



WASHINGTON STATE LIBRARY:

Providing access to information and opportunity

Public libraries provide valuable services to Washington residents

In partnership with the Washington State Library, 62 local public library systems in Washington State serve as vibrant, active community hubs that provide access to economic opportunity for Washington residents every day.

Washington residents rely on their local libraries for public Internet access to search for jobs, conduct research, build workforce and computer skills, access government services, and use other resources they can't afford or can't access at home. The Washington State Library provides leadership and support to ensure that residents throughout the state have access to these resources through their local libraries.

During challenging economic times, the public library is a stable source of information and hope for many people. Recently, libraries have seen an unprecedented increase in visitors seeking information and resources that can improve their lives.

Workforce development

In Washington, 92.4 percent of libraries provide access to career databases and other job opportunity resources.ⁱ Library staffers work with unemployed residents to search for and apply for jobs, find and use career resources, and write cover letters and resumes. Some libraries even offer classes that help people learn skills for new careers, improve interview skills and start a business.

In many cases, libraries are working in partnership with local workforce development organizations such as Work Source, local community colleges, or community action centers to make these resources more accessible to as many people as possible.

Access to technology and the Internet

Today, it is almost impossible to succeed without Internet access, yet one-third of adults in the United States do not have broadband access at home.ⁱⁱ Libraries serve as a key point of access to the Internet and technology tools for Washington residents.

Based on a survey conducted in Washington in 2009, 84 percent of respondents used a public library computer or wireless connection to access the Internet.ⁱⁱⁱ

Not only do libraries provide a point of access to technology, they offer the resources that help library visitors maximize their use of technology.

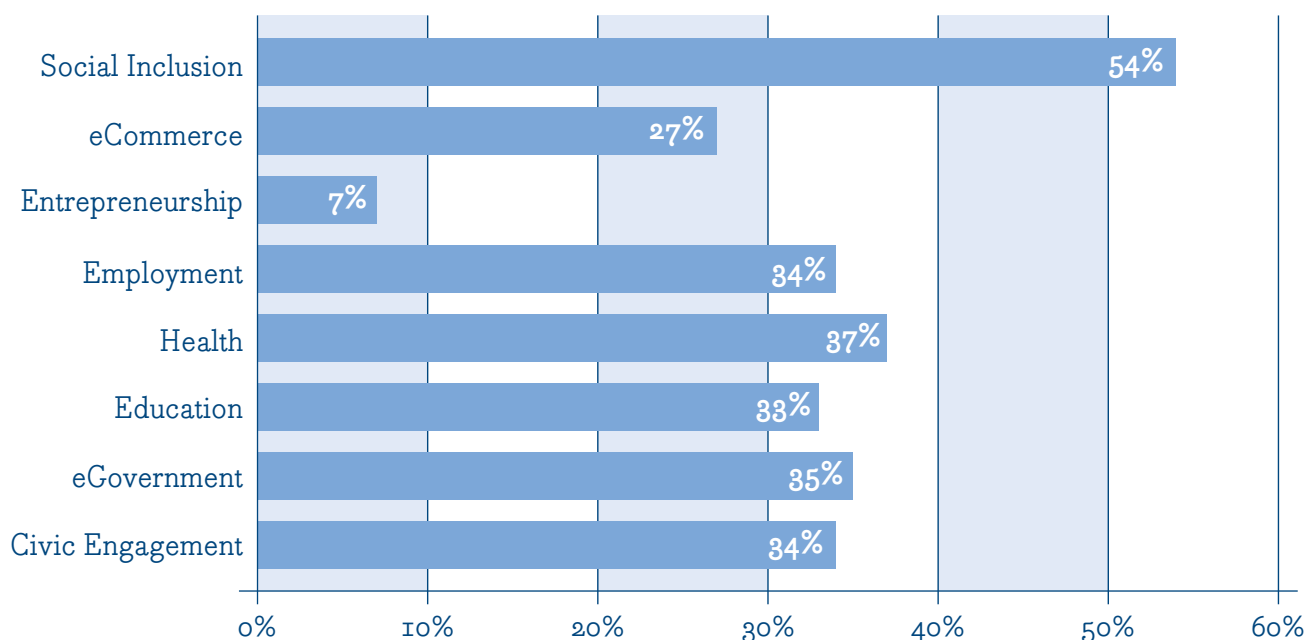
Many libraries across the state offer classes that teach people the basic steps of using a computer, setting up an email account, and finding

“The Transition Yourself Workshop helped me in many ways. I learned how to better organize my [job] search process. I discovered that much of what I was already doing was good, and how to improve other areas. My resume improved remarkably, and I felt more confident about the interview process. The support group helped me stay positive, and allowed me to help others. I believe that lessons and support of the group helped me connect with the right people at Shine Micro, and to become employed there.”

