CASE STUDY: North Liberty Community Library

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.
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Introduction

Purpose of the case

The Chief Officers of State Library Agencies (COSLA), with funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), launched the Measures that Matter initiative in 2016 to examine, evaluate, and map the landscape of public library data collection in the United States. COSLA retained Mt Auburn Associates with Program and Policy Insight (the Mt. Auburn team) to pilot a research effort to provide insights into how to measure library activities related to workforce and business development. In addition to completing an extensive literature review, the core research for this project involved ten case studies of library systems across the U.S. The case studies examine the processes in play for designing and delivering workforce and small business development-related services, identifying the role of libraries in workforce and business development in their community, and, most importantly, understanding if and how public libraries share the story of their work related to workforce and small business support through the tracking of outcomes. These case studies represent a diversity of public libraries in terms of the size of the community, the structures of the library system, and the types of state support for a library's role in the workforce system. The Mt. Auburn team selected North Liberty Community Library (NLCL) for its dynamic library leadership, early adoption of Brainfuse, and representation as a single-outlet system in a small city.

Overview of the case

North Liberty Community Library is a single-outlet library serving the small city of North Liberty, located near Iowa City and south of Cedar Rapids. NLCL is a valued community institution co-located with the city's community center. NLCL benefits from dynamic leadership and a dedicated staff committed to building relationships with the business support community as well as social service and education entities. Its core role in workforce and business development is as a connector and information resource, which the library delivers predominantly through its standard services, with limited specialized services and ad hoc partnership events.

The North Liberty case study offers an opportunity to understand the role that small suburban libraries that operate in proximity to larger urban areas can play in workforce and business development. It also provides an opportunity to assess the feasibility of measurement when workforce and business development services are relatively limited and delivered primarily informally and passively through standard service vehicles.

Methodology

During the first phase of this project, the Mt. Auburn team completed a literature review on libraries' role in workforce and business development and identified public libraries with interesting or exemplary models. In addition, the team developed a Theory of Change (TOC) that presents a framework for thinking about the public libraries' role in contributing to the economic wellbeing of

residents. The TOC identified three distinct roles that public libraries play: standard, specialized, and community hub (see sidebar). This framework became an important element in the case study research. Working with an Advisory Committee, the Mt. Auburn team identified 80 public libraries to consider for case studies, developed criteria for site selection, and selected ten public library systems.

Role of libraries in workforce and business development system

	Workforce development	Small business development
Standard services (Library Designed and Led Services)	• Access to computers for resume writing • Help filling out applications or submitting resumes • Books and online information related to job search • Access to online training programs • Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources	• Access to computers for tax, regulatory, and other forms • Books and online information on entrepreneurship, small businesses, specific industries • Access to databases for business plans and market studies • Access to technology for prototyping - 3D printer • Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources
Specialized services (Library Designed and Led Services)	• Computer literacy workshops and training • Career readiness workshops and training • Occupational training • Adult education and ESOL training • Digital navigation and one-on-one coaching • Designated career space • Facilitate job search support groups	• Business plan development and other specialized workshops • Maker spaces, co-working space, media and technology space • Pitch contests and other specialized programs • One-on-one coaching or mentorship programs by dedicated small business staff • Entrepreneur networking events
Community hub services (Partnerships)	• One Stop Career Center location • Facilities for training providers • Training programs run with other partners • Host job fairs with partners • Trusted convener of community service providers • On-the-job training and internship placements	• Joint programs and workshop with other small business service providers such as SCORE • Facilities for small business support organizations to meet clients and hold workshops • Trusted convener of community service providers

The first step in the case study process was to conduct baseline research on the communities in which the libraries reside. This baseline research included a demographic and economic overview of the market area that the library system operates within, an overview of the library system, an analysis of the state policy environment relevant to libraries and workforce development, and background information on the workforce development and business development ecosystem in the community. After gathering the baseline information, the Mt. Auburn team had an introductory phone call with the library system lead to further our understanding of the library and identify the internal and external stakeholders whom system leaders believed would be critical to interview.

In terms of the library system, the Mt. Auburn team interviewed library system staff, including leadership at both the system and outlet levels (when relevant), library staff directly involved in workforce or business development activities, and communication- and technology-related staff. The external interviews focused on stakeholders in the workforce and business development ecosystem in the library's service area, including "partner" organizations engaged in active collaboration with libraries, organizations providing workforce or business development services in the region but not engaged in a formal library partnership, and other civic leaders.

The case study interviews were in-person as part of a site visit to each library system or completed virtually for those unable to meet in person. In the case of NLCL, the Mt. Auburn team conducted 13

interviews, 12 onsite in North Liberty during an April 4, 2022 site visit, and one additional interview via Zoom on March 16, 2022. Of the 13 interviewees, four were library system staff, three were representatives of a small business development organization in the region, one represented a workforce development organization, and five were civic leaders, employers, or city staff. The Mt. Auburn team used semi-structured protocols to guide stakeholder interviews.

Community context

To better understand North Liberty Community Library's role in providing workforce- and business development-related services, it is important to understand the context within which it operates. This section looks at the library itself—its history, governance, and structure—and provides a demographic and economic profile of Johnson County more broadly.

Library system

NLCL, founded in 1984, is a single-branch library in the community of North Liberty, Iowa, and serves the residents of North Liberty and surrounding rural areas of Johnson County, Iowa. The city of North Liberty is the primary library funder and manages the library system.   In FY19, the library budget totaled $1,141,457 of which 98 percent was from the city.   The city adopted a 2022 budget of $57 million, including a $1.2 million allocation for the library.   This represents a 0.68 percent decrease in allocation

Library	North Liberty Community Library
Service area	North Liberty, IA
Population of service area	19,539
# of branches*	1
Administrative structure	Municipal
Operating revenue	$1,141,457
Operating revenue per capita	$58.42
Total paid staff (FTE)	12.38
# of adult programs**	277
# of internet computers	30
Computers per 1,000 population	1.54

* Number of branches including central branch, but not including bookmobiles
** Number of adult programs is estimated as the number of total programs that are not children's or young adult programs.
Source: *PLS 2019 data*

year-over-year, but that follows an 11.1 percent increase from FY21, likely to account for expanded programs and resources NLCL provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. Johnson County's Rural Basic Fund, which totaled $806,866 in FY19, also provides funding to support NLCL's service to rural residents of unincorporated Johnson County.[1]

The North Liberty Community Center houses NLCL, the communications department, and the recreation department. The library is open seven days a week. NLCL's Board of Trustees consists of six members, including five North Liberty residents and one resident of unincorporated Johnson County. North Liberty's mayor recommends the appointee, and the North Liberty City Council or, in

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[1] "North Liberty Financial Planning Model for Year Ending June 30, 2022." City of North Liberty, Iowa, February 19, 2021. https://northlibertyiowa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/FY22-Budget-Planning-Model.pdf

the case of the county resident, the Johnson County Board of Supervisors, votes to approve the appointment.

