June 2019: Report on Economic and Workforce Development in Public Libraries Survey

Overview:

This survey on Economic and Workforce Development was sent out to libraries in June 2019 to better understand how libraries are supporting and providing services in this area, as well as to find out how the State Library can better support these efforts. A total of 31 people responded to the survey, with most respondents answering all questions. I went through and categorized the responses, and summarized the results according to these responses for each question. Additionally there is a summary section at the end with general thoughts and observations from going through the data.

What does the phrase "economic and workforce development" mean to you and your library?

1. Professional development/training for public: 6
   a. This entails more in-depth training, beyond basic skills
2. Providing resources/information: 6
   a. Providing databases, books, websites
3. Helping apply for jobs: 5
   a. Helping people navigate online applications, understanding how to upload/attach resumes, giving help with resumes and cover letters
4. Promoting/supporting local businesses: 5
   a. Providing employers with training/information, spreading the word about their business in the community
5. Helping search for jobs: 5
   a. Particularly searching online – many people don't know where to even begin looking, or may need help deciphering what exactly a job posting is looking for
6. Learning job skills: 4
   a. This includes basic digital literacy/comfort with using a computer, answering phones, writing emails, etc
7. Providing space and technology: 3
   a. Wifi, computers, printers, scanners
8. Other topics mentioned only once:
   a. Career development
   b. Librarian-focused training
   c. Job creation
   d. Helping with resumes and interviews
   e. Career change support
   f. Career counseling
   g. Strategic plan

The answers to these questions were difficult to code and categorize because some people answered them from their personal perspective, some from the library's perspective, and some from the community's perspective.

Describe the services that you currently provide to assist with economic or workforce development in your community:

1. Technology and space use: 15
2. Providing resources/information: 11
3. Technology/digital help: 6
4. Resume help: 5
5. Help applying for jobs: 4
6. Passive programming: 4
7. Help finding jobs: 2
8. Basic skills class: 2
9. Local organization partnership: 2
10. Literacy class: 2
11. Other topics mentioned only once:
    a. Local business promotion
    b. Outside training
    c. Financial literacy class
    d. Proctoring exams

What economic or workforce development needs have you observed with your patrons?

1. In-depth tech help and classes: 9
2. Resume and cover letter help: 7
3. Basic tech skills: 3
4. Learning critical skills: 4
5. Help applying for jobs: 7
6. Help searching for jobs: 5
7. Better wifi/space: 2
8. Other topics mentioned only once:
    a. How to start a business resources
    b. Lack of skilled employees
    c. Small business incubator
    d. Literacy training
    e. Need Job Services office
    f. Low-income patrons
    g. Career information resources
    h. Marketing and publicity training
    i. Computer and printer access

What could libraries do to help with economic or workforce development in local communities they serve, if there were fewer limits of time, money, and resources?

1. Technology/digital literacy classes: 6
2. Job help center in library: 5
3. Create resource collection: 5
4. Tech/space to use: 4
5. Resume and interview help: 4
6. External orgs do training: 3
7. Partner with Job Service: 3
8. Dedicated staff member: 2
9. Job fairs: 2
10. Small business incubator space: 2
11. More advertising of library: 2
12. Librarian-focused training: 2
13. Other topics mentioned only once:
    a. Finding info/reference help
    b. Job bulletin board
    c. Resources for small businesses
    d. Job searching help
    e. Extended learning classroom

What organizations are currently engaged in economic or workforce development in your community?

This question would probably be more useful if it were broken up by individual library. There are varying degrees of activity in each community, and the mixture of organizations working on economic development greatly depends on the location. The organizations that are mentioned the most are:

1. Job Service offices (if they exist)
2. Chamber of Commerce

What services from the Montana State Library would be most useful in helping support economic or workforce development programs at your library?

1. Coordination with state agencies to encourage local partnerships: 24
2. Librarian-focused training for specific economic development topics: 22
3. Funding: 20
4. Programming ideas: 18
5. Resource materials: 18
6. Technology resources: 16
7. Data to support economic development activities in libraries: 10
8. Promotional/marketing materials: 9
9. Displays/exhibits: 8
10. Travel grants: 6

Summary/General Observations

1. Core economic/workforce development services in libraries are things like resume/cover letter/interview help, help with searching for jobs, help with applying for jobs, and providing general tech assistance. Most libraries also provide space and access to computers/wifi which is important for the job-searching population. General reference for finding information about jobs/careers is also mentioned as something that libraries provide for patrons.

2. Many libraries mention how they don't have the capacity for providing the more in-depth digital literacy training that many patrons need. Many people mentioned a need for digital literacy classes, specifically with the aim of addressing skills needed for jobs. My impression is that many libraries do already offer digital literacy classes, but perhaps something more intense is needed for job preparation and qualification and the basic introductory classes are not enough. Another oft-mentioned comment was needing a specific tech/job services person available to sit down one-on-one with patrons when they come in needing extensive help. Reference desk staff are not able to accommodate the length of time needed, and these patrons need an individual consult instead.

3. Resources and collections are often mentioned in the survey – many people mentioned how patrons are often unclear or unsure about where to even start looking for jobs or information about jobs. While it sounds like many libraries do have materials on career development, job searching, etc, it may be helpful to create a little "Job Center" with all those resources in one place to make it easier for patrons to find. It's unclear whether libraries already have this in place.

4. Most suggestions, ideas, and existing services exist for employees/people looking for jobs, and there was less of a focus on the employer perspective. However, some libraries were interested in professional development opportunities for career professionals and business owners, as well as having external organizations come to the library to give regular trainings. Some libraries suggested having business-focused, high-quality databases available for that group of people to use, or providing "small business incubator" spaces/workspaces available for people to use to grow and expand their business.

5. Overall, libraries seem to have an easier time with figuring out how to handle quick reference questions, providing resume/job seeking/interview/cover letter support, and developing collections in response to patron interest. However, they seem to struggle with how to best address bigger issues, such as how to get job seekers trained in skills that they are lacking, or providing more in-depth training for topics beyond basic skills. Mission creep seems to be an issue, particularly in areas that don't have a job services office/an external organization that is leading the charge in this area. The role of the library in economic development is not clearly defined and that leads to some confusion as to what services should be offered, and where the line of "beyond-scope" is.