

CASE STUDY: Asotin County 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 the Asotin County Library System (ACL) for its career center and its role in filling gaps in access to services for job seekers in a rural workforce development system.

Overview of the case

Asotin County Library is a small library system in a rural area in eastern Washington State on the border with Idaho.¹ ACL is a valued community institution and its staff are broadly and deeply engaged in the community. The system is notable for its direct workforce development service provision through its Job and Career Catalyst Center, which currently has staffing for 16 hours a week and provides one-on-one job search assistance, interest inventories, resume and cover letter writing, skill identification, mock interviews, some digital literacy, and referrals. The Asotin County Library case study provides an opportunity to understand the role that libraries can play in rural communities, particularly if formal workforce development system services are not proximate or are insufficient for demand.

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

¹ The branch located in Asotin High School closed due to a change in the law that requires a maximum class size of 21, which transitioned library space to classroom space.

community hub (see figure below). 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
Library Designed and Led Services	Standard services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
Partnerships	Community hub services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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, 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 Asotin County Library, the Mt. Auburn

team conducted ten interviews. The team conducted nine of these interviews onsite in Clarkston, Washington, during an April 1, 2022 site visit and one interview virtually over Zoom on April 15, 2022. Of the ten interviewees, four were library system staff, five represented workforce development organizations, and one was an economic development actor. The Mt. Auburn team used semi-structured protocols to guide stakeholder interviews.

Community context

To better understand Asotin County 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 the region more broadly.

Library system

Asotin County Library, established in 1913, is in Asotin County, Washington. The library is historically a three-branch library system; however, the Asotin Branch in Asotin High School closed due to a change in the law that requires a maximum class size of 21, which transitioned library space to classroom space. The branch remained closed as of June 2022, and the library is considering whether to reopen it a couple of days a week or open a bookmobile in place of the high school branch altogether. The system’s two open branches are in Clarkston (the Downtown and Heights branches).

ACL is an independent taxing district. A board of library trustees oversees the system where the Asotin County Board of Commissioners has the authority to appoint the five members. Members serve a five-year term and are limited to ten years of service on the board.

In FY19, the system had total revenues of \$904,351. Ninety-seven percent of this funding is through county property tax assessments for the library district. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit Asotin County Library Foundation, formed in 2008 with a mission to “support a vibrant, modern library system that serves the diverse needs of everyone in [the] community in perpetuity,” provides additional financial support to the library and leverages other funding, such as grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. ACL is also supporting renovations of an Early Literacy Center, a STEAM Lab, and

Library	Asotin County Library
Service area	Asotin County, WA
Population of service area	22,520
# of branches*	3
Administrative structure	Library District
Operating revenue	\$904,351
Operating revenue per capita	\$40.16
Total paid staff (FTE)	9.8
# of adult programs**	313
# of internet computers	27
Computers per 1,000 population	1.2
* 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.	

accessibility, data, furniture, and electrical upgrades.² In 2019, a \$923,000 line item from the state legislature capital budget supported these renovations.³ In FY 2019, IMLS awarded ACL with a \$50,000 grant through the Accelerating Promising Practices for Small Libraries program for an Open Data project.

The system’s most recently posted strategic plan is from 2018 with two goals: to complete building projects and to attract and retain patrons.⁴

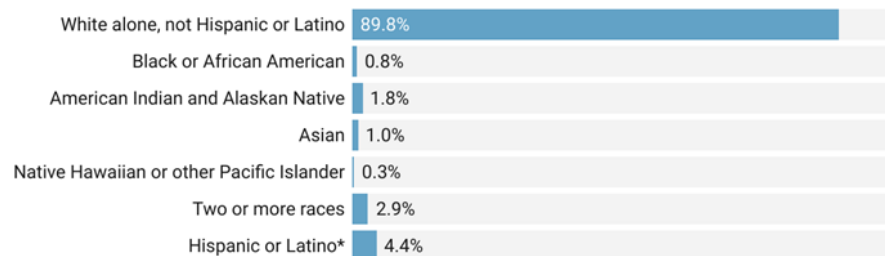
Community conditions

Asotin County, part of the Lewiston, ID-WA Metropolitan Statistical Area, is in the southeasternmost corner of Washington State, bordered by the Snake River and Idaho to the east and Oregon to the south. Clarkston, the location of the main branch, is the largest city in the county and is just across the river from Lewiston, Idaho. The proximity of Clarkston and Lewiston creates a unique interstate community that operates as one in many aspects of daily life.

