

## Public Libraries: Uplifting the American Workforce and Economy

Libraries are central hubs not only of knowledge but of the resources needed to thrive in today's **rapidly evolving job market**, from starting your own business to workforce training and skills development to **accessing high-speed internet** at the library or at home. Libraries tailor their collections and services to **support the needs of a diverse workforce**. They provide job search assistance, career development programs and resume help. They also house **small business centers** that offer tools, mentoring and co-working space to foster local economies. Additionally, adult education programs **build skills for employment**, technology, finances and more.

Computer labs and **digital literacy programs** at libraries build critical skills for school, jobs and life. Librarians are trained to offer **personalized guidance on using technology** effectively and safely. Libraries bridge digital divides by **lending tech devices and providing free Wi-Fi access**. During the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries were instrumental in improving how people got online, from erecting cellular towers to providing devices like Wi-Fi hotspots to helping eligible households receive Affordable Connectivity Program benefits. While many of these pandemic-era programs are winding down, libraries are finding new ways to ensure their customers stay connected and can thrive.

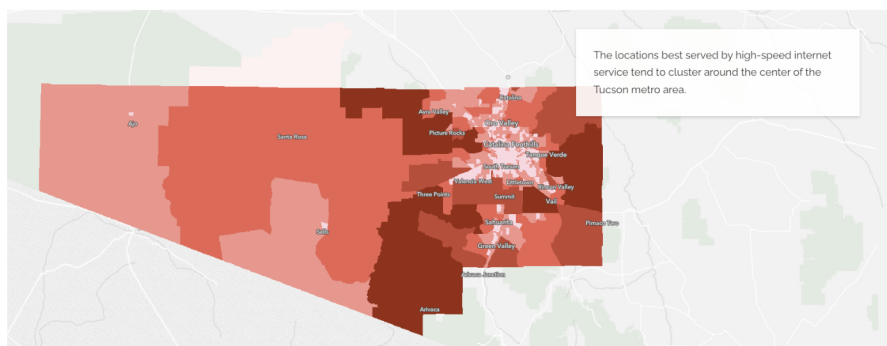
Also known as Makerspaces or DIY Labs, **library innovation hubs** allow for hands-on learning through exposure to new technologies and creative tools. These areas provide access to programs such as crafting and sewing projects, using a 3-D printer and producing your own audio podcasts or web videos.

## Snapshot of Libraries Advancing the Local Economy



### Pima County Public Library (AZ)

In 2021, the Pima County Public Library established the [Connect Pima taskforce](#) to address digital inequities in a community where 12% of households had no internet access. Through partnerships with local municipalities, internet service providers and community-based organizations, the library and Connect Pima taskforce takes steps to enact a united vision for digital equity and inclusion for the region. In 2023, Pima County received a \$30.3 million grant to [expand high-speed internet infrastructure](#) and increase internet access for residents in unserved or underserved areas.





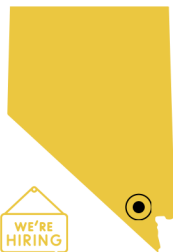
## Chicago Public Library (IL)

The **Maker Lab is Chicago's first free and publicly accessible maker space** and is located at the Harold Washington Library Center, the library's main branch. For more than 10 years, the Maker Lab has held introductory workshops and open shop time for personal projects and collaboration, using devices like 3-D printers, electronic cutters, sewing machines and design software. CPL also has a Maker-in-Residence program, where it welcomes members of the Chicago creative community into the library to build on their digital fabrication practice, collaborate with the public and explore approaches to making.



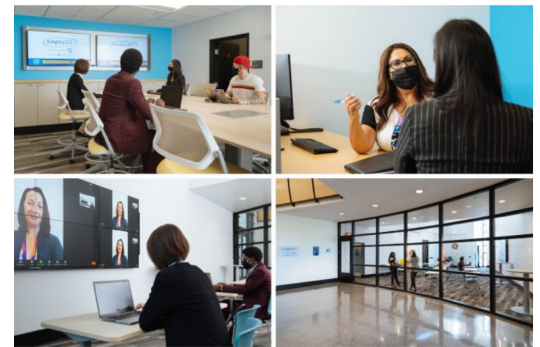
## Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library (IN)

The Evansville Vanderburgh Public Library actively collaborates with local organizations like the Indiana Department of Workforce Development and WorkOne Southwest to empower community members with **essential job searching and training resources**. It offers flexible, virtual learning courses that allow patrons to continue their education in a wide range of subjects. These programs have significantly enhanced employment opportunities for Evansville residents, contributing to local economic growth and individual career success.



## Las Vegas-Clark County Library District (NV)

The Las Vegas-Clark County Library District has partnered with the local workforce board to open **EmployNV Career Hubs at five branches** to help patrons with skills assessment, financial aid, digital literacy and interview coaching among other employment services. Since July 1, 2020, EmployNV Career Centers have invested over \$11.3M in the surrounding communities and provided more than 1,963 individuals employment and training services. In addition, 1,158 individuals have been connected to meaningful employment earning over \$31.1M annually.



## WHAT'S AHEAD FOR LIBRARIES: BECOME ONE-STOP SHOP CENTERS FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) should designate public libraries eligible to be one-stop centers for workforce development and to provide support for college and career navigators in public libraries. Public libraries help adults looking to attain their GED, advance their career goals, get help to start their own business or receive assistance around employment services. They are places where young people can explore pathways for college and career options.

Beyond essential technology access, libraries provide digital skills training and increase access to find and understand information, especially for adults facing barriers to employment. Congress should advance investments in public libraries as digital access leaders, including support for broadband, devices and E-Rate, as well as sustainable funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) and off-campus use.