

BLUEPRINT FOR A JOB CENTER AT YOUR LIBRARY

Bernice Kao and
Megan Pittsley-Fox



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Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
1 So You Want to Start a Job Center at Your Library?	1
The Changing Needs of the Community	2
Technology and the Job Search	3
Benefits to Libraries	5
Stories of Successful Job and Career Centers	6
2 Conducting Market Research	11
Market Research 101	12
Familiarize Yourself with Other Career Center Programs	15
Identify Your Target Market and Patron Needs	17
3 Developing Your Career Collection and Facilities	29
Weed to Start Fresh	29
Update Your Wish List	30
Shelving Arrangement and Collection Maintenance	31
Facilities	32
The Career Collection	34
Books	35
Internet Databases	38
Online/Web Resources	40
DVDs and CDs	41
4 Planning Programs and Services	43
Classes and Workshops	43

	Special Events	54
	Career Coaching and Advising	61
	Scheduling	66
5	Personnel and Training	69
	Organizational Chart	69
	Job Center Program Manager	69
	Additional (Free!) Staffing	72
	Training for Current Staff	76
6	Budget and Funding	83
	Your Budget and Needs	83
	Donation Request Letter	85
	Grant Proposal Plan	86
	In-Kind Donations	88
	Grants and Sponsorships	90
	Follow-Up	96
7	Marketing and Promotion	101
	Defining Your Audience	101
	Defining Your Brand	103
	Media Relations	103
	Print Marketing Materials	105
	Internal Library Promotion	106
	Online Marketing and Social Media	110
	Cross-Promotions and Community Outreach	116
8	Program Assessment and Evaluation	119
	Measuring Patron Experience	120
	Evaluation Methods	121
	Sharing the Success!	123
	Appendix: Library Job Center Case Studies	125
	Further Resources	137
	Index	139

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—Bernice

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—Megan

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So You Want to Start a Job Center at Your Library?

During the presidential debates in 2012, the nation's unemployment issue was undoubtedly the focal point. The slightly improved unemployment rate during the last quarter of 2012 brought the rate to 7.1 for December 2012. That means there are still over 19 million unemployed in the United States. This figure does not include the "disguised" job seekers who finally give up. Public libraries have always been social service providers, but in recent years libraries have experienced job seekers' increased hunger for information and need for assistance with job seeking.

Starting a job center and job seeker services within your library may seem like a daunting task given the tight budgets and overworked staff of most libraries in the current economy. However, libraries were created to meet the public's informational needs; and today meeting the public's informational needs is even more critical to their personal and professional success as well as the overall health of the community. Public libraries have now become an essential hub that satisfies patrons' critical demands.

In order to fulfill patrons' critical needs for information, libraries cannot deny what the public wants. Traditionally, public libraries have served children, adults, students, handicapped people, seniors, and veterans; today, they also serve the job seekers who are part of their communities. Social service agencies like unemployment agencies and labor departments on all levels of the government cannot be held solely responsible for assisting the unemployed. In this day and age, it is unrealistic—they simply do not have the resources. With recent budget cuts, many county and state government agencies focused on workforce development can only keep the minimum level of services available to the public, so the public library has become increasingly in demand as a resource for job seekers. Public libraries today must clarify their missions to provide information not only for reading, visual art, education, and entertainment but also for supporting their community's career needs. At this time, such needs are many times more critical than others.

Can your library afford to have a job center at a time when most libraries are experiencing budget crunches? What do you have to do before you start? Have your patrons been asking for the latest test guides or resume books? How can you work together with other institutes so you will not duplicate similar social services? You

need to have a blueprint for your plan to establish a job center in the library. This blueprint will become your global positioning system, leading you to initiate job services to benefit your whole community. Your job center's success also depends on your defined audience or community, as well as your library's program planning, collection management, outreach services, and networking with other organizations.

This book breaks down the seemingly complex process of beginning a library-based job center by providing a simple, executable blueprint, filled with best practices and resources, with which you can create your own successful program. We lay out the *who, what, when, where, why*, and most importantly the *how* of setting up an efficient and effective program to meet job seekers' needs.

One of the most important factors in being able to create a job center, and one of your first tasks, is gaining stakeholder buy-in. With the many challenges that public libraries face these days, how do you convince your administration that these programs are worth your valuable time and funding? What do libraries get out of creating such programs? And what is in it for you? We are here to tell you.