The Community Foundation of Johnson County established the Friends of the North Liberty Library Endowment Fund in 2016.[2] The Endowment Fund provides supplementary funding for library services, special programming, technology, collection development, and facility needs. Donors receive a 25 percent Endow Iowa Tax Credit for their contributions.

Community conditions

North Liberty is a suburb of Iowa City in east central Iowa. The city is part of the region that locals refer to as the Iowa City-Cedar Rapids corridor, or "the Corridor." According to the 2020 U.S. Census, North Liberty has a population of 20,479, a 53 percent increase since 2010. North Liberty is in Johnson County, Iowa, and is part of the Iowa City Metropolitan Statistical Area. The city is predominantly white (81.1 percent), with small Black (5.1 percent) and Hispanic or Latino (5.8 percent) populations. Notably, 97.6 percent of North Liberty residents are

Community Conditions	North Liberty City	United States
Unemployment rate	2.7%	5.4%
Persons in poverty	4.0%	11.4%
Median household income	$85,435	$64,994
In civilian labor force	81.6%	63.0%
HS graduate or higher (> 25 y.o.)	97.6%	88.5%
BA or higher (> 25 y.o.)	56.0%	32.9%
Foreign-born persons	8.7%	13.5%
Households with internet access	94.9%	85.2%
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016-2020 American Community Survey, 5-year average, https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs		

high school graduates or higher, and 56 percent of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher. According to the ACS 5-Year Average, 2016-2020 data from the U.S. Census, the median household income in North Liberty is $85,435, and the poverty rate is 4 percent.
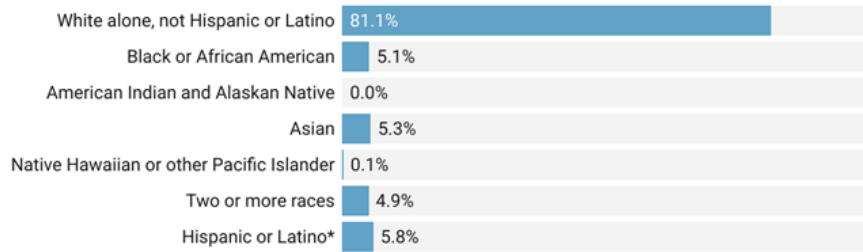
Settlers founded North Liberty in 1838, and North Liberty incorporated in Iowa in 1913.[3] The city experienced slow and steady growth throughout the 20th century, increasing from 190 residents at its founding to 5,000 by 2000. In the mid-2000s, North Liberty was the second fastest-growing city in Iowa.[4] The largest industries in North Liberty's economy are healthcare and social assistance, education, and manufacturing.

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[2] Community Foundation Funds. Community Foundation of Johnson County, September 19, 2019. Accessed June 29, 2022. https://cfjc.org/our-funds/community-foundation-funds/

[3] North Liberty, Iowa. Citytowninfo.com. Accessed June 28, 2022. https://www.citytowninfo.com/places/iowa/north-liberty

[4] North Liberty Iowa. Iowa City Dudes Moving. Accessed June 28, 2022. https://iowacitydudesmoving.com/north-liberty-iowa/

Racial and ethnic breakdown of North Liberty

White alone, not Hispanic or Latino	81.1%
Black or African American	5.1%
American Indian and Alaskan Native	0.0%
Asian	5.3%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.1%
Two or more races	4.9%
Hispanic or Latino*	5.8%

* Hispanics and Latinos may be of any race, and are also included in applicable race categories. Total percentages exceed 100%.

Source: 2020 Census • Created with Datawrapper

Given its proximity to Iowa City and its home to a mix of new business startups, media headquarters, regional financial centers, and national transportation companies, North Liberty has positioned itself as a small town with first-class amenities and high quality of life. The city has an economic development strategy that highlights the city's location and business climate as the principal means of attracting and retaining high-quality jobs while also providing business development assistance as needed to attract and retain businesses. North Liberty's Mayor Chris Hoffman began a four-year term in January 2022.

Relevant systems

The state-enabling environment—the policies and practices of state agencies related to both public library support and workforce development policies and priorities—influences each public library. Moreover, each public library operates within a very different local environment related to the workforce and small business ecosystems. This section reviews the state-level and community-level systems in which the North Liberty Community Public Library operates.

State-level support: policies, funding, and infrastructure

State Library administrative agency

The State Library of Iowa resides within the Department of Education. A nine-member Commission of Libraries governs the agency and approves the budget and plan of service, appoints state librarians, and adopts library rules. Iowa's annual Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants to States program allotment from IMLS in 2021 was $2 million.[5] Although the State Library had level or increasing funding prior to the Great Recession of 2008, overall funding has declined since that time.[6]

The two identified roles of the State Library are to improve library services in Iowa and deliver specialized information services to the state. The State Library's two main areas are:[7]

- The Library Support Network, whose staff 1) help librarians optimize their roles and information resources, and 2) collaborate with community partners to further the strategy and economic

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[5] "Grants to States: State Allotments." Institute of Museum and Library Services. Accessed June 15, 2022. https://www.imls.gov/grants/grants-state/state-allotments

[6] The Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2021. Functions and Roles of State Libraries: 2000 and 2020. Washington, DC: The Institute of Museum and Library Services.

[7] About Us: State Library of Iowa. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act as administered by State Library of Iowa. Accessed June 28, 2022 https://www.statelibraryofiowa.gov/index.php/about/about

goals of the library. Iowa General Funds and LSTA funds from IMLS fund the Library Support Network.

- Specialized Library Services, whose staff provide direct reference and information services to government and state residents.