— Port Townsend Public Library customer



Top Uses of Public Library Computers*



*Based on results from the U.S. Impact Study Web Survey conducted in Washington in 2009.

information online. Research shows that library Internet users in Washington get online for a wide variety of reasons, including to continue their education, to find jobs, and to search for health information.

Northwest Open Access Network, a partner of Washington State Library, was able to garner more than \$138 million in stimulus funding to improve broadband connectivity for community anchor institutions, including more than 100 public and tribal library branches in Washington. This expanded broadband access will allow even more Washingtonians to benefit from the opportunities available online.

A source of education and lifelong learning

Public libraries are actively engaged in supporting education for all people. Libraries offer programs year-round that provide early childhood education, help students complete homework and study for SATs and GREs, and support individuals exploring and applying for college. Seventy-six percent of youth ages 14-18 who use public library computers and Internet access use the technology to complete homework.^{vi} Because of partnerships between public libraries and local educators, many students have the opportunity to learn how to use library tools and resources effectively through their classes and ongoing engagement with their local library.

Early learning, summer reading and K-12 programs at local libraries help students continue their education year-round. More than 200,000 youth participate in summer reading programs alone at libraries throughout the state.

People of all stages in life use libraries to continue their education. Some benefit from materials housed right in their local library; others research opportunities to participate in certificate programs, take online courses and tests, or learn new job skills. No matter how old you are or what you are interested in, there is a way to continue learning at your local public library.

“For Nadine Rogers, the library is a giant job search engine, complete with résumé advice, personal attention from librarians, and free computer use. The 51-year-old unemployed Gig Harbor resident believes she’s saved “a ton of money” by submitting résumés and job applications electronically at the library.

Lydia Shropshire’s Pierce County Library card is like money in the bank. She can save \$15 to \$25 at a time by checking out books, rather than buying them.”

— “Pierce County Library card is just their ticket,” The News Tribune. March 2, 2010. By Kris Sherman.



RENEW WASHINGTON

In October 2009, the Washington State Library launched the Renew Washington program, which helped 20 public library systems across the state provide new and enhanced services to help local residents face the economic challenges of the ongoing recession. The program assisted libraries in providing a variety of services to users including job search databases, classes on computer and workforce development skills, resources for starting or growing small businesses, and more.

As a part of the program, the Washington State Library created the Hard Times Resource Guide (www.sos.wa.gov/library/hardtimes/default.aspx) to help residents find information about employment, learn how to manage their finances, and seek health and housing resources.

Services and programs supported through the Renew Washington program have helped to add new depth to the economic support libraries provide to Washingtonians.

How the Renew Washington program is helping Washington residents improve their lives:

- *One library patron used the Fort Vancouver Regional Library Job Lab in search of help preparing for a job interview. With assistance from the library volunteers, he found helpful videos in the library databases, tips on interview questions, and even background information on the company. He used what he learned during his interview, and was hired for the job.*
- *A recent immigrant from Mexico attended a citizenship class and the Talk Time classes offered at the Lynden branch of the Whatcom County Library System to practice her English and prepare for her U.S. citizenship test. Before attending these classes, she relied on her three children to act as translators for her. After completing both classes, not only was she more comfortable speaking English, but she also successfully passed the citizenship exam.*
- *A young mother brought her son into the Whitman County Library to find books that would address his numerous questions about financial planning. As a result of their visit, the son started saving his money from mowing lawns to get a savings bond instead of a skateboard.*



Help libraries meet increasing demand for services

There has never been a more important time to support public libraries. As our state continues to struggle against significant economic challenges, and individuals and families seek greater opportunity in the face of hard times, providing quality access to information and learning through public libraries is critical.

Libraries around the state report that visitation and demand for their services has never been higher. Together, local leaders and communities can ensure libraries continue to provide opportunity and learning for Washingtonians now and in the future.

Visit your local library to learn what you can do to sustain high-quality library services for Washingtonians.

About the Washington State Library

The Washington State Library's vision is to ensure that Washingtonians have access to the information they need today and the history of Washington for tomorrow. The State Library's mission and purpose are to:

- Collect, preserve and make accessible to Washingtonians materials on the government, history, culture and natural resources of the state.*
- Provide leadership and coordination of services to all libraries in the state of Washington.*
- Support the information needs of residents in state institutions and of the visually impaired.*
- Serve as the primary source in the region for published information from the federal government.*

To learn more about the Washington State Library and its programs and services, go to www.sos.wa.gov/library/.



ⁱ "Libraries Connect Communities: Public Library Funding & Technology Access Study 2009-2010," American Library Association and the Center for Library & Information Innovation (UMD). June 21, 2010.

ⁱⁱ "Home Broadband 2010," Pew Internet & American Life, May 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ "U.S. Impact Study Web Survey Results, Aggregate Report for Web Survey Libraries in Washington," Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2009.

^{iv} Ibid.

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