The Changing Needs of the Community

In 2012, Reference and User Services Association's (RUSA; part of the American Library Association [ALA]) Reference Services Section organized the Job and Career Reference Committee to "offer programming, forums for discussions, and professional development opportunities focused on providing services and outreach related to patrons' jobs and career needs. Topics may include library resources and reference assistance; guides, tutorials, and web content; programming, promotion, and instruction; and effective community partnerships."¹ This was the first committee of its kind to focus solely on these issues, and it demonstrates that the needs of job seekers in libraries today are being recognized.

Our current four-and-a-half-year recession has been turning our nation into deficit-filled communities—communities that look to their local library for informational support. Economic issues have come to the forefront of political elections and voting decisions as well. To achieve a strong economy as a nation, we must strive to have reasonable numbers of people employed at all levels. Our community includes states, counties, cities, and small towns throughout the United States.

Infrastructures in any community depend on resources that fulfill information needs, and without these resources, nothing can be built. Libraries traditionally provide free information in a variety of formats including print, electronic, digital techniques, and even wireless Internet access. In many libraries, use of career resources is quickly catching up with general Internet usage, and more libraries are expanding their services to library patrons with job information needs, the same way they have helped in the past with other topics, such as consumer, legal, and medical information.

In addition to finding the value of an old car or how to fix that leaking sink, today's patrons want to know where to look for a job and how to prepare themselves to secure employment. Many of the newly unemployed find that their resume-writing skills are rusty and that they do not know how to perform a job search. Libraries have become one of the few places where patrons can find free job resources and search assistance.

Table 1.1
Museums, Libraries, and 21st Century

	20th Century	21st Century
Number of Jobs in Lifetime	1–2 jobs	10–15 jobs
Job Requirements	Mastery of one field	Simultaneous mastery of many rapidly changing fields
Job Competition	Local	Global
Work Model	Routine, hands-on, fact based	Non-routine, technical, creative, interactive
Educational Model	Institution centered; formal degree attainment is primary goal	Learner centered; self-directed; lifelong learning is primary goal
Organizational Culture	Top down	Multi-directional (bottom-up, top-down, side-to-side, etc.)

Source: Institute of Museum and Library Services

An estimated 30 million people—40 percent of total library computer users (77 million)—were engaged in job search activities in 2011.² Four public libraries served as case study sites, and survey results came through 300 interviews with library staff, funding sources, and local community organizations. The participating libraries were Enoch Pratt Free Library (Baltimore, Maryland), Fayetteville Public Library (Fayetteville, Arkansas), Marshalltown Public Library (Marshalltown, Iowa), and Oakland Public Library (Oakland, California). This report reinforces the importance for public libraries to “sustain and improve” public Internet access.

In 2009, the Institute for Museum and Library Services released their study entitled “Museums, Libraries, and 21st Century Skills,” which demonstrates the changing needs of the public, with a focus on information, communication and technology literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, civic literacy, and global awareness. The research was used to preset the changing role of museums and libraries to serve as learning institutions to help the public gain the life and work skills they need to be successful in today’s economic climate. The authors were also able to uniquely highlight how the workforce and its demand on professionals has changed drastically from the twentieth to the twenty-first century³ (see Table 1.1).

Technology and the Job Search

In 1996, Bill Clinton signed off on the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), which approved federal funding for technology-based infrastructure improvements within the nation’s library systems. The program was initiated by ALA and other library groups and is now paving the way for libraries across the country to allow patrons access to information and the world at large using technology. Over 15 years later these funds are still in extremely high demand, and the programs are active, as libraries and communities need access to technology now more than ever.

Library Job Centers in the News

For years libraries sat quietly as silent heroes, sometimes even being thought of as dinosaurs from the past. Yet throughout the recession libraries have been gaining more and more national attention from all over the United States for helping job seekers and the community in general during this economic shift.

Jim Carlton, "Folks Are Flocking to the Library, a Cozy Place to Look for a Job; Books, Computers and Wi-Fi Are Free, But Staffs Are Stressed by Crowds, Cutbacks," *Wall Street Journal* (2009). <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123197709459483585.html>

"Libraries in Crisis," *Huffington Post*. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/libraries-in-crisis>. An entire news page that includes blogs, pictures, videos, news, and community conversations.