The State Library in Iowa is the lead agency for the State Data Center (SDC), a partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau. The State Library also serves as the State Center for the Book affiliate, which promotes books and libraries, literacy, and reading. In Iowa, the State Library provides varied program assistance, including continuing education programs; library planning, evaluation, and research; summer and statewide reading programs; and consulting on continuing education, technology, marketing, and adult literacy.[8]

The State Library developed a FY2018 to FY2022 Strategic Plan to set long-range agency goals and objectives. The process identified three goals:[9]

- *Information access:* All Iowans have access to quality information resources and have the assistance needed to select and use the information to succeed personally, professionally, and academically.

- *Institutional capacity:* All Iowans are served by excellent local libraries that are technologically advanced and that employ knowledgeable and community-focused staff who incorporate the best professional practices to deliver high-quality library services.

- *Lifelong learning:* All Iowans learn to be productive 21st century citizens.

The lifelong learning goal most closely relates to the library workforce development services. Within this goal, the strategic plan identified a project to improve access to job and career training for Iowans. The plan outlines the following measures of progress:

- *Outputs:* Number of uses of online utility, number of trainings held.

- *Outcomes:* Iowans will be successful in building careers.

- *Measures:* Feedback surveys included in online utilities, surveys of training participants (libraries in train-the-trainer sessions and library patrons/community members in local library training).

  o Activity 1: Provide an online utility for digital training geared toward job and career support.

  o Activity 2: Partner with other agencies to provide training on tools and resources available to libraries.

The State Library is providing American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grants of up to $5,000 to Iowa community college libraries or Iowa public libraries to "support digital inclusion efforts to enable libraries to reach students, especially in support of education, health, and workforce development needs; and/or to respond to the pandemic and implement public health protocols." In addition to

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[8] The Institute of Museum and Library Services. 2021. Functions and Roles of State Libraries: 2000 and 2020. Washington, DC: The Institute of Museum and Library Services.

[9] Scott, Michael, and Nancy Medema. "Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Five-Year Plan for 2018 - 2022." State Library of Iowa, June 28, 2017. https://www.imls.gov/sites/default/files/state-profiles/plans/iowa5yearplan.pdf

funding for technology, digital content, assessments, and pandemic relief, libraries may use these funds to support "dedicated space for social worker/employment specialist/etc."

The State Library is currently partnering with the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina to help libraries identify the psychosocial needs of their patrons, such as resources for poverty, mental health or health problems, or substance use disorder. They are conducting a statewide needs assessment focusing on staff perception of patron psychosocial needs and perceived gaps in the ability to meet those needs. The goal of the effort is to explore ways to further facilitate collaboration between social workers and libraries throughout the state.

While, initially, NLCL provided support, the State Library now supports (through discounted collaborative costs) Brainfuse as the resource provider for career services, test preparation, and software tutorials through libraries statewide. Brainfuse is an online platform that provides JobNow/VetNow (one-of-a-kind career assistance); HelpNow; Adult Learning Center (academic assistance for adult learners); and live job coaching and veteran support. State funding supports Brainfuse JobNow/VetNow, and federal (IMLS) funding supports Brainfuse HelpNow, Foundation Directory Online, OCLC FirstSearch, and WhoFi.

State workforce system

The Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) agency renders employment services to individual job seekers through Iowa*WORKS* partners. The statewide system includes 15 state-designated regions, four satellites, and eight expansion offices to deliver services. The state Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) plan identifies libraries as eligible WIOA Title II providers. Iowa*WORKS* does not explicitly acknowledge libraries as Iowa Workforce Development partners; however, research suggests strong library engagement on a case-by-case basis, depending on the location. It seems, therefore, that the library/workforce partnership may result more from library initiative than workforce development initiative.

Local workforce and business development ecosystems

Workforce development system[10]

The state-level workforce development agency, IWD, provides employment services through its Iowa*WORKS* partnership. Iowa*WORKS* has a center in Cedar Rapids (serving the six counties of Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Linn, and Washington counties, which comprise Region 10). There is also an Iowa*WORKS* satellite office in Iowa City. In addition to standard services, Iowa*WORKS* hosts several career fairs in the Iowa City-Cedar Rapids corridor each year. The Employers Council of Iowa – Region 10 is the local IWD advisory group, with one located in each IWD region. The purpose of the advisory group is to guide IWD's business focus, address topics of concern to employers, sponsor training initiatives, and more.[11]

Johnson County is within the East Central Local Workforce Development Area (LWDA) of the state workforce development board system. The East Central LWDA serves seven counties: Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington. Chief Elected Officials (CEOs) are elected officials

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[10] "Workforce Solutions Guide." Iowa City Area Business Partnership, 2022. https://iowacityarea.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Workforce-Solutions-Guide_2022R.pdf

[11] Employers' Council of Iowa . Iowa Workforce Development. Accessed June 15, 2022. https://www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov/employers-council-iowa

from the seven-county area, while Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) members are leaders from business, labor, economic development, government, public assistance, education, youth, and community-based organizations.

In addition, postsecondary educational institutions support workforce development in the region. For example, the University of Iowa Pomerantz Career Center hosts an annual career fair, and Kirkwood Community College offers apprenticeship programs in a variety of career pathways and hosts an annual career fair.

The Iowa City-Cedar Rapids corridor has a robust economic development community. Many of these organizations support workforce development in addition to other business support services:

- *Iowa City Area Development Group (ICAD):* ICAD, an economic development agency serving the region, runs the ICR Talent Hub, which identifies candidates through targeted marketing campaigns and personal outreach to help persuade them to look at opportunities in the region.

- *Iowa City Area Business Partnership (formerly the Iowa City Area Chamber of Commerce):* The partnership's mission is to build community by strengthening local businesses.

- *Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance:* In 2012, the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance combined the economic and community development efforts of the former Cedar Rapids Area Chamber of Commerce, Cedar Rapids Downtown District, and Priority One. The Economic Alliance collaborates with the business community and other stakeholders and partners, including local municipalities and entities, through the following core functions: business support, economic development and workforce, community development, and pro-business and pro-growth advocacy.

The regional workforce stakeholders collaborate on many committees and coalitions in the service of improving the local talent pool:

- *Iowa City-Cedar Rapids (ICR Iowa):* ICR Iowa is a joint venture of Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance and Iowa City Area Development Group, and partners include seven area counties: Benton, Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Jones, Linn, and Washington. ICR Iowa focuses on business attraction and workforce development.

