

MARKETWISE

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Community



Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond

The Changing Role of Libraries in Our Communities

From tablets and smart phones to e-readers, technology continues to change how we receive and consume information. Libraries across the country have adapted to this trend in part by offering books and information resources in digital formats. Many libraries have also begun to think about how to provide additional community services that use library space and their expertise. Because librarians are often familiar with visitors and their requests, they are readily tasked and able to identify area and programming needs.¹ Libraries have used this knowledge to partner with local nonprofits and government agencies to address a variety of community issues. By offering unconventional services and programs, these partnerships help libraries expand their reach and provide viable resources to increase sustainability and serve community needs.

Helping Nonprofits Find Funding

One example in the Maryland area is the thriving partnership between Enoch Pratt Free Library, The Foundation Center and GrantSpace.org, an online resource for grant seekers. With the economy's downturn and shrinking nonprofit budgets, a host of organizations started seeking ways to do more with less. Enoch Pratt librarians recognized an increased need to help under-resourced nonprofit groups find information and training to

obtain grants and other funding. During the past few years, reference material on obtaining grants has been in demand more than ever before.² According to Bob Burke, manager of the Enoch Pratt Social Science and History Department, this stemmed partly from people seeking help to fund programs that had lost government, state or private funding in the wake of the economic crisis, as well as individuals wanting to provide better resources for their communities.³

Enoch Pratt submitted a grant proposal to the Foundation Center, which is an organization that works to strengthen the social sector by advancing knowledge about philanthropy, to establish a "cooperating collection." Cooperating collections are free funding information centers that provide publications and a variety of supplementary materials and services that would be useful to grant seekers in underserved and under-resourced areas.⁴ With the establishment of its Grant Collection, a cooperating collection of the Foundation Center, Enoch Pratt became the first Maryland library with the ability to provide this comprehensive information center to the community.

"In addition, we pay a subscription fee to receive reference and circulating materials for organizations that are looking for alternative grant funds," said Burke. "This also includes access to online databases with more than 150,000 sources of grant funds, which can be narrowed by geographic location, grant type and requirements."⁵ As more individuals became interested in the library's grant resources, the program added other valuable

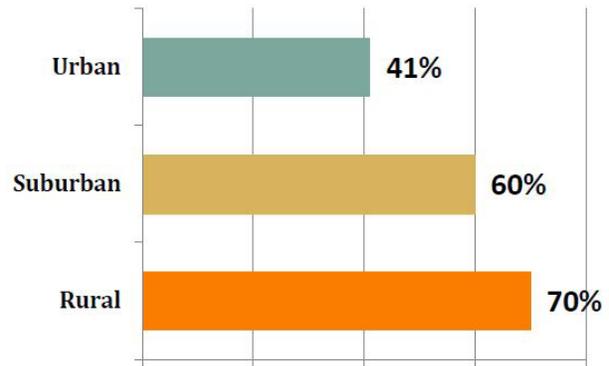


Public Libraries Serve as Lifeline of Technology Resources and Training

More Americans than ever are turning to their libraries for a diverse range of technology resources and training essential to full participation in the nation's economy.

- 62% of libraries report that they are the only source of free public access to computers and the Internet in their communities.
- 74% of libraries report public use of library Wi-Fi increased in 2011.
- 90% of libraries offer formal or informal technology assistance to library users, and 35% offer one-on-one technology training by appointment.
- 36% of libraries report increased use of library technology training over the previous year.

Libraries That Report They Are Only Provider of Free Public Internet Access in Their Community



Source: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, [Libraries Connect Communities: Key Findings 2011-2012](#)

components. For example, Paul Chasen, Enoch Pratt's Grants Collection manager, teaches a class that introduces users to the online process of obtaining grant funds. Other classes and services are free to the public and provide individuals with opportunities to garner funds that may have been overlooked.

Through free classes and workshops on topics including proposal writing, starting a foundation and obtaining grants, nonprofit management, and fundraising, participants gain a variety of experience to help them navigate through the grant-seeking process. According to Burke, grant seekers from as far as Florida and Georgia have sought Enoch Pratt's services to help obtain grant funding for a variety of special community programs.

