12 months.

General use of the public computers in libraries increased significantly, a finding that has been corroborated by other studies. Over the past year, “45 percent of the 169 million visitors to public libraries connected to the Internet using a library computer or wireless network during their visit,” according to the recently released *Opportunity For All*² study. An estimated 30 million (40%) of those library computer users received some form of job help. Many Project Compass survey respondents commented that patrons were cutting off home Internet connections as a cost-saving measure and coming to the library to get online.

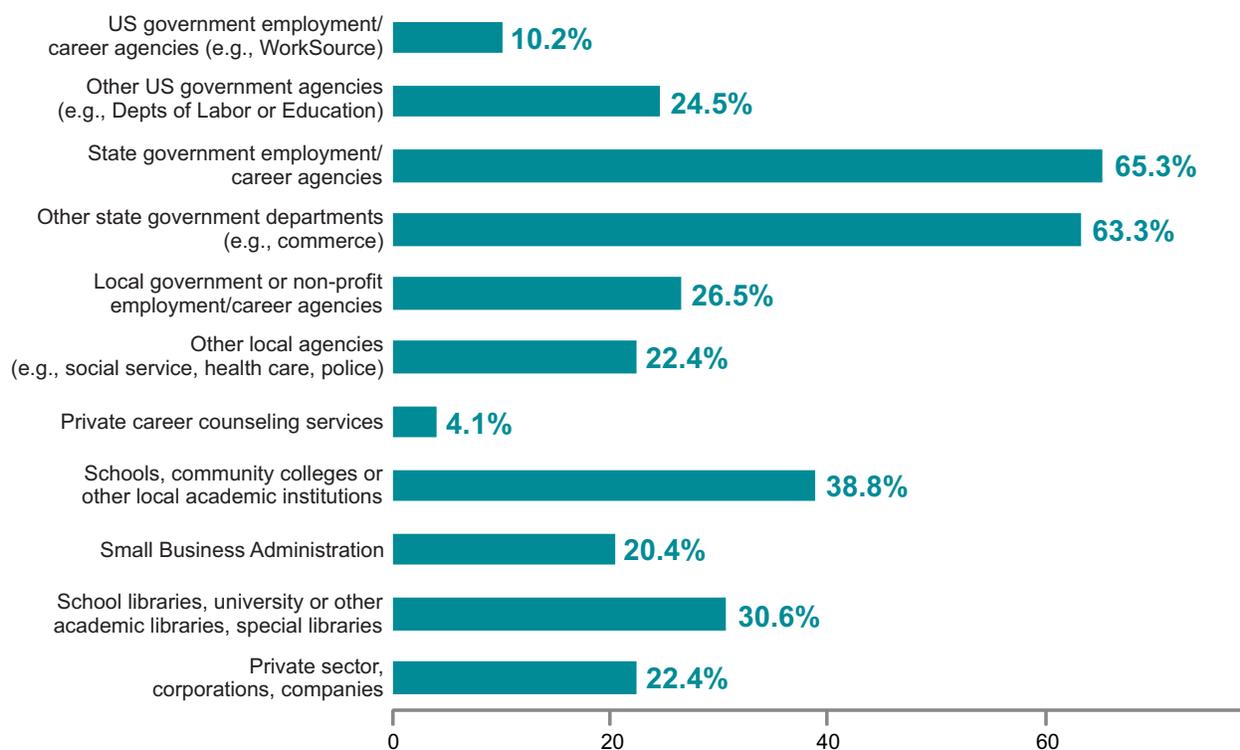
“Computer usage has increased beyond belief.”

State libraries already pointing in the right direction

By the time Project Compass launched, the economic crisis was biting into its second year. State libraries and public libraries had sprung into action as soon as the flow of people seeking help became a flood through their doors. They had already made strides toward addressing patrons’ workforce development needs. Not only had they ramped up their own services, they had reached out to join forces with other organizations in their communities.

