

# The Manufacturing Sector & The Knowledge Economy

**M**any people in the industrial heartland and across the nation are being left behind in the technological revolution. Middle class incomes are being replaced by minimum wage jobs. The promise of a better life for the next generation is in jeopardy. Urgent policy action to increase economic opportunity for all is needed, and America's libraries are part of the solution.

Libraries are established centers for learning and advancement. People use libraries to improve job skills, access new technologies, pursue vocational and educational programs, start new businesses, and advance research. Libraries also enable economic opportunity more broadly—by engaging with families to prepare children to succeed in school, for instance, and providing vital information on health and personal finance. With 120,000 locations, libraries are everywhere—including economically struggling communities.

Leveraging libraries to advance economic opportunity is cost-effective. This national infrastructure is already in place, ready to accommodate new programs. We urge decision makers in the U.S. Departments of Commerce, Labor, Education, Veterans Affairs, and Health and Human Services; the White House, Congress, and Small Business Administration; and the many other federal agencies implicated in economic opportunity to include libraries in their planning, as well as decision makers in the corporate, non-profit, and research and think tank worlds. ▶



## Employment in the Trades

Yes, you can learn to operate a forklift at a library. The modern library is much more than books and children's story hour (though libraries still have these fine resources, too). At the Orlando Public Library, its Melrose Center hosts dedicated simulators for operating forklifts and excavators, and for driving vehicles and flying an airplane, along with corresponding training classes.

The Gail Borden Library in Illinois co-sponsored the Manufacture Your Future event with the Elgin Chamber of Commerce, in which local manufacturers networked and answered questions related to products and careers in manufacturing. "You keep hearing there's no new manufacturing happening, and that's not true," said event participant Clint Borucki, president of ACME Design, a maker of props, prototypes and exhibit displays.

Library professionals provide resources to improve job skills, obtain certifications, prepare for the GED and vocational tests, and explore new careers. For example, the Port Townsend (Wash.) Library's Transition Yourself initiative assists job seekers to assess current circumstances and goals, find job training, and make work transitions. Many libraries, such as the Mid-Continent Public Library in Missouri, provide vocational collections and testing resources.

## The New Economy Is in the Library

Access to new technology and the ability to use it effectively are central to success in the new economy. Today's libraries have internet connections and computer labs—both for general use and in conjunction with library programming. Hundreds of libraries have maker spaces, 3D printers, video studios, and

**A**s part of Nevada's Working Capital Initiative, the Carson City Library is collaborating with education and industry partners including Western Nevada College to build local proficiency in high-tech manufacturing. The library offers a widely recognized manufacturing certification, to help community members obtain and demonstrate skills relevant to new jobs that will be generated by the opening of a Tesla Motors battery plant.



other technological resources, enabling people to engage in diverse disciplines from advanced manufacturing to animation. Everyone may use these resources for business activities, in pursuit of formal educational programs, and in informal experimentation.

Perhaps even more important than technology access is the knowledge of how to apply technology to economic advantage. Libraries help people find the information they need online, provide access to specialized databases, and offer valuable training. In 2015 New York City's three public library systems served more than 158,000 people with technology training programs, an 81 percent increase from just three years earlier. University libraries enable the research process by providing extensive information collections and services as well as specialized guidance and tools on big data, intellectual property issues, and in myriad other ways.

**The Akron-Summit County (Ohio) Public Library has a Microbusiness Center and Co-working space. It also offers easy access to a business librarian, databases that facilitate competitive analysis and market research, an audio recording studio, and other tech resources to generate prototypes or promotional materials as business plans evolve.**

## Entrepreneurial Opportunity

Libraries propel entrepreneurship across the country. Library services are especially important to smaller businesses that need current and detailed online information and digital skills to launch, market, and position their businesses in a competitive economy. In libraries, one can research or brainstorm new ideas or markets, develop business plans, gain access to or learn about emerging technologies, obtain information about intellectual property, and sustain an enterprise.