Community Conditions	Asotin County	United States
Unemployment rate	5.8%	5.4%
Persons in poverty	14.1%	11.4%
Median household income	\$53,941	\$64,994
In civilian labor force	55.8%	63.0%
HS graduate or higher (> 25 y.o.)	91.0%	88.5%
BA or higher (> 25 y.o.)	23.4%	32.9%
Foreign-born persons	3.1%	13.5%
Households with internet access	83.7%	85.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016-2020 American Community Survey, 5-year average, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

Racial and ethnic breakdown of Asotin County



* 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

Asotin County has a population of 22,285, according to the 2020 U.S. Census, a population increase of 3 percent since 2010. The city is predominantly white (89.8 percent), with small Hispanic or Latino (4.4 percent) and Native American populations

² Foundation. Asotin County Library. Accessed July 6, 2022. <https://asotincountylibrary.org/using-the-library/foundation/>

³ Sandaine, Kerri. “Library Gets State Funding Boost.” The Lewiston Tribune. May 3, 2019. https://lmtribune.com/northwest/library-gets-state-funding-boost/article_2f1d192b-a0c4-5249-844e-b79dfff1df96.html#:~:text=An%20ongoing%20renovation%20project%20at,library's%20next%20round%20of%20improvements.

⁴ Strategic Plan. Asotin County Library, February 4, 2019. <https://asotincountylibrary.org/using-the-library/strategic-plan/>

(1.8 percent). The county has a relatively low median household income and a poverty rate well above the national average. More than half of students in the school district are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.⁵

The Nez Perce tribe were the original settlers of Asotin County. Subsequently, settlers following the path of Lewis and Clark, who passed through Asotin County in 1805, came to the area and by the mid-19th century had pushed the area's Native American population from Asotin County to reservations in Idaho. The new settlers established a trading center.

The town of Asotin incorporated in 1880, and the region became a hub for agriculture and the production of alcohol during prohibition.⁶ Various agricultural and infrastructural advances during the late 19th century aided the growth of Asotin County and contributed to its booming agricultural and mining industry.⁷ Notably, the Lower Snake River Project changed the economy of Asotin County by creating one of the longest inland water routes in the nation, providing the county access to the Pacific Ocean via the Snake River.⁸

Today, Asotin County encompasses two cities, two Census-designated places, and five unincorporated communities, spanning 641 miles. The largest industries in Asotin County are health care and social assistance, manufacturing, and retail trade.⁹ The largest employers in Asotin County are Washington State University, the University of Idaho, Clearwater Paper, and the Nez Perce Tribe.¹⁰

Three district commissioners, a select number of elected officers, and five boards and commissions govern Asotin County.

Through its participation in Valnet, a consortium of 16 public and school libraries with 42 locations, ACL provides a shared online patron catalog, the ability to check out and return items and pay fines at member libraries, e-book and audiobook downloads, and daily courier service with libraries in the broader region of Southeastern Washington and North Central Idaho.

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

⁵ Stakeholder interview, April 11, 2022.

⁶ Explore Washington State. Asotin County. Explore Washington State, September 28, 2017. <https://explore.washingtonstate.com/asotin-county-washington>

⁷ Suljic, Ajsa. Asotin County Profile. Employment Security Department, Washington State, January 2022. <https://esd.wa.gov/labormarketinfo/county-profiles/asotin>

⁸ "Asotin County." Washington State Wiki. Fandom. Accessed July 6, 2022. https://washingtonstate.fandom.com/wiki/Asotin_County

⁹ Asotin County, WA. Data USA. Accessed July 6, 2022. <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/asotin-county-wa#economy>

¹⁰ Area Profile. Valley Vision. Accessed July 6, 2022. <https://lewis-clarkvalley.org/area-profile/>

workforce and small business ecosystems. This section reviews the state-level and community-level systems in which the Asotin County Library operates.