The number and variety of partnerships that survey respondents listed attest to their resourcefulness and energy. A substantial percentage (65.3%) had established some level of collaboration with state-level workforce agencies; another 26.5% had formed alliances with local workforce agencies, such as One-Stop Career Centers. Some of the more unique partnerships

included working with a Community Loan Fund, the Patent Office, a Global Center for Cultural Entrepreneurship, VISTA volunteers, and the Agency on Aging.



Responses to the survey question about what agencies state libraries had partnered with to respond to the economic challenges in their state.
 (Note: respondents checked all that applied.)

Clearly, state library representatives who would be attending the Project Compass summits had experience and expertise to share. The project wanted to capture the work being done as a springboard for knowledge sharing at the upcoming summits. Summit participants were invited to deliver a *showcase* of the accomplishments in their state in the form of a 7-minute presentation. Given the breadth of responses to workforce needs, the time limit was a tough, but necessary, constraint.

The showcases addressed a spectrum of needs, illustrating the variety of ways the state library can support its public libraries. There were commonalities: collaborations with state or local workforce agencies, BTOP (Broadband Technology Opportunity Program) grant applications for enhanced connectivity and workstations, centralized Web-based resource directories, and statewide database subscriptions. One-of-a-kind efforts included Colorado’s BHAG³ (Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal) project, a public library advocacy campaign that enlists community members to promote the value of their local libraries. Florida library representatives reported on another notable effort from Pasco County Library System—their E-Government Tools webpage,⁴ which offers video tutorials on very basic computer skills such as using a mouse.



Shelley Walchak, Library Community Programs Senior Consultant, showcases what the Colorado State Library has done to help the unemployed.

All showcase ideas and programs came with an invitation to imitate and adapt. When each state shared what they had done on the first morning of the summits, they sparked conversations and connections, and inspired others to forge new or renewed efforts.

For a more detailed view of the showcases, read about three representative examples from the New York, New Mexico, and Missouri State Libraries in the Appendix. Or browse the full list of showcases at <http://www.webjunction.org/project-compass/-/articles/content/94581646>.

Summits: the power of convening

With all that expertise and success under their belts, was there anything left for the state libraries to do? The answer would unfold over the series of Project Compass gatherings, including four regional in-person summits and one online summit. Participants came from all 50 states plus the District of Columbia public libraries—109 representatives in all—to concentrate their collective minds on the issue of library support for workforce recovery.

Summits locations and dates:

- Atlanta, GA, March 11–12, 2010
- Portland, OR, March 22–23, 2010
- Providence, RI, May 6–7, 2010
- Denver, CO, May 27–28, 2010
- Online (WebJunction), June 8–25, 2010

Instead of following a traditional “workshop” or “training” model, we conceived the state library convenings as *summits* to facilitate knowledge exchange and brainstorming. Bringing state library officers together to focus on a common problem had all the potency of an electrical current just waiting for the plug to be inserted in the socket. Many participants commented on the energizing effect of getting together with a focused agenda. Phrases about the advantages of “hearing what people are doing,” “exchanging ideas,” and “building common interest” echoed across all the meetings.

“I was reluctant to come here and fit it into my busy schedule. Now I’m so energized with so many good ideas and so much support, I can’t wait to get back and put these things into practice.”

The summits offered key opportunities to advance all of the Project Compass goals, especially increasing library services for workforce development, increasing partnerships to augment services and resources, and raising the visibility and awareness of the vital role of libraries.



Participants at the Denver summit

Participants identified new or continuing project efforts to address workforce needs. They leveraged the peer-sharing environment to help each other expand on the idea seeds, deliberate partnership possibilities, develop strategies and generally precipitate strong forward momentum to take back to their states and put into action. Of the 84 people responding to a post summit survey, 84.5% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “After participation in this Summit, I am more likely to seek out other state libraries for information and idea sharing.” In addition, 91.7% agreed that, “bringing state library staff together with facilitators to address a specific issue is very beneficial to me.”