- *ICR Talent Intelligence Council:* The Talent Intelligence Council is a group of human resource professionals who meet quarterly to guide the region's talent attraction, retention, and pipeline strategies. ICAD is the council administrator.

- *Inclusive ICR:* Inclusive ICR focuses on talent diversity and inclusion. Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance is the administrator.

- *Kirkwood Sector Partnerships:* Kirkwood Community College oversees this partnership of several sector-specific boards comprising industry, workforce development, education, and community organization stakeholders.

Business development system

America's SBDC Iowa operates 15 state-designated regional business assistance centers, which the three Iowa Regents institutions and 11 community colleges host, all coordinated through the state center at Iowa State University. The SBDC operates two local offices within the Iowa City region:

- *America's SBDC Iowa at The University of Iowa (Iowa City/Coralville):* The University of Iowa center, established in 1982 as one of the four original regional centers in Iowa, serves businesses in Cedar, Iowa, Johnson, Poweshiek, and Washington counties. The center is part of the Tippie College of Business.

- *America's SBDC Iowa at Kirkwood Community College:* The Kirkwood center collaborates with federal, state, local, and private resources to serve its clients. Its expert, confidential, and free business counseling is available in Benton, Jones, and Linn counties and includes business planning, financing options, market research, loan proposal assistance, business growth strategies, new business guidance, business succession strategies, and business disaster counseling.

Other small business development actors in the region include:

- *The University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center (Iowa JPEC):* Iowa JPEC was established in 1996 within the Tippie College of Business. Iowa JPEC is committed to "helping every entrepreneur, no matter their level of expertise, to start something great."[12]

- *City of North Liberty:* The city of North Liberty works with the Iowa City Area Development Group to attract and bolster new business and the Iowa City Area Business Partnership to help strengthen existing ones. The city of North Liberty offers a Small Business Development Program, in conjunction with the University of Iowa John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center, to encourage new businesses or expand existing ones in North Liberty. The Small Business Development Program helps fill the financial gaps new and expanding businesses might encounter with loans up to $25,000 for terms up to five years.

Library workforce and business development services

Overview of the library's approach

The NLCL benefits from a dynamic leader who encourages a dedicated staff to engage in community initiatives and organizations. NLCL's interest in workforce and business development is due to the relationships built through its community engagement efforts and its willingness to listen to community needs.

I have learned, you don't want to tell people "No." You want to say, "I don't have that right now, but let me see what I can do to get it." As a public servant in a public library, it is our duty to say just that.

The library provides connections and information access through its standard services as well as limited, ad hoc specialized and community hub services that this case study describes in more detail below. Most stakeholders, including employers interviewed, could not identify any specific workforce or business development services the library offers beyond standard services, although they validated NLCL's commitment to engagement with the community and its "helper" mindset. Additionally, because the city of North Liberty is currently too small to host its own state workforce or business development offices, stakeholders noted that the library's location near the two urban centers of Iowa City and Cedar Rapids is a helpful alternative for information access for job seekers and others.

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[12] Our Story. John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center. The University of Iowa. Accessed June 15, 2022.
https://iowajpec.org/overviewour-story

Workforce development services

Standard services

NLCL provides workforce development access through its standard services, including the following:

- *Access to internet-connected computers and printing:* NLCL has the full Microsoft Office Suite on its adult computers. This software, plus the ability to print 30 free black and white copies, is a resource for job seekers who want to, for example, create and print a resume. These resources were the workforce development assets that community stakeholders cited most often.

- *Specialized print and online collections:* NLCL offers online employment-related training programs, including Brainfuse and Niche Academy, which patrons can access with an NLCL card. The library purchased Brainfuse, including JobNow, VetNow, and HelpNow, prior to the State Library launching and supporting this resource in libraries statewide. Niche Academy provides tutorials such as using Microsoft Office Suite software, how to write a resume, using social media, and creating a Gmail account. The library also offers access to LinkedIn Learning, which it reports was a financial stretch for a small library of its kind, but an important resource for various workforce training needs.

- *One-on-one walk-in and by-appointment support with the adult services librarian:* Librarians provide digital navigation services and assistance submitting online applications and writing resumes both as a walk-in and by-appointment service. Librarians report providing referrals to agencies that can meet patrons' needs, including workforce development and, less so, business development.

Specialized services

NLCL specialized workforce development services include the following:

- *Information kiosks:* NLCL has a bulletin board and a table where Iowa*WORKS* can place pamphlets and brochures. Library staff also actively solicit and post flyers from businesses advertising job openings in the information kiosk. Additionally, NLCL has a standing display near the front desk that showcases a different social services provider each month.

- *Volunteer and practicum student programs:* NLCL contributes to workforce development directly through its volunteer program for students and by hosting University of Iowa social work or library science practicum students.

- *Workforce development links:* To facilitate system navigation for jobseekers, NLCL includes key workforce development links, such as a link to IWD, in the favorites tab on all desktops.

Several notable specialized workforce development-related services in the recent past include the following:

- *Career development-dedicated computer:* Several years ago, NLCL applied for and received a state grant to have a computer dedicated to career development, where patrons could have a four-hour timeslot for job hunting instead of the usual one-hour. Changes in NLCL's computer use policy and increased availability of laptops have alleviated the problem of patrons not having computer access. As a result, NLCL phased out the program.

- *Free headshots:* Before the pandemic, NLCL offered free headshots by a professional photographer and supplemented that effort by purchasing secondhand business attire and accessories for patrons to wear in the photos if needed. NLCL intended this as a one-time offering, but the photographer offered to come for a second session at no charge. NLCL hopes to provide this service again in the future, as well as potentially start a tie and scarf lending library.

Community hub services

NLCL occupies 17,900 square feet within the city's community center, which also includes a fitness center, swimming pool, childcare, and municipal offices and offerings. Many stakeholders cited this location as instrumental in reinforcing the NLCL's image as a community hub. Dynamic, engaged leadership also contributes to this image.

