

Making Cities Stronger:

Public Library Contributions to Local Economic Development

This Urban Libraries Council 2007 study showed that public libraries are logical partners for local economic development initiatives that focus on people and quality of life. They provide a broad range of information services to diverse constituencies. They are part of formal and informal community networks and initiatives that support education, jobs and careers, business and cultural activity, and civic pride. Library resources, services and facilities leverage and expand other local agencies' capacity and expertise.

Public libraries are unique, open institutions, where people have access to information, technology and training on an as-needed basis. With digital information and greater outreach, libraries are transforming the way they interact with the public. They are becoming much more proactive and collaborative, contributing in a variety of ways to stronger local economic development conditions.

The report identified four primary areas:

- 1. Early Literacy services are a key foundation for long term economic success.**
- 2. Library employment and career services are preparing workers with new technologies.**
- 3. Small business resources and programs are lowering barriers to market entry.**
- 4. Public library buildings are catalysts for physical development.**

PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIES

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Early Literacy	School readiness/academic success
Community Campaigns	Elevate awareness of the need to read early and often
Baby Lap-Sit to PreK reading activities	Elevate levels of early literacy, expand learning resources
Outreach to parents and caregivers	Elevate levels of early literacy, improve quality of child care
Child care training and certification	Strengthen community-wide child care provider network, improve child care worker qualifications
 Workforce Development	 Expand quantity and competencies of local workforce, long-term community economic capacity
Access to technology	Expand employment aptitudes, competencies
Access to internet	Expand access to employment search and application opportunities
Access to technology training	Expand employment skills and opportunities
English language training, adult literacy resources & services	Expand employment opportunities, economic sustainability
Career skills workshops (w/agencies)	Provide support for career pathways, expand audiences/reach of agencies
 Small Business Support	 Strengthen key local enterprise base and stimulate new job creation
Access to databases and other resources	Reduce cost for research and planning
Technical assistance for start-ups and micro-enterprises	Reduce costs and barriers to entering market, reduce failure rates, expand audience for other local agencies involved in small business support, expand small business sector
Technical assistance to existing businesses	Strengthen viable small business sector, expand reach and lower costs of other local agencies with shared facilities and resources, increase clustering of enterprises for competitive advantages
 Physical Development	 Contribute to vibrant urban and suburban life
Downtown (often "central" or "main")	Anchor development, generate foot traffic, revitalize commercial and cultural activity
Mixed-use, residential	Provide amenity value, generate foot traffic, increase quality of life and safety
Mall, commercial development	Generate traffic, but not sales competition, strengthens developer financing pro forma
Joint-Use	Reduce development costs, generate synergy of consumers/service providers

Ways Public Libraries Can Broaden their Impact on and Contributions to Local Economic Development Conditions

In *Making Cities Stronger: Public Library Contributions to Local Economic Development* (http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/1001075_stronger_cities.pdf), the following activities were identified for public libraries.

Early Literacy/School Readiness

- ☐ Broaden support for outreach
- ☐ Establish strong partnerships with area child care providers
- ☐ Continually evaluate early literacy programs and collect data on effectiveness over time

Workforce Development

- ☐ Establish strong connections with area workforce development agencies
- ☐ Build better employer connections
- ☐ Know your customers – what do they need? how do they prefer to get it?
- ☐ Know the broader workforce outlook

Small Business Support

- ☐ Invest in targeted staff training on new databases
- ☐ Build community-wide access to business information resources
- ☐ Aggressively market library business resources
- ☐ Understand and support small business clusters
- ☐ Understand small business financing
- ☐ Provide tailored support for micro-enterprises

Physical Development

- ☐ Demonstrate the symbiotic benefits of public and private development
- ☐ Identify ways public libraries complement local development plan
- ☐ Provide data to change developer perceptions