

BTOP Workforce Efforts and Partnership

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In September 2010, the Colorado State Library (CSL) secured a \$3.3 million Broadband Technology Opportunity Program (BTOP) grant including \$2.3 million in federal funds, \$754,000 from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and \$316,234 in matching and in-kind donations from local libraries, CSL, and community organizations. This grant funded 50 grantees to build or enhance Public Computer Centers (PCCs) in 88 high-need urban and rural communities with high poverty rates, ethnic diversity, low broadband penetration, and/or limited access to public computers.

This Fast Facts, which is the third in a three-part series about the CSL BTOP project's first year, highlights the project's workforce efforts, partnerships, and statewide initiatives that have focused on addressing critical workforce development issues in Colorado's rural areas.¹

Introduction

With many communities finding libraries to be their only source of free access to the internet, libraries are playing a central role in providing employment-seeking assistance to millions of job seekers affected by the economic downturn:

- In 2011, over 90% of US public libraries reported that providing employment services is important to their communities.²
- Librarians themselves identified employment services to job-seekers as the *most* important public access technology service that they offer to their communities.²
- Almost half of the respondents (47%) to a 2010 workforce investment boards survey indicated that they had entered into partnerships with local libraries in order to deliver employment and training services.³

In Colorado, 56% of libraries are located in communities where the library is the *only* place to provide free access to computers and the internet.²

In Colorado, 92% of public libraries provide access to jobs databases and other job opportunity resources.⁴ More than four in five provide access to civil service exam materials,

"Yesterday alone I helped three people format and upload resumes. Without the PCC, where would these people get assistance?"
PCC Staff Member

help patrons complete online job applications, and offer software and other resources to help patrons create resumes and other job-seeking materials.⁴

The CSL BTOP project has positioned Colorado's libraries to effectively partner locally and regionally, while CSL staff have coordinated statewide efforts for public libraries to be instrumental in creating

greater workforce development opportunities for Colorado's job seekers.



1 PCC, 2 Success Stories

"A hearty congratulations to John Morris on his new employment as an assembler for Kelly Services at Covidien in Boulder. John's been burning up the hours on our High Plains computers for 3 months. Persistence finally paid off. We'll be having a mini celebration right here at 3 Coffee this FRIDAY, JANUARY 13, at 9am. Cake, balloons and funk music. All are welcome to stop by." Posted on 3 Coffee & Roastery's Facebook page on January 9, 2012. 3 Coffee & Roastery is a High Plains Library District PCC location in Milliken, CO. (<http://snurl.com/pcc-3cr-jm>)

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation highlights the story of a 3 Coffee & Roastery PCC patron, Gene Jaramillo, in a video titled "Libraries: More Than Books." According to Jaramillo, *"the company I worked at, which I thought I would retire from, ended up closing after 18 years. So I was out looking for a job. I needed skills."* Jaramillo booked an appointment with the PCC Supervisor. *"I was able to create my resume, fine tune my resume, and send my resume" and "because of skills that she helped me with, now I'll have a job starting next week,"* he commented. (<http://youtu.be/4pzJEbL2tak>)

Colorado's Workforce Centers

Regional Workforce Centers are located in urban and more populated areas of Colorado. These workforce centers provide a variety of free services to assist both employers and job seekers, including access to online job listings, computers, and high-speed internet. Job seekers can obtain career counseling and training, while employers have access to worker recruitment services such as pre-screening, referrals, training reimbursements, and tax credits.

The Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium

The Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium (CRWC) is comprised of the Colorado Department of Labor and Colorado Workforce Centers and "was formed to meet the collective needs of Colorado's rural communities relating to workforce vitality."⁵ The CRWC consists of 11 workforce regions covering 52 rural counties in Colorado. However, 20 of these counties do not have a workforce center, and the consortium recognized that it needed to devise alternate solutions for providing services to them.⁶ With 83 public libraries located in the CRWC regions (38 of which are BTOP libraries), libraries were perfectly positioned to team up with the CRWC to help create and implement the Virtual Workforce Center at the Library.

Virtual Workforce Center at the Library

Virtual Workforce Center at the Library (VWFC) provides dedicated workforce stations at libraries with a virtual connection to the nearest Regional Workforce Center. This statewide partnership funded thirty rural libraries to receive equipment and software for computer workstations dedicated to career and economic development. The VWFCs are scheduled to "go live" in fall 2012. Many other partner libraries that are not receiving computer equipment are still benefitting by participating in VWFC training and accessing the VWFC's

YourWorkForceCenter.com portal, an online gateway for patrons who are looking for jobs, business owners who are seeking employees, and residents needing social services.