- *Meeting space:* NLCL encourages businesses and working professionals to use the community rooms free of charge for in-house trainings, interviews, or meetings, as long as the use is not profit seeking. A recent example was the Hy-Vee grocery store chain, which used the library space free of charge to conduct interviews over six to eight weeks. While NLCL did not track the number of people who obtained employment through this event, Hy-Vee indicated that it hired approximately 100 new staff. Several stakeholders cited meeting space as a key library hub offering.

- *One-time partner events.* NLCL partnered with Iowa*WORKS* to host the library's very first job fair in January 2022 as a part of the Lighthouse in the Library series (see sidebar).

  o In the past, the library has offered space for Iowa*WORKS* or the University of Iowa to host resume writing workshops at the library, and, at the time of the site visit, staff indicated they planned to hold a workshop again in May 2022.

  o The library has also offered financial planning workshops in conjunction with local financial institutions.

  o Previously, NLCL has partnered to host career fairs specifically to

LIGHTHOUSE IN THE LIBRARY

In January 2021, the American Library Association selected NLCL as one of 300 libraries to participate in *Libraries Transforming Communities: Focus on Small and Rural Libraries*, an initiative to help library workers better serve their small and rural communities. The competitive award came with a $3,000 grant that launched *Lighthouse in the Library* (LITL) as a quarterly community conversation series. NLCL's January 2022 LITL event focused on workforce development in partnership with Iowa*WORKS*. The "New Year, New Career" panel discussion centered on workforce challenges in the community, after which there was a free job fair. Panelists included the director of strategic growth from the Iowa City Area Development Group, the founder of North Liberty CoLab co-working space, and a workforce advisor from Iowa*WORKS*. Previous LITL events have covered food and wellness equity as well as COVID-19's impact on education.

The job fair experienced low turnout, prompting NLCL and Iowa*WORKS* staff to consider what contributed to the low turnout and reflect on what NLCL's workforce development programming might look like in the future. Possible factors that could have contributed to the low attendance included the national labor shortage and fewer people looking for work, the job openings were too low-paying to generate interest, NLCL does not regularly offer workforce development programming so residents were unaware of these services, and, in a small community, there was not a critical mass of patron interest to contribute to robust turnout.

NLCL is considering another LITL panel on a workforce-related topic for 2023. Staff emphasized that outreach to patrons and workforce stakeholders to gain feedback and input on needs will be critical to deciding what to offer.

educate youth on different career pathways and tax assistance and financial management events.

Small business development services

NLCL's role in business development is fairly limited and centered on relationship building and engagement with the Iowa City Area Business Partnership and other economic development agencies in the region and building its role as a community hub.

Standard services

Small business standard services have shifted in recent years. In the past, the library offered Reference USA, which provides market data for businesses, but the library retired it due to lack of use by the community. Further, stakeholders reported that Reference USA and other business resources are available at Iowa City and University of Iowa libraries. Looking forward, the director shared that the library's focus is on expanding its business-related collections.

Specialized services

The library does not provide any specialized services with a focus on entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Community hub services

In interviews, staff emphasized the availability of meeting space as one of their central business development offerings. They reported that the Iowa City Area Business Partnership has held events at the library. In an interview for this research, a stakeholder raised the possibility of hosting a business course for small business entrepreneurs at the library in the future.

The region was once a bedroom community. Due to growth, it is less so now, yet most government services are only available in Iowa City or Coralville. NLCL is considering ways it can provide space as a regional hub for its community. The library sees nonprofit businesses as its primary focus for small business development.

Service administration

Staffing and management

NLCL does not have staff specifically dedicated to workforce development, and it has not supplied any formal training. Any workforce development knowledge is self-taught or through experience. All staff are broadly knowledgeable about workforce development-related topics and services and can assist patrons with basic needs, but the adult services librarian has the most knowledge in aiding patrons with job applications, unemployment benefits, or utility support.

Similarly, Similarly, NLCL has neither formally assigned anyone to support small business development nor provided support for formal small business development training. NLCL did report that its public services librarian is increasingly shifting in that direction as a chamber ambassador and using past experience in the for-profit sector prior to becoming a librarian to inform work with businesses.

System support and role

As a single-branch system, NLCL has centralized all workforce and business development resources, although the director gives librarians leeway to pursue new partnerships and activities within reason.

Funding

The city is the primary funder of NLCL; however, many specific acquisitions or programs are grant-funded, such as solar benches, laptops, hotspots, and social work/library science paid practicum student placements. The library has a Friends of the Library and endowment that it can draw on as needed, but staff mentioned that they could not recall drawing on these resources to support workforce or business development programming. While NLCL initially funded Brainfuse, the state currently pays for Brainfuse in all Iowa libraries. NLCL does not receive any other state funding.

How they determine what to offer

NLCL leadership maintains an openness to fill community needs while remaining wary of overcommitting and "being everything to everyone." Consequently, they see their role predominately as a connector and information resource and less of a direct service provider. This philosophy guides how NLCL ascertains community needs and its capacity to play a role. For example, in a small community like North Liberty, the librarians do not feel they can subscribe to a "build it and they will come" mentality. They believe it necessary to get feedback from patrons to understand their needs, hence the director's desire to have staff "get out there" in the community.

Prior to the pandemic, Iowa*WORKS* approached libraries around the state about putting Iowa*WORKS* software on library computers so residents could apply for WIOA services directly from library workstations. NLCL declined the offer, feeling the role—helping patrons navigate lengthy and complex workforce development system applications and processes—would be a substantial burden on staff without sufficient training or time.

> *When I started as director, we used to always go out and say, "Hey, here's all these great things we offer." And now my goal is to go out and say, "Hey, what can we do for you? What are the things you need? And, within reason, we're going to try to offer those things if we can make them a reality for you."*

Marketing of services

The library has one full-time marketing staff member, and that staff member has an assistant who devotes many of their hours to marketing. NLCL does not have a specific strategy for marketing workforce or business development services, and its webpage does not have a page dedicated to workforce or business development services. The marketing staff will promote NLCL programming as they schedule and highlight library databases like Brainfuse regularly.

If a program needs a broader audience, NLCL will publish in a citywide quarterly newsletter. Otherwise, marketing library offerings is primarily through social media and a monthly library newsletter. NLCL also attempts to share its offerings with agencies like the food pantry, which serves more foreign-born residents who may not be as aware of the services the library provides for free. The library occasionally pursues print marketing, like flyers, posters, and newspaper ads.