Fostering Entrepreneurship

In Ohio, the Columbus Metropolitan Library has worked to provide resources to the small business community through the Base of a Successful Enterprise program, a free monthly workshop series.⁶ The program focuses on

providing entrepreneurs with access to resources to help grow and support their small businesses. According to librarian Steve Hipes, two classes are held each month, with the first focused on providing services and information for pre-venture and startup businesses and the second class dedicated to assisting existing business owners looking for ways to target their markets and improve business.⁷

Nationally, 90 percent of public libraries provide formal or informal technology training to library patrons, as well as online training and one-on-one sessions by appointment.

Source: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, [Libraries Connect Communities: Key Findings 2011-2012](#)



“Our space can hold up to 20 individuals per class, and spaces often fill up quickly,” says Hipes. “We usually have an average of 12–18 participants for the startup class who represent a varied cross section of entrepreneurs looking for startup information and industry research.”

The first class is aimed at helping entrepreneurs learn how to do a variety of tasks important for small business startups, including using the library’s catalog to find reference materials on small business startup tasks like writing a business plan, researching an industry using the library’s resources, finding business-to-business contacts, using the Legal Forms resource to find business and legal forms, and finding tutorials on how to research a company, industry or demographic.⁸

The second class, usually smaller in size, is focused on research strategies for growth. Participants learn how to use specific resources such as the Business Decisions database, the Business Source Premier database, ReferenceUSA and eJournals to create a demographic and market segmentation report, find specific trade journals or articles, and find tutorials for other types of market research.⁹

While several librarians within the Science, Business and News Division of the Columbus Metropolitan Library are qualified to run the two-hour sessions, it is important to note that they are not business specialists. According to Hipes, from time-to-time, the library partners with the area’s Small Business Administration to share real-world experience with participants. “The library is a safe place for many of these individuals to sort through business ideas, ask questions and to learn without feeling intimidated,” he added.¹⁰

In New York, the Brooklyn Public Library goes a step further in their support of entrepreneurs. The library’s PowerUP! Business Plan Competition is open to Brooklyn residents who want to start a business in Brooklyn, and participants have an opportunity to win from \$500–\$15,000 in startup capital.

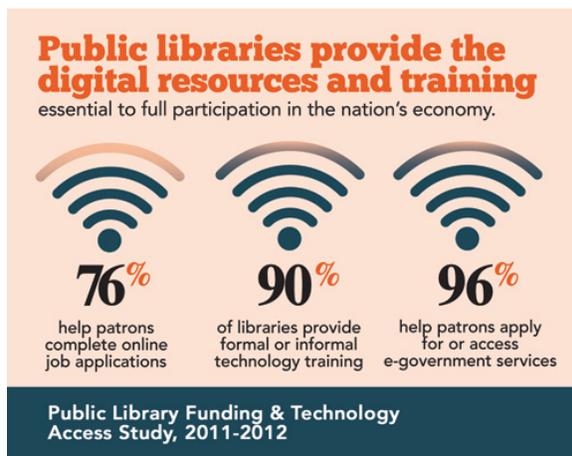
How does it work? Participants attend free classes covering topics such as writing business plans, creating marketing plans, generating financial projections and doing research with library resources. The classes are team taught by librarians and technical assistance providers. According to Regional Program and Outreach Manager Maud Andrew, all participants must take three of the four classes offered to fulfill the program’s requirement.¹¹

“More than half of the students fulfill the requirement, and we find that as they go through the process, many realize that starting a business is a lot of work and that there is a significant learning curve. You also have to understand that it is very different than a college or university; the classes are for the general public and skill sets vary. We attempt to catch people at different levels and fully understand that not everyone can complete the program and work involved. It is a remarkable accomplishment to finish the business plan.”¹²

Throughout the process, participants also gain valuable insight and free resources and end up with a solid business plan. While the concept is simple, Andrew notes that the program grew out of the library’s need to be “more relevant, to demonstrate that they have small business resources, were connected to the small business community and could provide an incentive to reach the public.”¹³



Participants compete for funds by drafting a business plan that is detailed, comprehensive and well-documented and that also supports sustainability.¹⁴ Judges of the business plan competition also consider whether participants outline a clear need and use for the \$15,000 prize and the impact the business will have on the community.¹⁵



Source: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, [Libraries Connect Communities: Key Findings 2011-2012](#)