VWFCs are designed to bring many of the services found at regional workforce centers to employers and job seekers in remote and rural areas. Whereas many public access computers at libraries have a 30- to 60-minute limit per session, the dedicated VWFC workstations allow patrons to use the computers for the time necessary for completing online job applications.

By co-locating the library's technology resources and the Workforce Center's career development resources inside of the library's physical space, VWFCs are able to provide patrons with enhanced access to computers, high-speed internet, and the YourWorkForceCenter.com portal, as well as assistance from Workforce Center staff and library staff – all without having to drive to a distant Regional Workforce Center.

Since some workstations will be equipped with a camera, microphone, and an ISDN video line, patrons will even be able to make appointments for virtual face-to-face counseling sessions with Workforce Center staff. There are plans for many VWFCs to offer training sessions for job seekers on creating resumes, preparing for job interviews, and much more. For those who live far from regional offices, the VWFCs are powerful and accessible resources for improving employment prospects.

BTOP Computer Training Classes

In 2011, BTOP sites offered 22 classes on business development and 93 classes on job seeking, including those for the VWFC program. As comments on class evaluations show, these computer training classes met the needs of a variety of participants, including job seekers looking to improve their resumes or perform better on job skills tests, as well as employed patrons looking to update or improve their job skills.

Comments from PCC Computer Training Class Participants

"This was great and the fact that it was free is the most amazing part. I have been at a disadvantage in not being proficient at the MS Office programs while looking for a new job and now I can add these courses to my resume."

"Thank you very much!!! I am taking a test for the City and County tomorrow, and this class was very helpful. I would come back and access the resources available for future reference."

"I used to be great with Excel, but haven't used it since college. I'm starting a new job where I'll need that knowledge and this was a great way to brush up on those skills."

"I was thrilled about the helpful instruction of [PCC staff member]. She is a gem and I will be able to use these skills at my job. Thank you for providing this service."



Conclusion

The Virtual Workforce Center at the Library initiative is a direct result of multiple state agencies partnering and working together toward the same goal to boost statewide economic recovery. Libraries provide a space where technology, trained staff, and equipment physically come together so that employers can find skilled workers and job-seekers can find meaningful employment. With their newly expanded role as career development centers, libraries are clearly full partners in the statewide initiative to power Colorado's economic turnaround. As Jamie Hollier, BTOP Project Coordinator commented, *"These computer centers are much more than just a computer and internet access. They are an education place, a gathering place. They fill a lot of roles, especially in rural Colorado. The [BTOP] program has been integral to giving us the access to resources and tools and training to help make sure that no one gets left behind."*⁷

"One of the women I talked to in class has been looking for work for a year and finding that every place she talked to requires an online application, but she had never used a computer before. Our class Monday was the first time she'd successfully navigated from one web page to another, and she's excited about the Word class, because she's never had a digital version of a resume and she can't find work without one."

-PCC Staff Member

For more information about CSL's BTOP project, visit <http://coloradovirtuallibrary.org/btop/>.

¹ The other Fast Facts in this series report on 2011 location, equipment, usage, and training data [http://www.lrs.org/documents/fastfacts/311_bridging_digital_divide.pdf]; and participant satisfaction with computer training classes [http://www.lrs.org/documents/fastfacts/312_computer_class_satisfaction.pdf].

² 2010-2011 Public Library Funding & Technology Access Survey funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Information Policy & Access Center. (2011). *Public library funding & technology access survey. Public libraries & employment*. Retrieved from <http://plinternetsurvey.org/sites/default/files/publications/employmentbrief2011.pdf>

³ National Association of Workforce Boards. (2010). *Local Workforce Investment Board Partnerships with Local Libraries*. Retrieved from <http://nawb.org/documents/Research/Library%20Report%201a.pdf>

⁴ 2011-2012 Public Library Funding & Technology Access Survey funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Information Policy & Access Center. (2012). *Public library funding & technology access survey. Public libraries & employment: Colorado state brief*. Retrieved from <http://www.plinternetsurvey.org/advocacy/state-details?id=CO>

⁵ Krauth, D.S., Murray, K., Yee, D.L. (2012) Raising the bar for job seekers in the Pueblo City-County Library District. *Colorado Libraries Journal*, Issue 36.3. Retrieved from <http://www.coloradolibrariesjournal.org/articles/raising-bar-job-seekers-pueblo-city-county-library-district>

⁶ EAGLE-Net Alliance Quarterly Newsletter: Government & Technology. 2012-Q2. *The Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium: Virtual Workforce Centers @ the Libraries*. Retrieved from

<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs009/1104865671015/archive/1109594789842.html>

⁷ *Libraries: More Than Books*, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation video, <http://youtu.be/4pzJEbL2tak>

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