The director and the public services librarian have an intentional plan for the public services librarian to introduce themselves to local businesses to inform them of services the library might provide for them. The emphasis of this outreach is to raise awareness in the community about NLCL's meeting rooms, free Internet, and free copies, which may be useful for small businesses. The public services librarian has strengthened this role, recently becoming a chamber ambassador through the Iowa City Area Business Partnership's Ambassador Program. Chamber ambassadors volunteer in a variety of ways, including raising awareness and engagement in the Iowa City Area Business Partnership. The public services librarian views this active engagement in the partnership as a way to raise awareness of the library's offerings within the business community.

Informal, ad hoc word of mouth and networking are also key marketing strategies for the library. More formal and regular networking and community engagement come in the form of participating on boards and committees and doing volunteer work. For example, the director was the chair of the speaker's committee for a local school bond initiative and, over the course of the campaign, spoke over 30 times to multiple community groups as both library director and community member.

Some library stakeholders believed the library was doing a good job communicating its services and value. Other staff members thought they could do better. One community stakeholder interviewed felt the library lacked a "brand" that communicated its role in workforce and business development in the community.

Aspirations

NLCL is currently going through a strategic planning process and is considering its role in various domains, including workforce and business development. Some of the ideas stakeholders expressed during interviews included:

- *Starting a tie and scarf lending collection:* NLCL intended to start this collection prior to the pandemic but had to pause it owing to the pandemic. The library plans to solicit donations from residents and retail outlets and expects to be ready to circulate items in the first quarter of FY23. Its strategic plan also includes expectations to create a Library of Things that would include a wider variety of items for checkout, such as microscopes, telescopes, or tools, that patrons may use as accessories in professional photos or in their current jobs.

- *Offering additional digital literacy and computer skill classes:* NLCL has been cultivating relationships with a small nonprofit organization that aids the recently incarcerated with re-entry into the community, including teaching digital literacy. NLCL sees a role for itself in supporting what the agency is currently doing by lending additional capacity and expertise.

- *Developing services for startups or businesses that struggled during the pandemic:* The director spoke about being open to developing new services that small businesses need. This aspiration may align with a small business development stakeholder's potential interest in running a small business course for entrepreneurs at NLCL.

- *Hosting a set of workshops on market research and small business development:* NLCL could conduct these workshops in partnership with the Business Library at the University of Iowa.

Library staff cited several challenges to expanding services. For example, the experience of low turnout for the January 2022 job fair prompted the library staff to reflect on what workforce development programming might look like in the future. Another panel on a workforce-related topic

is under consideration for 2023, but staff emphasized that outreach to patrons and workforce stakeholders to gain feedback and input on needs will be critical to deciding what to offer.

In addition to concerns about either lack of demand for additional services or identifying the right services to offer, staff cited the scarcity of dedicated workforce or business development staffing as a barrier to expansion. Should NLCL want to go in this direction, some of the workforce and business development stakeholders expressed interest in increasing collaboration and communication with the library.

At the same time, there was some external stakeholder hesitancy toward NLCL's expanding workforce and business development services, citing a lack of expertise or differences in institutional culture between libraries and economic development organizations.

Library system's role in the community's workforce and small business development systems

Library collaboration with ecosystem partners

NLCL has a strong inclination toward community engagement and increasing its visibility in and utility for the community by "getting out there." Among workforce and business development partners, this takes the form of community engagement and reciprocal awareness building (both on the part of library staff and community partners' awareness of respective offerings), ongoing informal communication, and ad hoc events or activities.

- *Community engagement and awareness building:* In the early 2000s, the director participated in the chamber's Community Leadership Program (CLP). The public services librarian and the library's marketing and events coordinator have also participated in this program. The CLP is a year-long commitment to visit a different industry every month, ranging from the arts to healthcare. The program provided the library staff with an enhanced understanding of the industry sectors in the region and how they intersect and work together, which helps staff identify potential partnerships or community needs. The director is a member of the Iowa City Area Business Partnership, and the public services librarian is a chamber ambassador. In addition, staff are members of boards of several community organizations, including agencies that support early childhood and literacy, which the library recognizes as a key upstream investment for workforce development.

- *Ongoing informal communication:* Informal, ongoing connections with Iowa*WORKS* include frequent information exchange. For example, when NLCL adopted Brainfuse, the adult services librarian met with Iowa*WORKS* staff to familiarize them with the resource. For their part, Iowa*WORKS* staff report that NLCL is on their community partners list and that they aim to keep library staff informed whenever they are doing an event. Iowa City Area Development Group staff also report they are in communication with the library.

- *Ad hoc events or activities:* As this case study described in the sidebar, somewhat more formal, intermittent partnerships with Iowa*WORKS* include the January 2022 "New Year, New Career" panel as a part of the Lighthouse in the Library (LITL) "community conversation" series and the concomitant job fair. Both workforce and library staff reported the core challenge around an event-focused partnership like the LITL series was the lack of public participation, which they surmise could have been due to the newness of the series or the current state of the labor

market. Still, they believed the event gave the community exposure to what the library can offer the community.

Before the pandemic, several library staff would go to Kirkwood Community College or one of the high schools, including the alternative high school, to conduct mock interviews with students. The schools reached out to NLCL for volunteers, which demonstrates the library's reputation as a willing community resource that is responsive to community needs. These interviews are likely to resume after the pandemic.

While not necessarily workforce- or business development-related, NLCL has had one-time, ad hoc partnerships with various banks that come to the library and offer financial literacy programs. Two banks have expressed interest in doing that again as the pandemic resolves.

Library's position in the greater ecosystem

As a connector and information resource, NLCL contributes to the greater workforce and business development ecosystem by providing self-serve access to information, librarian support when needed, and referrals to resources patrons seek.

- *Evidence of filling system gaps:* The NLCL meeting space resources fill a gap in the greater ecosystem by providing businesses and workforce development actors a place to meet between Iowa City and Cedar Rapids.

