



# PARTNERING FOR A LONGER WORKFORCE I, H L R R E E J A N

As technology further shifts the economic landscape, libraries prepare American jobseekers to enter the workforce, reskill to meet evolving requirements, and succeed as business owners.

Public libraries in Vermont and nearly 17,000 strong across the country: (1) help people secure employment through job search, resume writing, and interview training, (2) provide internet access and digital skills programs that encourage use of emerging technologies and empower entrepreneurship, (3) collaborate with other community stakeholders to identify workforce challenges and build vibrant local economies.

With many communities hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and facing economic challenges, libraries are a critical part of the economic safety net, now more than ever.

**O** - The economy in Bennington, Vermont is both thriving and struggling. The recent closings of two major local employers, including a local liberal arts and nursing college and an Energizer battery factory, were a blow. Yet, simultaneously, the community is working on a major downtown redevelopment project and a variety of jobs in the

health care and other sectors continue to exist. In this context, the Bennington Free Library helps people to access and complete online job applications. The library aims to meet jobseekers where they are, offering free and friendly service at a convenient downtown location. While modifications due to COVID-19 have been necessary, under normal circumstances public computers

**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

- Libraries in Vermont and nationally support jobseekers, entrepreneurs, and local businesses.
- Libraries are well-placed to offer digital skills training and economic

are available for use at the library, as well as on-demand help and weekly evening technology drop-in hours. In addition, the library recognizes that some jobseekers may face particular constraints, such as working parents who want to improve their technology skills but do not have the time or resources. To address this particular need, the Bennington Free Library has considered incorporating information about resources for jobseekers into family programming—hosting activities for kids while giving adults a chance to become comfortable in the library and gain awareness of what it has to offer.

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Beyond regular informal help for jobseekers, the Bennington Free Library offers jobs workshops and events. At a day-long Job Seekers Jamboree hosted at the library, community members were invited to explore digital skills and tools relevant to the jobseeking process, including using email effectively, developing a resume, online job searching, and completing online applications. By providing snacks and prizes, along with concrete digital skills help, attendees were able to work on their digital skills in a fun community environment. For example, a young woman who attended the event received help to redesign and improve her existing resume using an online template and later won a gift certificate to the local bookstore. Most importantly, attendees—who ranged in age from their early twenties to over sixty—learned that the library can

direct people to a variety of useful free resources for jobseekers, as well as help people make use of them.

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An economic development strategy for Southern Vermont identified several priorities for the region including improving job opportunities and encouraging job growth; helping economic

