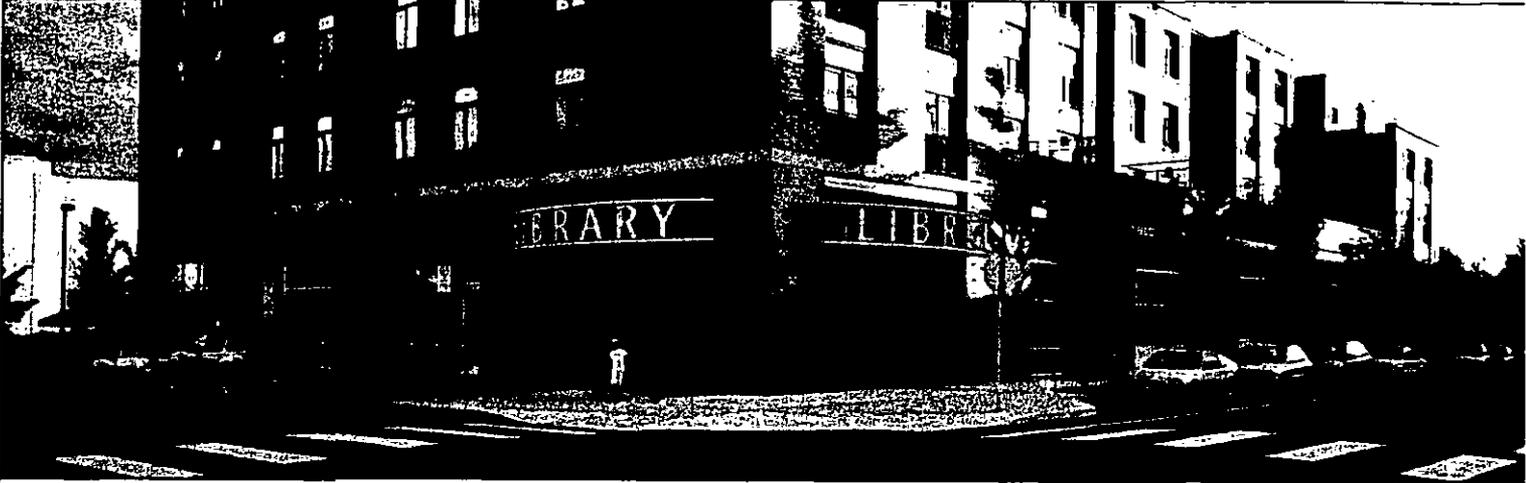


# Making Cities Stronger:

PUBLIC LIBRARY CONTRIBUTIONS TO LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



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# Conclusions ABOUT PUBLIC LIBRARY CONTRIBUTIONS CHAPTER 6



**W**ITH OVER 16,000 BRANCHES in over 9,000 systems across the country, public libraries are among the most widely distributed public services available to Americans. This report highlights some of the ways in which public library resources and services contribute to individual, family, and community economic vitality. The report shows that libraries are positioned to support the expansion of technology skills, continuous learning, critical research, and local-to-global networks of information that are the fuel of economies today.

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.

**Early literacy services are a key foundation for long-term economic success.** Given strong and growing evidence that investments in early literacy yield a high return and compound over time, public libraries are

expanding their traditional role in early literacy, engaging in high-impact strategies with community partners. They are leading public awareness campaigns, reaching new mothers with materials and resources that promote reading early and often. Extensive early literacy training with home and professional child-care givers is helping to raise levels of school readiness and success. Public libraries are reaching many young children and families in diverse neighborhoods across the country. These services are the first link in a chain of investments needed to build an educated, competitive workforce.

**Library employment and career services are preparing workers with new technologies.** With an array of public computers, Internet access, and training, public libraries are a first point of entry for many new technology users. Over ninety percent of public libraries regularly offer training to use and build technology skills. New library job and career service models are mobile and adaptable, providing value to both job seekers and employers. Increasingly, libraries are working with local partners to better understand local workforce trends and to have a greater community-wide impact on workforce readiness and "retooling" in an era of rapid and transformative change.