Participants state it best in their own words:

“Learning what other states are doing is enormously helpful because we don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Borrowing ideas, sharing resources, and partnering with programs is the best way to succeed, especially in this era of limited resources.”

“By attending this summit, I came to understand that the state library has an obligation to be involved in the workforce recovery issues in the state. I was thinking too narrowly about my responsibilities at the state library. Now I’m beginning to think in more broad terms about the impact we can have in helping libraries in the state.”

Sharon Brettschneider, director of the Connecticut State Library Division of Library Development, paid the highest compliment to the success of the summit gatherings. She intends to replicate the format in Connecticut in order to bring public library staff together to generate ideas for more and better programs and services, to augment the publicity about the value of libraries in tough times, and to build energy for keeping it going.

On the continuum of collaboration,⁵ the primary stage of *networking* occurred spontaneously and prolifically at the summits; good ideas and shared experiences cross state lines easily. Many summit participants reached a level of *coordination* by exchanging resources and offering help to execute projects. The SLNC put its curriculum and planning documents online for others to follow their Job Search Workshop model. The Colorado State Library has spread the concept of “economic gardening” through Project Compass, recommending resources and consultants to other states who want to pursue similar initiatives. They also cooperated with WebJunction to co-produce a webinar series on the topic. The goal of full *collaboration* between state libraries remains elusive, in part due to significantly different structures, jurisdictions and funding sources.

Forward motion

The summits generated more than 50 project ideas for augmenting support of public library services to the unemployed. The list of ideas is its own testament to the power of people working in concert toward a common set of objectives. Over the course of the summits, five common themes surfaced, reflecting an evolution of needs or shifting of priorities since the initial needs assessment. These themes remained consistent across all five summits.

Themes for future workforce development efforts in libraries:

- **Staff training:** the need to increase staff knowledge of resources available and to prepare staff to handle a kind of patron stress that goes beyond difficult patron behavior.
“What do you do at the service desk when someone is so desperate about their job situation that they start to cry?”
- **Patron training and resources:** the need for patron-facing, easily accessible resources and training, especially centralized Web-based resource directories and enhanced connectivity and workstation availability.
- **DOL partnerships:** the need to work in cooperation with state Departments of Labor (DOL) and local workforce agencies (One Stop Centers, JobLink Centers) to augment services to patrons.
- **Small business support:** the need to support the information needs of local entrepreneurs as another path to getting a community back on its economic feet.
- **Communicating value:** the need to amplify the value of libraries in the face of looming budget cuts, where reduced staff meets increased demand.

“Libraries do not stand outside of the economic downturn.”

The following sampling of proposed state library projects address the themes above demonstrates the continuity of purpose and the common directions for helping public libraries meet the needs of the workforce. Though impossible to quantify, it is certain that these projects were informed by conversations and connections made through Project Compass.

Staff training

Although the need for training library staff to meet patron needs did not emerge as a significant demand in the initial needs assessment, it was an undercurrent that surfaced more visibly throughout the summits. The fourteen projects in this category include activities that:

- Provide seminars, workshops or online training on workforce resources, e-rate process, and state-specific electronic resource products;
- Develop a librarian’s toolkit to help librarians use existing resources;
- Deploy a planning tool (Strategic Reality Check) to help public libraries reprioritize and refocus in light of current budgetary reductions; and
- “Grow your own librarian” – provide library staff with the support needed (financial assistance, mentoring, etc.) to acquire continuing education at multiple levels.

Patron training and Web resources

Some state libraries had already assembled centralized, Web-based, resource directories for job seekers; they inspired eight other states to build similar sites without reinventing the wheel. Patron training efforts involve multiple strategies for providing training in computer literacy and job-seeking skills through access to test and job preparation databases, like Learning Express Libraries, and by a variety of methods, including face-to-face, online, and one-on-one consultations. Many state libraries were in the process of submitting BTOP (Broadband Technology Opportunity Program) applications with the intention of enhancing connectivity, increasing access to remote areas, increasing the number of public computers, and providing basic skills training.