State-level support: policies, funding, and infrastructure

State Library administrative agency

The Washington State Library sits within the Office of the Secretary of State and is advised by the statewide Library Council of Washington. The State Library's mission is to connect Washington through the power of libraries. Its vision is to build prosperous and informed communities by providing technology, access to information, resources, and professional support. It has seven strategic goals:¹¹

- Foster civic engagement.
- Preserve and share Washington's stories.
- Serve all who cannot read standard print.
- Support the incarcerated and hospitalized in their recovery and release.
- Promote economic growth, education, and life-long learning.
- Build and maintain a federal and state depository program.
- Develop professional skills and build capacity among all libraries.

The State Library coordinates services and helps secure federal or private funding for libraries throughout the state. It also provides training, sub-grants, and credential certification for librarians. The State Library website cites the state's Department of Labor and Industries as a library partner, as is the Department of Social and Health Services. Additionally, the State Library has a full-time state and federally funded workforce development librarian to facilitate support for workforce development efforts.

The State Library uses state funds to support statewide access to online platforms of importance to workforce development, including LinkedIn Learning and Microsoft Imagine Academy, a statewide initiative supporting in-demand IT careers and certification.

Washington's annual Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants to States program allotment from IMLS in 2021 was \$3.7 million. In addition, IMLS provided the State Library with \$688,070 in CARES funds and \$3.676 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds.

The State Library contracted with the University of Washington Information School to complete a needs assessment and help develop its 2018-2022 LSTA five-year plan. Several findings from the needs assessment are relevant to the library's workforce development services and measurement.

¹¹ "Strategic Goals Washington State Library." Office of the Secretary of State, Washington State Library, n.d. https://www.sos.wa.gov/_assets/library/wslstratgoals.pdf

First, the needs assessment noted that libraries must form partnerships with other organizations to extend their reach and deliver services effectively. Second, the needs assessment stated that library leaders need clear data about how people use library services and the outcomes they achieve. The needs assessment also recommended increased training opportunities on evaluation practices and the facilitation of common metrics among libraries throughout the state. The assessment noted uncertainty about what to measure and how to gather reliable information as bigger issues than concerns regarding patron privacy.¹²

The Washington LSTA five-year plan also reflects a focus on workforce development. Three supporting strategies directly relate to the library's effort in workforce development:

- Strategy 1.1: Coordinate with libraries, Workforce Development, and organizations that support underserved and marginalized individuals to support adult basic education, non-traditional learning, life-skills training, and digital literacy for academic and job readiness.
- Strategy 1.2: Work with the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) and the Department of Corrections (DOC) to improve the employability of inmates in preparation for their release by improving their digital literacy skills.
- Strategy 1.3: Improve employability prospects for the recently released by supporting them to become Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certified in one or more Microsoft Office applications.

These strategies aim to improve patrons' ability to use resources and apply information for employment support. As noted in the state plan, the "Workforce Development project is actively working with local libraries, academic institutions, and workforce development entities to bring resources to this [type of] service area."¹³

The five-year plan notes that the Washington State Library currently partners with WorkSource Washington, Washington Community and Technical Colleges, and Washington DOC by serving on committees, exploring common interests, and working together on activities to further digital literacy and job readiness.