- *Evidence of expanding system reach:* Interviewees widely regard universal internet access as a key gap NLCL filled, particularly as job seeking and the world of work have moved nearly entirely online. Library staff, in general, can help patrons with basic workforce development needs, including job applications and resume support, but they are also equipped to provide referrals to workforce development partners, less so to business development partners, to meet patron needs. To that end, library staff have a binder at the front desk that lists local service providers, including workforce development. Workforce and business development agency representatives reported referring clients to NLCL for specific standard services, like computer access and printing, and community hub services, like meeting space. Specifically, workforce development partners' referrals to NLCL center on access to internet-connected computers so that job seekers do not have to go to Iowa City or Coralville for that service. Workforce development stakeholders felt it was advantageous to have access like this in multiple places and that the overlap was beneficial by "meeting people where they are." If patrons need more intensive support, workforce development staff refer them to the Iowa City or Coralville office.

Generally, workforce development partners view the library as a valuable community partner and see its role as providing computer, internet, and printing access as sufficient workforce development resources for the community. Neither Iowa*WORKS* nor NLCL appears interested in revisiting the proposal to have Iowa*WORKS* workstations at the library, for example. However, workforce development staff noted that if the library began seeing an increase in foot traffic requesting workforce development services, they would be open to hosting a weekly resource table as they do currently at the food bank.

Most business development stakeholders similarly had a hard time imagining the need for an increased role for NLCL in the ecosystem, although several stakeholders spoke about the NLCL's role as a safe, unimposing place for all to seek resources and supports. These stakeholders said this made

the library a natural destination for more intentional, regular workforce or business development programming. This is particularly true for disconnected youth or adults who may need skill development but are intimidated about going to a community college for courses or an incubator for small business support. NLCL's welcoming image amplifies its ability to capture diverse populations, which the library could better promote for patrons' economic, professional, and personal development.

In summary, most external interviewees believed NLCL staff are very knowledgeable and connected to the community. While the community generally does not view the library as a central workforce or business development actor, library staff and community partners identified a few factors that may contribute to NLCL's low workforce and business development profile in the community:

1. NLCL uses more informal networks and relationships to communicate workforce development support opportunities, like the ability to set up a one-hour appointment with a librarian to get help with typing or an online job application.

2. NLCL lacks a dedicated workforce development or business development staff member to focus on the work. The adult services and public services librarians conduct workforce and business development associated activities, yet these are in addition to their many other responsibilities.

3. Perhaps most notably, NLCL intentionally limits direct service offerings to avoid overcommitting ifs existing staff.

Despite these factors, the library is notable for its deep and broad community engagement activities, including involvement in the area's business-serving community organizations, showcasing the library's standard, specialized, and community hub offerings in support of job seekers and businesses.

Pandemic response and recovery

Overview of library services during the pandemic

NLCL staff spoke about the inherent resilience of libraries because they have always had to adapt to changing environments and needs. This was an asset for libraries pivoting due to the pandemic. In addition, staff spoke about how their existing relationships with core service providers in housing and social services enhanced their ability to meet unemployed patrons' needs during the pandemic, including providing referrals to other community service providers.

State and regional workforce development offices remained closed longer than the library, enabling NLCL to serve as a critical access point for job seekers. The library reopened just for staff in June 2020 and commenced curbside materials loans. Staff would also print documents for patrons who needed that service and allow them to pick them up curbside.

Approach to workforce and business development services during the pandemic

The library was able to sustain and expand services through creative delivery methods:

*   Like many libraries, NLCL expanded its WiFi reach to the parking lot and checked out laptops for people to use in their cars. NLCL intends to keep the expanded WiFi indefinitely. While not a pandemic-related offering, the Emergency Connectivity Fund provided grant funding for five mobile hotspots, and NLCL hopes to receive funding for 20 more.

- Due to cold weather, the library offered access to its rooms by appointment, one person per room to use one of its laptop kits or for patrons to work or study.

- During an extreme weather event when many residents lost electricity and water, NLCL put charging stations outside for people to charge their devices.[13]

- NLCL offered one-on-one "general job support," such as submitting applications online, particularly for patrons with limited digital literacy skills.

- NLCL installed ten coded lockers outside its front doors that enable patrons to pick up resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Once a patron picks up materials, the library re-codes the locks for the next patron.

- The pandemic afforded staff time to conduct a diversity audit of all NLCL's collections to ensure they meet community needs and represent all community members.

- NLCL expanded partnerships during the pandemic. For example, the library was part of a cross-agency community effort, Project Better Together, which several economic development agencies in Johnson County spearheaded.

- NLCL partnered with other city and county agencies in providing services. It partnered with Johnson County Public Health, using its role as a community hub to distribute approximately 2,000 COVID test kits. NLCL also partnered with the city to provide childcare in the recreation center, which is co-located with the library, for healthcare, emergency, and city workers during the pandemic.

Learning from the pandemic

The pandemic expanded the library's actual provision of job application and resume support, as well as its image in the community as a place to get this kind of support, including by appointment, if needed. One business development stakeholder noted how the pandemic increased awareness among the business development community, including Think Iowa City, Iowa City Area Development Group, and the Business Partnership, about the role libraries play for the underserved in the community.

NLCL indicated that curbside delivery of materials is not going away after the pandemic, mostly because the library wants to be helpful to working people and curbside pick-up is very efficient for patrons. Going forward, library stakeholders expect to continue to expand partnerships.

Tracking and measurement

The library system's approach to tracking and measurement

NLCL collects data for monthly reports to its board of trustees, annual reports to the state, an annual "community report," and ad-hoc internal needs, such as to evaluate whether to retain a particular resource. At present, NLCL's data collection and reporting focuses primarily on outputs and is largely internally facing aside from an annual community report.

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[13] The library has two new solar charging benches that were still waiting for installation at the time of the site visit in April 2022. ARPA funding supported the purchase of the solar benches. https://northlibertyiowa.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Library-Board-2021-12-20.pdf

1. *General data collection on library operations:* NLCL collects operating data that it compiles in a monthly report to the library board of trustees. This report includes activity reports by staff members, including community meeting attendance, programs offered at the library and the number of attendees, and other operational updates. It also includes library financials and statistics on database usage and circulation. NLCL also maintains a partnership spreadsheet to track partnerships. NLCL collects door counts and site occupancy through an automated software system and tracks the purpose of the meeting room rentals and how many people used them.

   As is typical, the library compiles data for annual reports to the state, including income, expenditures, collections, library transactions, services, programming, and staffing. Beyond these regular reports, the staff analyze data on an as-needed basis for internal purposes. For example, the library may use door count data to find patterns for scheduling staff or to see which programs have high attendance and how frequently NLCL might want to offer them.