Some of the more unique ideas were to:

- Offer workshops on life skills for the unemployed at the library;
- Support career development for unemployed, non-college bound youth;
- Develop a Community Resource Exchange to bring a variety of social service/employability-related agencies and organizations together for face-to-face meetings with citizens; and
- Build a portable lab to deliver resources and training on computer skills, database usage and health information access to underserved rural areas.

DOL partnerships

In serving the needs of the unemployed, the Department of Labor (DOL) and libraries have a lot to offer each other. Although the DOL and its subsidiaries are the primary resource for filing for unemployment insurance and receiving job skills training, many people turn first to their local public library for a number of reasons, including the fact that libraries are more likely to provide:

- Services to job seekers (13,000) than workforce centers (3,000);
- Longer and more convenient hours than One Stops, which are generally open only 9–5;
- Better technology in the libraries, including public computers, wireless connections, computer labs and meeting rooms;
- More opportunity to connect with other newly jobless professionals;
- Activities for children; and
- Electronic and print resources as an accompaniment to the workforce system resources.

Responses to the needs survey indicated varying success at partnering with local workforce agencies (One Stop, JobLink or WorkSource Centers). The summits enabled participants to discuss the challenges and brainstorm potential solutions. The trend toward collaborating with government agencies got a big boost in June, when IMLS announced a federal-level partnership agreement with the DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA), in which both parties agreed to make a concerted effort to encourage local partnerships. Several state library representatives plan to pursue new or strengthened connections with the DOL and to actively facilitate local collaborations.

Small business support

The link between libraries and local economic development was a topic that gained momentum through the course of the summits. Libraries can be key players in supporting and facilitating the success of local businesses. Colorado is in the middle of a year-long project to educate its libraries on the concept of “economic gardening,” a strategy aimed at stimulating the development of small businesses with the goal of growing a healthy, community-scale economy. Other projects for small business support that grew out of the summit conversations will:

- Establish a program that offers a template to make it easier for libraries to collaborate with community partners, provide assistance to entrepreneurs, and facilitate new small business growth;
- Provide libraries throughout the state with planning software and training videos that support small businesses and entrepreneurs; and
- Develop stronger relationships with economic development organizations (e.g., the regional Small Business Development Center) and similar business interests to strengthen the library's ability to deliver services to the business community.

Communicating value

As Project Compass proceeded through the year, bad news about library funding cuts, staff reductions and closures abounded. There was a constant tension between the desire to provide more and better services to the unemployed and the pressure of handling the increased traffic with fewer staff and curtailed budgets. The value of the library and its services was clear to the patrons but not necessarily clear enough to the funding agencies. Some summit participants chose to address this schism directly through their projects to:

- Develop advocacy training for library directors;
- Teach librarians how to work with others to advocate for libraries with elected officials at all levels;
- Seek to establish libraries as critical in the minds of elected officials, heads of agencies, and citizens; and
- Enable libraries to tell their patrons' stories and to publicize the economic benefits of their work to our communities and State.

For a full list of projects identified through Project Compass, see:

<http://www.webjunction.org/project-compass/-/articles/content/96005241#doI>

Ongoing community

*"A community of practice provides a context for people to reflect, reinforce and extend their knowledge by discussing it with each other."*⁶

The duration of Project Compass is short; the recession is long. It was important to develop some means to sustain the cross-pollination of ideas and efforts beyond the term of the grant. WebJunction offers the platform for building an online community of practice where people come together around a shared interest or need. The Workforce Resources community of practice has swelled over the year with the contributions of summit participants and from the broader library community. It's gratifying to hear confirmation of how useful it is to collect resources in one accessible, community-built space:

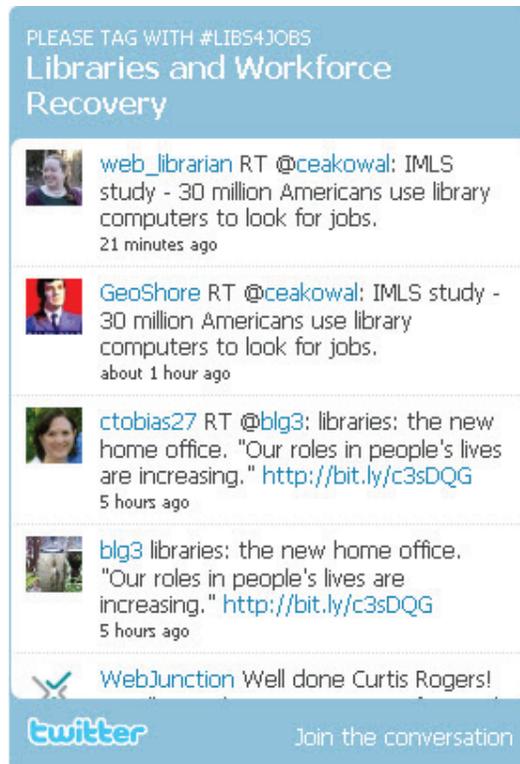
"I hadn't spent a lot of time on WebJunction prior to attending this conference, but I now understand what great resources are available there. It is helpful to see what other libraries have done and shared with the whole online community."

As of the end of August, 2010, there are 69 documents and 14 discussion topics on a variety of subjects, including:

- Partnerships and collaboration
- Grants, BTOP and other funding
- E-government resources
- Programs and training for job seekers

- Building awareness and job-seeker success stories
- Impact of economic tough times on library services
- Needs assessment
- Technology needs of job-seeking patrons

The site collects the latest news and events relating to libraries and workforce recovery through a Twitter hashtag #libs4jobs, which updates in real-time on the main page of the community.



Twitter badge on the main page of the Workforce Resources community displays tweets with the #libs4jobs hashtag

The essence of a vibrant community of practice is the extent to which the community contributes to it. This is true of the Workforce Resources content; a significant portion has come from outside of WebJunction, especially from the active participants in the summits. Contributions include audio-enhanced showcase slides, additions to the wiki, discussion posts, #libs4jobs tweets, and collaboration on a webinar series. The project has sought to recognize and celebrate these activities by awarding virtual truffles in the Project Compass Update, an electronic newsletter sent out periodically to participants.



The programmatic efforts associated with Project Compass have reached well beyond the state library participants to the wide community of library staff interested in improving their understanding and delivery of services to the unemployed. In the past year, WebJunction has produced nine webinars on workforce recovery topics, with an average audience size of 150. The Helping Job Seekers webinar, which was produced in collaboration with ETA staff, attracted nearly 500 attendees. The audience poll results and the numerous questions during the session indicated they were receiving new and crucial information. All webinars are archived online for viewing at any time.

Project Compass webinars:

- Libraries and Workforce Recovery, January 2010
- Helping Washington Libraries in Hard Times, February 2010
- Opportunity for All: American Public Benefits from Library Internet, May 2010
- Re-tooling Frontline Staff with E-government Resources, June 2010
- Helping Job Seekers: Using Electronic Tools and Federal Resources, August 2010
- Libraries and Economic Development Webinar Series, August 2010 (three 30-minute sessions)
- mySkills, myFuture: A New Tool for Job Seekers, September 2010

Conclusion

At the start of Project Compass in the fall of 2009, there were vague rumors that the economy was turning around and demand on libraries would diminish. A year's passage has shown otherwise. Much has been accomplished and there is much still to do.

State libraries will certainly sustain or renew their efforts to maximize the effectiveness of local libraries that provide activities, services, and outreach to the unemployed community. Their participation in Project Compass engendered a rich exchange of knowledge and peer fellowship to help catalyze their forward motion. One state library officer remarked that the summit provided "...the motivation to continue to press ahead with our projects despite some obstacles that we are facing."