In Wyoming, the Library to Business (L2B) center of the Laramie County Library System connects entrepreneurs with local and regional economic development agencies to create a business network and learn new skills, such as social media marketing. The Dream Lab at the D.C. Public Library facilitates knowledge exchange between community members by providing free co-working space to individuals and small organizations that in turn offer regular public programming related to information technologies and digital literacy.

## Setting the Foundation for Economic Success: Youth and Education

Early childhood learning is the foundation for leveling the economic playing field. Libraries partner with a wide variety of stakeholders to help parents and caregivers support children’s literacy. For instance, the Rochester Hills (Mich.) Public Library holds parent/child workshops for families with children 1-3 years old, and has an extensive collection of teaching toys that allow a child to play with a purpose. Programs to support families and nurture early childhood development help to ensure that all children enter school ready to learn.

Strong educational programs have strong libraries that make concrete links between schools and outcomes. In Kansas, librarians at Emporia High School and Flint Hills Technical College worked together to create resources and activities that engage students in career exploration and in understanding how their educational choices can translate into future jobs. More broadly, research demonstrates that K-12 schools with school libraries and librarians are associated with higher

student reading achievement and success.

Much student learning takes place outside of formal programs. As long-established institutions known for lifelong learning, libraries are well-placed to promote informal learning. For youth, a rapidly growing area for libraries is encouraging coding and computational thinking that can power digital-ready futures.

Libraries also serve America’s 1.7 million homeschooled

students. For example, the Homeschool Resource Center at the Johnsburg (Ill.) Public Library offers circulating microscopes, science kits, educational board games, software, curriculum materials and catalogs. New Hampshire homeschooling parent and blogger Cait Fitzpatrick Curley says “I am a firm believer that the only true homeschooling must-have is a library card.”

The W.E.B. Dubois Library at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst established a facility devoted to encouraging entrepreneurship through 3D printing. The facility, known as the MakerBot Innovation Center, includes 50 3D printers, with plans to launch an entrepreneur-in-residence program, hold business plan competitions and offer coaching services for start-ups.



## Personal Well-Being: Health and Finances

Managing a family’s health and finances is also instrumental in economic security. Libraries provide resources and training on personal finance and access to information about healthcare and insurance. In fact, two-thirds of public libraries help people identify health insurance resources. For example, the Wilkes County (N.C.) Public Library, along with the local health department, organized a six-week workshop for community members focused on chronic disease self-management.

When it comes to finances, public libraries have partnered with the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to become a trusted source for unbiased information and resources in their communities. Higher education libraries, such as at Santa Fe College (Gainesville, Fla.), work to promote student financial literacy by providing learning resources and classes, covering topics such as budgeting, financial goal setting, responsible use of credit, saving, renting, and taxes. ■

### TAKEAWAYS for decision makers ►►►►►►►►►►

- Look to libraries—120,000 across the land—to advance economic opportunity for all. Implementing new initiatives via libraries is efficient and cost-effective, building on existing infrastructure.
- Libraries prepare people for all types of jobs, whether in the trades, new economy, or otherwise. Libraries help to create small businesses.
- Strengthening educational and learning opportunities for youth through libraries is vital to building a strong foundation for economic success.
- Libraries help people to manage health and household budgeting, which bolsters economic sufficiency.



# ABOUT AMERICA'S LIBRARIES



**T**he 120,000 libraries across the United States are a powerful force in addressing public policy priorities. Libraries advance Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, and Engagement for Everyone, Everywhere—The E's of Libraries®.

Libraries serve America's cities, towns, counties, and states; on school and college campuses; on military bases; in hospitals, government agencies, corporations, and other institutions. Library professionals provide diverse programs, services and resources tailored to community needs.

The American Library Association (ALA) is the oldest and largest library association in the world, with more than 57,000 members. The ALA Annual Conference, held in June, typically attracts over 20,000 participants. ALA maintains a Washington Office to engage federal and national decision makers and influencers.

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