Andrew adds that Citi Foundation serves as the sole sponsor of the program and has partnered with the Brooklyn Public Library's Business Library Success Council to offer the program since 2003. "Back then, we had 150 applicants," added Andrew. "Each year, the number of applicants has increased, and this year, we had about 458." With 81 final business plans submitted in 2012, Andrew notes that \$15,000 does not stretch as far as it once did, but it is certainly an incentive to turn an idea into a successful business. Since 2003, PowerUP! has reached over 3,000 entrepreneurs, awarded more than 63 prizes totaling more than \$200,000 and has provided funding for 32 successful startups.¹⁶

According to Andrew, the Brooklyn Public Library was the first public library in the country to create this type of competition. Neighboring systems in Queens and the New York Public Library System now have similar competitions sponsored by the Citi Foundation. This ensures that all boroughs of New York are served. Andrew also noted that the Houston Public Library in Texas is in the beginning stages of creating the same type of contest and that she has been contacted by representatives from Michigan, Virginia and Indiana to help coordinate similar programs and opportunities.

Serving Community Needs

Libraries are also reaching out to meet the social service needs of their communities. In Peabody, Mass., young adult librarian Melissa Rauseo and others realized that significant numbers of children were missing midday meals in the summer because they were not in school.¹⁷ A program and partnership was initially formed in 2009 between the Peabody Institute Library, the Council of Aging and the Healthy Peabody Collaborative to address the issue of how to provide meals to hungry children while also exposing them to other beneficial library services. Rauseo read about a similar initiative in a California library and used it as a model for the Peabody program.

In its first year, the program ran Monday–Thursday and served more than 2,400 free meals to Peabody children.¹⁸ Although the program was initially held each day in the basement of the main library, the program and funding recently expanded to include support from the mayor's office, the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Haven from Hunger, and Project Bread, which allowed the program organizers to purchase an outside tent to accommodate more participants in the summer.¹⁹





Librarians and staff work to provide free lunches and organize fun and educational activities for participants ages 18 and younger. This year, activities included arts and crafts, games, hip-hop dance classes and an opportunity for teens and young children to read together as Book Buddies.²⁰

In addition to serving social service needs, many libraries often find themselves serving as the central point of contact in disaster situations and for relief efforts. One example is in Pasco County, Fla., where library staff is very much aware of the hurricane season's impact on Floridians approximately six months out of every year. The Pasco County Library teamed with the Pasco County Office of Emergency Management to create the Residential Information Center, or RIC, in 2004.²¹

In a blog discussion with the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, Library Systems Application Analyst Terri Romberger reported that the RIC program ensures library personnel are trained to help "navigate policy and procedures in emergency management and preparedness as well as staff the center and provide

citizens with accurate information on sandbag locations, evacuation levels and GOKITS (which contain paper copies of important information and other useful supplies like batteries) before and after hurricanes."²²

The Pasco County's Hurricane Guide is always available at the library, but library personnel handle a variety of calls and questions from concerned citizens leading up to and after a storm. The RIC program is put in motion only when the County's Emergency Operations Center is operating at maximum capacity and there is a need for additional assistance to handle call volume. The emergency line rolls over to the RIC, and it is imperative that staffers have timely, accurate and relevant information to ensure disaster preparedness and safety.

According to Romberger, "more than 100 employees, including 25 supervisors and Community Emergency Response Team volunteers are trained on basic navigation of the database, policy and procedures in emergency management, as well as bunker layout and operations."²³

"As librarians are extremely good at gathering, verifying and disseminating information, it is a natural progression that librarians would be chosen to help in emergency efforts when distribution of that information becomes necessary," says Romberger in an interview in the National Network of Libraries of Medicine Emergency Preparedness and Response Toolkit blog. "As a result, Pasco County Library's personnel have become the primary workforce for this task, and provide indispensable support to the Office of Emergency Management's (OEM) Resident Information Center (RIC)."²⁴