Although not a new pursuit to state libraries, the formation of strategic partnerships in service to the unemployed was strengthened by the peer sharing. Lively conversations, especially about states' BTOP applications, led to discovery of "unexpected partners" and affirmation of the value of maintaining relationships. Many summit participants stated that, even if their BTOP application was not granted, they would continue to work with the partners they had identified. The idea to form a federal partnership between IMLS and the DOL/ETA had already germinated before the start of Project Compass; however, input from the project based on participant feedback undoubtedly informed the high-level decision to cement the relationship.

The goal to increase awareness of library services and demonstrate to key decision makers the critical role libraries serve during times of economic crisis will require more time and intention. Defining the needs, facilitating effective public library responses to the needs, and collecting resources and success stories all help to amplify attention to the essential community service that libraries provide.

“The summit provided many resources and ideas on programming to increase the visibility and outreach of libraries. The community of practice on WebJunction is an area that I think all library staff involved in workforce and job and career services can learn from.”

In June 2010, WebJunction and the State Library of North Carolina were awarded a follow-on grant to bring some of our learning from Project Compass directly to frontline library staff. The program will target areas with the highest unemployment, but there will also be online training and resources that will benefit all libraries that are striving for workforce renewal.

“Reinforcing collaboration—within the state and nationwide is important—both with libraries and with public /non-profit agencies.”

Let’s continue to work together, to guide and be guided, as we help libraries illuminate the way forward through tough times.

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- ¹ The full results of the Library Responses to Economic Tough Times survey may be seen at <http://www.webjunction.org/project-compass/-/articles/content/85192135>; the full summary may be read at <http://www.webjunction.org/project-compass/-/articles/content/87081542>.
 - ² Opportunity For All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U. S. Libraries <http://www.webjunction.org/workforce-resources/-/articles/content/94601339>
 - ³ BHAG: The Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal, Colorado Public Library Advocacy Initiative. <http://bhagcolorado.blogspot.com/>
 - ⁴ Pasco County Library System (FL) E-Government Tools. <http://pascolibraries.org/egovtools.shtml>
 - ⁵ Library Collaboration: What makes it work. Murray Shepherd. University of Waterloo, Canada http://www.iatul.org/doclibrary/public/Conf_Proceedings/2004/Murray20Sheperd.pdf
 - ⁶ Navigating the Interactive Workspace. Marty Rosenheck. CLOmedia. May 2010. <http://www.clomedia.com/features/2010/May/2921/index.php>
 - ⁷ Job-Seeker Success: Libraries throw out a lifeline to the unemployed. <http://www.webjunction.org/workforce-resources/-/articles/content/101741495>

Appendix

Featured Showcases

The following three examples of Project Compass Showcases are representative of the efforts that many state library agencies have undertaken in response to the needs of a workforce in crisis. To browse the complete list of showcases, visit <http://www.webjunction.org/project-compass/-/articles/content/94581646>.

1. *Collaborations: Workforce Development, One Stops & Employment Centers in New York Libraries*

The New York State Library (NYSL) has a solid history of partnering with other agencies and providing services to the workforce. Starting in the 1970s, the agency has disseminated grants for job information centers in public libraries and has pioneered programs for adult learning, higher education and outreach to special populations.

The recent economic downturn has only spurred their initiative. Here is a snapshot of where they are now.

- 280 of 756 libraries have self-identified Career Centers.
- 23 Library Systems support patron training with computer literacy classes and other programs.
- 16 library systems offer online job resources such as Learning Express or Tutor.com or a similar career development tool.
- The State Library provides the Lifelines Information Portal, a Web directory of resources to help libraries offer job search services.
- 34 libraries will soon host new computer workstations and enhanced connectivity through the Gates Foundation Opportunity Online broadband and hardware grants.
- NYSL continues its outreach efforts to prison populations, ESL and immigrant populations, and literacy outreach to adults and children.

The NYSL has collaborated effectively with the New York State Department of Labor, including:

- Partnering with One Stop Centers
- Providing library patron access to the DOL Career Zone Portal
- Providing Smart 2010 skills matching software technology
- Delivering a Joint Webinar with the New York DOL and regional libraries (2010).