**Small business resources and programs are lowering barriers to market entry.** One of the biggest traditional barriers to small business has been access to current data on products, suppliers, financing sources, and competitors. Public libraries are the source for new online business databases that reach entrepreneurs around the clock. Additionally, libraries are offering an increasing variety of

**FIGURE 3: Public Library Strategies and Contributions to Local Economic Development**

<b>PUBLIC LIBRARY STRATEGIES</b>	<b>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTIONS</b>
<p><b>Early Literacy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Campaigns</li> <li>BabyLap-Sit-to-PreK reading activities</li> <li>Outreach to parents and caregivers</li> <li>Child care training and certification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School readiness/academic success</li> <li>Elevate awareness of the need to read early and often</li> <li>Elevate levels of early literacy, expand learning resources</li> <li>Elevate levels of early literacy, improve quality of child care</li> <li>Strengthen community-wide child care provider network, improve child care worker qualifications</li> </ul>
<p><b>Workforce Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to technology</li> <li>Access to internet</li> <li>Access to technology training</li> <li>English language training, adult literacy resources &amp; services</li> <li>Career skills workshops (w/agencies)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand quantity and competencies of local workforce, long-term community economic capacity</li> <li>Expand employment aptitudes, competencies</li> <li>Expand access to employment search and application opportunities</li> <li>Expand employment skills and opportunities</li> <li>Expand employment opportunities, economic sustainability</li> <li>Provide support for career pathways, expand audiences/reach of agencies</li> </ul>
<p><b>Small Business Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to databases and other resources</li> <li>Technical assistance for start-ups and micro-enterprises</li> <li>Technical assistance to existing businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen key local enterprise base and stimulate new job creation</li> <li>Reduce cost for research and planning</li> <li>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</li> <li>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</li> </ul>
<p><b>Physical Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Downtown (often "central" or "main")</li> <li>Mixed-use, residential</li> <li>Mall, commercial development</li> <li>Joint-Use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to vibrant urban and suburban life</li> <li>Anchor development, generate foot traffic, revitalize commercial and cultural activity</li> <li>Provide amenity value, generate foot traffic, increase quality of life and safety</li> <li>Generate traffic, but not sales competition, strengthens developer financing pro forma</li> <li>Reduce development costs, generate synergy of consumers/service providers</li> </ul>

business development workshops conducted with agencies and corporate partners. These resources and programs are reducing market entry costs for start-up businesses, and strengthening the important local sector of small and micro-enterprises. Libraries are in the vanguard, trying new business development strategies. In Brooklyn, seed money is awarded to promising new ventures. In Phoenix (AZ), the public library is part of a statewide network of business, economic development and library professionals who are seeking to expand and diversify the economic base by promoting synergy among clusters of enterprises.

**Public library buildings are catalysts for physical development.** Libraries are frequented local destinations. Researchers for this study repeatedly found that public libraries are highly regarded, and are seen as contributing to stability, safety and quality of life in neighborhoods. Among private sector developers of malls, commercial corridors, mixed-use developments and joint-use facilities, libraries are gaining recognition for other qualities – their ability to attract tremendous foot traffic, provide long-term tenancy, and complement neighboring retail and cultural destinations.

Making Cities Stronger adds to the body of research pointing to a shift in the role of public libraries - from passive places for recreational reading and research to active agents for local economic development. Libraries are helping to raise levels of literacy, digital dexterity, and entrepreneurial activity in communities, working collaboratively within local, regional and state networks. Rather than succumbing to obsolescence with the advent of new information technologies, the basic business of public libraries is being recast.

Figure 3 provides a quick reference summary to the strategies and contributions to economic development noted in this report. Figure 4 provides a summary of thought-starter ideas for considering how public libraries might strengthen and broaden the impact of their resources further which are found at the ends of Chapters 2-5.

Public libraries are positioned to fuel not only new, but next economies given the rise of new service and partnership models, and effective “niche” roles in building strong, resilient local economies and vibrant, livable places.

**FIGURE 4: Ways Public Libraries Can Broaden their Impact on and Contributions to Local Economic Development Conditions**

**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 plans
- Provide data to change developer perceptions