2. *Information requests and referrals:* As a general practice, NLCL does not track one-on-one, ad hoc requests for help from patrons by any workforce or business development category. However, one librarian reported tracking the number of one-on-ones librarians conduct and the topic of the assistance. The librarian uses these data primarily as a case management tool for internal tracking. Library staff do not track referrals to or from external agencies.

3. *Specialized online resources and website analytics:* NLCL uses Cisco Meraki to track wireless usage and CASSIE to manage public computer use. The library also collects usage statistics on its online databases and collections. NLCL analyzes these data for its monthly report to the board of trustees and on an as-needed basis, for example, deciding whether to renew a subscription to a particular resource or promote a resource.

4. *Outputs related to specialized and partner services:* Since NLCL offers few specialized services and ad hoc partner services, at present, the measurement for specialized and partner services includes the number of event participants as a means to decide whether to repeat the event or service. Workforce development stakeholders view their day-to-day partnerships with the library as informal; therefore, there is no tracking system in place. For instance, Iowa*WORKS* does not track patrons getting help applying for unemployment by a librarian or intermittent partnerships, including the LITL panel and the subsequent job fair, in any official capacity.

5. *Outcomes related to services:* NLCL does not conduct outcomes analysis. At present, outcome analysis would depend on a patron who received library job application assistance from a librarian, for instance, coming back to report on whether or not they had success obtaining employment.

6. *Anecdotal evidence:* Staff spoke about the value of qualitative, anecdotal evidence to tell their stories. An example of this storytelling was a television station feature on a library patron who came in frequently to use library computers to obtain certification as a substitute teacher. Library

To me, those qualitative things are sometimes better than the quantitative. You know, if you have a program and you get six people and you hoped for 30-50, but you still had an impact, I'm happy with that.

staff allowed the patron to exceed the one-hour time limits on the computers in order to fulfill his goal.[14]

Outcome measurement challenges

Staff cited several challenges to outcome measurement and measurement overall:

► *Lack of dedicated staff to collect and analyze data:* Stakeholders mused on whether the lack of a dedicated workforce development (or business development) staff member is one reason the library does not actively track and report workforce-related data.

► *Privacy:* While some staff keep a log of assistance they provide to patrons, they are careful not to collect personally identifying information without explicit permission from the patron. In general, staff cited patron privacy as a barrier to more robust data collection and reporting.

► *Staff burden:* More robust data collection would fall on staff to implement, adding to their workload or reducing the number of services they can provide.

While not stated by staff, the *lack of a critical mass of services to analyze* may also limit data collection motivation. With such limited direct specialized and community hub workforce or business development services, there may not be sufficient data to analyze to warrant the effort.

Interest and feasibility of implementing new outcome measurement systems

NLCL did not mention any plans for new tracking or measurement systems, and staff had mixed reactions to a hypothetical pop-up computer survey that could be a means of measuring standard, computer-based services. One staff member felt the pop-up survey data would be useful, particularly if the pop-up survey asked, "Did you have any interactions with staff helping you today?" and "Did you get your question answered?", which would help them with training staff. Another staff member agreed it would be helpful data, especially if the survey asked whether the library was their primary access point.

However, stakeholders generally agreed that patrons may not complete the pop-up, may be annoyed by the pop-up, or the data right now would be skewed due to the labor crisis and fewer people using the computers for workforce development activities. Instead, one stakeholder suggested that a better option may be a separate kiosk with an iPad that displays a three- or four-question survey. NLCL fields surveys like this periodically, incentivizing participation by giving out candies. There was also openness to periodic manual census-taking by staff if it was easy for staff to complete, but stakeholders did wonder whether even smaller libraries with one or two staff had the capacity to participate in something like this.

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[14] Scheinblum, Aaron. "North Liberty Man Spends Months at a Library Computer, Accomplishing Goal of Becoming a Substitute Teacher." https://www.kcrg.com. A Gray Media Group, Inc. Station, December 9, 2019. https://www.kcrg.com/content/news/North-Liberty-man-spends-months-at-a-library-computer-accomplishing-goal-of-becoming-a-substitute-teacher-565998631.html

Observations

✓ **Having a culture and leadership committed to external engagement may lead to increased awareness of a library's services related to workforce and business development.**

The director and other staff are involved in the community in different capacities, including the Iowa City Housing Coalition and the Business Partnership. In these capacities, their focus is more general library services than workforce- or business development-related services. The workforce and business development outreach appears to be more general than strategic or targeted to different community stakeholders.

These folks, they may not know the answer, but they'll find it. They are the Google of our community.

They are proactive in marketing their standard services and the message of the library as an access point in the community, and more reactive in terms of specialized services to be responsive to what community stakeholders need. The proactive messaging appears effective; external stakeholders universally cited computer access, Internet access, free printing services, and meeting space as the key workforce or business development supports NLCL provides.

✓ **There is a tension between wanting to be of service and fill gaps and the reality of capacity in a small library system.**

Opportunities to expand workforce development offerings, including having Iowa*WORKS* workstations at the library, may not fit as a service within the library due to insufficient staff capacity and training to support patrons using those resources. Still, during the pandemic, library staff learned how to help patrons apply for unemployment insurance and other social safety net programs, suggesting that there may be some circumstances where there is sufficient capacity to take on more direct, specialized roles. Library staff discussed the need for a dedicated workforce development staff member if NLCL was to expand its workforce development offerings and, in turn, staff wondered if that would drive more consistent referrals to the library.

✓ **Regional context influences library systems' workforce and business development offerings.**

North Liberty is a smaller town in proximity to two larger cities and a large university. As such, Iowa City, Coralville, and the University of Iowa are the hub for workforce and business development offerings in the region. Additionally, stakeholders reported that the libraries in Iowa City and at the University of Iowa have many robust business development databases and incubator-type supports that may preclude the need, or the demand, for a small library like NLCL to also provide these resource-intensive services.

✓ **In small suburban communities, it may be more essential than in larger communities to base workforce and business development offerings on directly identified community needs.**

In a small community, a "build it and they will come" approach may not be effective because of capacity, budget, and staffing limitations. Instead, intentional community engagement and listening may be more fruitful approaches to fill needs and capture community participation.