The interactive Web site associated with the Help Wanted: Tools for Tough Times series broadcast on two New York PBS stations, WHMT and WCNY.

In pursuit of creative collaborations, the NYSL partnered with two local PBS stations to create a 26-episode documentary television series focused on helping New Yorkers deal with the current economic crisis. *Help Wanted: Tools for Tough Times* featured interviews with New Yorkers in their search for employment and financial assistance. It also provides a Web portal connecting people to community and online resources, which include public library services.

Cassie Artale and Elizabeth Carrature provided a narrated version of their PowerPoint presentation: <http://www.webjunction.org/workforce-resources/-/articles/content/97861377>

2. *Fast Forward New Mexico: Connecting You to a World of Opportunities*

During the year of Project Compass, applications were being filed for the second round of BTOP grants (Broadband Technology Opportunities Program). The subject was uppermost in the minds of most State Library participants and surfaced in numerous presentations. The New Mexico State Library received a BTOP award in January 2010; their summit showcase looks optimistically toward its implementation, with an emphasis on training for both patrons and library staff.

In formulating the grant application, the State Library secured strong partnerships:

- The 1st Mile Institute (an organization bringing telecommunications systems to local economies)
- University of New Mexico Continuing Education Department

- Global Center for Cultural Entrepreneurship
- 16 public libraries.

The plan delineated strategies for three training components:

- Deliver in-person training at 16 public libraries, tailored to each community.
- Build a Web site with curriculum and self-paced tutorials.
- Deliver a train-the-trainer program for librarians and community volunteers to sustain and extend the project.

The in-person trainings covered two levels of job help to accommodate a variety of job-seeker types. Tier one went for the basics in computer use, navigating job and e-government sites, and taking online courses. Tier two ratcheted up a notch for more tech-savvy patrons, offering advancement of forward-facing 21st century skills. They received instruction on how to build their own Web site with free tools, how to market or sell online, and how to use social networks to support a business or nonprofit. The 16 libraries selected for the training opportunities reach all corners of the state.

Susanne Caro and Beth Crist presented the showcase for the New Mexico State Library: <http://www.webjunction.org/workforce-resources/-/articles/content/99501892>

3. *Missouri State Library Help for Tough Times*

The Missouri State Library has long placed a major emphasis on providing education and training resources for patrons, particularly for the underserved. The economic crisis heightened their attention to this goal. After conducting a pilot program in low-literacy, high-unemployment areas of the state, they decided to use E-Rate funds to provide a state-wide license to Learning Express Libraries. The database, which includes online tests, study materials, job search and workplace skill-building, and Spanish language options, is available to all public libraries, K-12 schools and academic library members of the state network. Many patrons were requesting help in these areas and the pilot program indicated that the database materials were easy to use.

Usage statistics for the Learning Express Libraries show a strong uptick from the first year of the state-wide license (2008) to the present. This is attributed in part to the advent of tough times but additionally, the State Library ran some marketing efforts directed at library staff to increase their awareness of what the database has to offer.

LEL Usage statistics

FY08: October–June	33,754
FY09: July–June	53,312
FY10: July–March*	58,431

* Statistics available only through March 2010

In partnership with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Missouri State Library led another state-wide educational effort. They purchased licenses to two video series produced by Kentucky Educational Television—*GED Connections* and *Workplace Essential Skills*. Both professionally produced series feature actors interspersed with interviews with real people in real-life work and GED situations. The program provides workbooks and a master set of materials to public libraries and adult education centers.

Barbara Reading and Ann Roberts presented the live online showcase for the Missouri State Library: <http://www.webjunction.org/project-compass/-/articles/content/104343693>



WebJunction's vision is to be the place where the library profession gathers to build the knowledge, skills and support we need to power relevant, vibrant libraries. Our mission is to promote learning for all library staff by providing open, affordable online learning communities.



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ISO 9001 Certified

ISBN: 1-55653-390-X
978-1-55653-390-7