A Free Library report indicated that one third of the computer users within libraries are concentrating on job-search-related activities. In 2010, 32 percent of the 138,979 hours of patrons' total 434,312 computer usage hours were spent on such activities.⁴ Such a figure provides further evidence of the importance of relationships among public libraries, computer technology, and job search services.

Career information changes in content and format at a rapid pace, just like any other information today. Due to quickly advancing trends of information delivery, human resource professionals have experienced the impact and have already changed their hiring practices to survive. Today, applying for jobs online is common because the process is technology driven. Most job postings can only be found and applied for online via online applications, proprietary company applicant tracking systems, and through email. Resumes are transmitted electronically, and many companies no longer accept hard copies of resumes. Company recruiters rely on online job boards and professional social networks such as LinkedIn to announce job openings and sources for potential candidate profiles and resumes. It is very important for your job center in the library to stay updated in the job information and services you provide. A current awareness of the employment market in your local community is vital to the center's existence. You want your job services to be real, current, practical, and useful.

Because of the limited number of computers available, your library may need to limit the time for each patron to use it. What happens if a patron is in the process of applying for a job online but is cut short before he completes his process? What if a job seeker doesn't know how to attach her resume to online application form? Who can provide assistance to job seekers with specific needs in areas such as resume-writing and interviewing skills? Where and when can patrons learn effective job hunting strategies? Are there any relevant job hunting webinars available for staff or patrons? Who is teaching the public how to assess the value of those free resources? Public libraries of the twenty-first century are being called upon to help job seekers assess if such services are feasible, timely, and affordable.

Besides books and CDs on job training, Internet-based career databases have mushroomed over the past 10 years. LearningExpressLibrary.com and JobNow.com are two good examples. Every library staff today needs to understand how to utilize these new tools and the technologies and processes patrons must know to hunt for

jobs. With a library card, patrons can have access to those online databases from home, expanding library hours to 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That type of convenience can make your library an extremely patron-friendly one.

Whether taking a practice test to be a certified nurse or teacher or learning the basics of writing a cover letter, resume, and thank-you letter, with today's technology, users can self-pace their learning in private. Computer tutorials provide self-paced lessons in areas critical for improving skills in today's online job searching world. There are tutorials on software programs such as Microsoft Office and others that are commonly used on the job, which can enhance your patrons' skills and resumes. Encourage your patrons to use their library cards to take advantage of the many resources available to them online.

If your library is short on computers or other resources that you need to serve job seekers, consider funding a purchase through a grant. A good time to apply for grant funding is when you are ready to add new equipment, from laptops to subscriptions to the new career databases. Grant money for increasing computer access is becoming more available to public libraries. Many libraries are seeking (and obtaining) funding for such efforts. We'll cover more resources and information on seeking grant funding in Chapter 6, "Budget and Funding," and you can read through specific examples of what other libraries have been able to raise by taking a look at the case studies in the Appendix.

Throughout the country, there are many job seekers today who still do not have access to the technology they need to perform a successful job search. If they are lucky, they know that the public library is one of the best places to use computers, printers, books, online databases, and training programs that will help them find employment. But many do not—therefore, the issue is not only providing resources and services but ensuring that the public is aware of what is available.

Benefits to Libraries

Job seekers sometimes hesitate before asking for help from librarians. They feel embarrassed at their lack of knowledge or feel like they're bothering a busy person. They might even be ashamed of being unemployed. Sometimes, they do not think that library can give them any assistance. They would rather hide themselves behind the shelf and peruse some old resume books. But as time goes on, public libraries are becoming better known as innovative job service providers. It might start with a small career collection, then programs start to emerge in response to job seeker demand, and outreach services expand into community collaboration. Libraries partner with a variety of outside agencies such as government-run career centers, homeless shelters, and business associations with creative programs that respond to the community needs. All these career services become a part of the added value to patrons of the user-friendly institute they have come to rely on.

When it comes to providing services for job seekers, we are not just helping the public; the public also helps libraries in many ways. Public libraries become business entities, competing for taxpayers' dollars and promising to meet vital service needs from citizens everywhere. The expansion of public libraries' roles over the past 30 years

has not been limited to the physical size of the library building or collection but extends to the diversity and quality of services. Job and career services are truly life-saving, skill-building, and economy-enhancing; they attract more library patrons, multiply cardholders, increase circulation statistics, strengthen visitation numbers, and keep the library in the forefront of the community's mind.