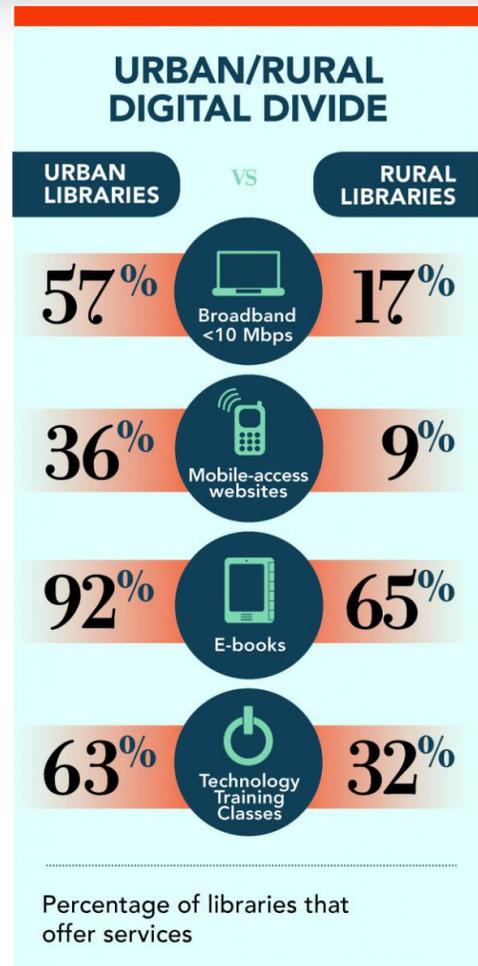


CONCLUSION

While providing access to books and traditional information is still a primary function of libraries, technology has paved the way for more unconventional library resources, programs and partnerships to serve community needs. From nonprofit and small business sectors to social services and disaster relief, public libraries are engaging in activities that weren't even considered 20–30 years ago. These activities help to secure a role as essential anchors to continued growth, development and sustainability of small and large communities alike.

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Source: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study, *Libraries Connect Communities: Key Findings 2011-2012*

Resources

For additional information on the organizations mentioned in the article, please visit their websites:

American Library Association
www.ala.org

Brooklyn Public Library
www.bklynpubliclibrary.org

Columbus Metropolitan Library
www.columbuslibrary.org

Enoch Pratt Free Library
www.prattlibrary.org

Foundation Center
www.foundationcenter.org/collections

Pasco County Library
www.pascolibraries.org

Peabody Institute Library
www.peabodylibrary.org



Endnotes:

- ¹ Edwards, Julie Biando. "Community Centered: 23 Reasons Why Your Library Is the Most Important Place in Town." Accessed June 28, 2012. <http://www.publiclibrariesonline.org>
- ² Burke, Bob, Social Science and History Department Manager, Enoch Pratt Free Library, phone interview, August 3, 2012.
- ³ Ibid.
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- ⁵ Burke, Bob, Social Science and History Department Manager, Enoch Pratt Free Library, phone interview, August 3, 2012.
- ⁶ Urban Libraries Council. "Making Cities Stronger: Public Library Contributions to Local Economic Development." January 2007, pg. 19. Accessed September 27, 2012.
- ⁷ Hipes, Steve, Librarian, Columbus Metropolitan Library, phone interview, November 16, 2012.
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- ¹¹ Andrew, Maud, Regional Program and Outreach Manager, Brooklyn Public Library, phone interview, November 16, 2012.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Brooklyn Public Library. "PowerUP! Competition: Business Plan Elements & Judging Criteria." Accessed December 17, 2012. <http://www.bklynpubliclibrary.org/locations/business/powerup/plan>
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Brooklyn Public Library. "PowerUP! Business Plan Competition Eighth Annual Awards Ceremony." Accessed December 17, 2012. http://www.bklynpubliclibrary.org/sites/default/files/files/pdf/business/powerup/4683_PT_PowerUPSlideshow_6r2.pdf
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- ¹⁹ Rauseo, Melissa. "Got Hungry Kids? Bring Them for Lunch at the Library," The Peabody Patch Blog, July 29, 2011. Accessed December 4, 2012. http://peabody.patch.com/blog_posts/got-hungry-kids-bring-them-for-lunch-at-the-library
- ²⁰ Laidler, John. "Peabody Institute Library Launches Summer Lunch Program," The Boston Globe, July 1, 2012. Accessed December 17, 2012. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/regionals/north/2012/06/30/peabody-institute-library-launches-summer-lunch-program/cggzw6wNW8ISkjGiUI7eCJ/story.html>
- ²¹ Wilson, Dan. "National Network of Libraries of Medicines Emergency Preparedness & Response Initiative Blog Archive," June 18, 2007, interview with Terri Romberger, Pasco County Library System, Florida. Accessed October 17, 2012. <http://nmlm.gov/ep/2007/06/18/pasco-county-library-system-florida/>
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ibid.