If your library has not been hit by a budget cut yet, consider yourself lucky. As you may well know, budget cuts were not limited to the "high recession" years of 2008–2010; they are still happening today—at an aggressive level. In July 2012, libraries in the state of Louisiana lost approximately \$900,000 in state funding.⁵ As of the writing of this book, libraries in Washington, Florida, and California, among many others, are fighting to keep their budgets. If you have not noticed yet, take a look at the headlines, and you will likely realize that there could be a very scary future for public libraries.

Your support of your community directly influences their support of your library; and in these times it is critical that you have your community's support to keep your doors open. As city and county governments tighten their belts further, libraries are often one of the first services to go onto the cutting block. Remembering the help that they or their friends or family members found at the library, voters have every reason to vote "yes" when the crucial time for library funding comes and "no" when someone threatens their beloved resource.

One librarian we spoke with during the development of this book told a beautiful story about a veteran the library helped to find employment through its job center program. He was eternally grateful for the assistance the library had given him, and he felt they were the only ones who were able to help him with his needs. Later on, that same veteran became a commissioner for the city and was a major supporter of the library—preventing its budget from being cut year after year. He also became a personal donor to the job center program.

Having exceptional programs for job seekers greatly enhances your public image within the community. It provides you with an excellent tool for public relations, outreach, and media coverage. Be sure to actively network with organizations in your community as a part of your job center development and marketing. These relationships provide referral and resource networks to strengthen the bond between agencies throughout your community and therefore patron knowledge of available resources and services. You will learn more about these partnerships and resources in this book (see Chapter 2, 4, and 7).

Stories of Successful Job and Career Centers

In a 2010–2011 report published by *American Libraries* magazine, 91.8 percent of public libraries were offering Internet services for job search and 87.3 percent provided formal or informal technology training to library patrons. Libraries assisting library patrons with online job applications increased from 67 percent to 72 percent. In the same report, it was estimated 300,000 individuals received job-seeking help, although 56 percent of libraries reported insufficient staff to help the patron effectively. Lack of expertise was cited as another dilemma for those trying to provide services; 43 percent of libraries admitted not having the necessary expertise to meet patrons' job search needs. Of course, this can be addressed by formalizing your job center services.⁶

During the past few years, many webinars and workshops focusing on job services in public libraries have attracted over several hundred librarians in participation. In 2009, the authors of this book won praise for presenting a webinar with www.InfoPople.org on “Best Practices” for serving the unemployed better in the public library. One hundred and forty people attended. Library conferences across the country have also held similar in-person sessions. Many sessions have been held at ALA’s annual conference in Chicago on helping job seekers in the library as well.

There have also been several major statewide programs run by state libraries focused on growing services and resources for job seekers within libraries. In August 2010, the Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (KDLA) received funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) provided through the U.S. Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) in the amount of \$1,349,826. Multiple organizations provided matching funds, including \$390,000 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The grant funding was used to improve and develop public computing centers (PCCs) in 45 libraries across the state of Kentucky, with a focus on those in especially disadvantaged communities facing the biggest economic crisis.

The Public Library Workforce Center (PLWC) libraries selected for the programs not only enhanced their public computer labs but also provided various classes and trainings to the public with a focus on economic improvement and workforce development. The KDLA also provided library staff trainings, monthly conference calls, and marketing material templates to libraries to support them in implementing the new programs.⁷

New Jersey State Library ran a similar program called NJ Works, funded by a \$5.1 million BTOP grant and matching \$1.5 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for a grant period of July 2010 to June 2013. The program aimed at providing libraries in New Jersey with the resources and support they needed to serve the unemployed and underemployed populations in their community. They offer access to multiple career-related databases, a statewide calendar of job seeker events, a directory of participating libraries, and more. Here is an overview of the impact the program made:

- 49 professional development workshops delivered to over 650 New Jersey librarians
- 1,194 job readiness workshops delivered with over 8,000 residents in attendance
- 845 public access computers added to 124 public libraries
- 86 libraries received an upgrade to 10 Mbps of broadband via Ethernet
- 128 laptops and eight projectors utilized as mobile training labs in four-hour job readiness skills training delivered in collaboration with a consortium of NJ community colleges

You can see further details of the NJ Works programs online at <http://njworks.org>.⁸

Arizona too received BTOP funding of \$1,646,936 with a match of \$705,830 from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Arizona State Library Archives and Public Records, and Arizona public libraries. The program, entitled Arizona Job Assistance