Libraries are also active in the Adult Education Advisory Council (AEAC), which includes diverse education, workforce, and business stakeholders. As noted in the state workforce plan, *Talent and Prosperity for All*, "Membership in the AEAC includes representatives from the Basic Education for Adults division of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), higher education, adult education, community-based organizations, private sector employers, business, private literacy organizations, economic

¹² Washington State Library. "Washington State Library Services And Technology Act Plan 2018–2022." Institute of Museum and Library Services, June 29, 2017. <https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/state-profiles/plans/washington5yearplan.pdf>

¹³ Washington State Library. "Washington State Library Services And Technology Act Plan 2018–2022." Institute of Museum and Library Services, June 29, 2017. <https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/state-profiles/plans/washington5yearplan.pdf>

development councils, library programs, labor programs, corrections education, and the general public.”¹⁴

State workforce system

The Washington State workforce system (WorkSource) helps residents find jobs, access training, and advance in their careers while simultaneously providing businesses with a skilled workforce. Washington State Employment Security Department (ESD) and the regional Workforce Development Councils (WDC) administer it. The state Workforce Board coordinates 16 programs and monitors and evaluates the 12 largest state workforce programs. Twelve WDCs direct federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) activities.

Talent and Prosperity for All cites libraries as a potential partner to create remote workforce connection sites around the state. The workforce plan specifies opportunities with public libraries and other possible connection sites to provide Title I services, including:¹⁵

- Increasing partnership between Title I local workforce boards and public libraries as the latter have “brick and mortar” sites and electronic accessibility to host one-stop connection sites.
- The State Library has been an active planning partner and has expressed interest in building a stronger partnership with the workforce development system for better strategic coordination of services.
- Coordination among workforce development system partners can yield new possibilities for WorkSource connection sites statewide, such as at housing authorities, food banks, etc.

The state plan also acknowledges the increased reach that libraries can provide: “Increasingly regional library systems carry on joint activities with one-stops. Individuals who frequent libraries and who may not be aware of one-stops fall into several categories that can benefit from services.” It notes that through partnerships with libraries, “Staff provide not just program connections and basic information but put a friendly face on the system.” The plan includes Washington libraries as eligible providers for workforce grant funding to provide education and training, which was not true for all case study libraries in other states.

Local workforce and business development ecosystems

Workforce development system

The Eastern Washington Partnership WDC designs and administers the nine-county eastern region of WorkSource, including the counties of Asotin, Columbia, Ferry, Garfield, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens, Walla Walla, and Whitman.

¹⁴ “Talent And Prosperity For All: The Strategic Plan for Unlocking Washington’s Workforce Potential.” Washington Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board, March 2020. <https://www.wtb.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TAP-Update-2020-030420.pdf>

¹⁵ “Talent And Prosperity For All: The Strategic Plan for Unlocking Washington’s Workforce Potential.” Washington Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board, March 2020. <https://www.wtb.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/TAP-Update-2020-030420.pdf>

There are two full-service WorkSource centers in the Eastern Washington region, including one in Walla Walla, which serves the counties of Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla, and Whitman. Rural Resources Community Action (Rural Resources) operates an affiliate WorkSource center in Clarkston and serves the counties of Asotin and Garfield. Affiliate centers typically offer most employment and training services onsite; however, due to the pandemic, WorkSource has not been able to staff its physical location in Clarkston. Rural Resources stakeholders mentioned that the Employment Security Department will move to Rural Resources' office, which will help with staffing onsite. Once this site has adequate staffing, the Clarkston office will be a full-service WorkSource center. A WorkSource Connection site at the Clarkston campus of Walla Walla Community College provides electronic connections to most employment and training services.¹⁶

The city of Lewiston, Idaho, is just across the river from Clarkston. The states of Idaho and Washington have reciprocal agreements that enable customers to enroll in training programs in either state.

The Clarkston campus of Walla Walla Community College and Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston are the primary providers of postsecondary academic and career education in the immediate region. Additionally, Washington State University and the University of Idaho are each 30 miles away.

Business development system

The Idaho Small Business Development Center (Idaho SBDC) is a partnership between the U.S. Small Business Administration, the state of Idaho, and Idaho's institutions of higher education. Lewis-Clark State College operates the North Central Idaho SBDC in Lewiston, Idaho.¹⁷

Local actors within the business development ecosystem include the following:

- *Port of Clarkston*: The Port of Clarkston is an economic development entity that has a mission knitted closely with workforce and business development: "To deliver property, facilities, and infrastructure that encourage private investment, create wealth for constituents, create family-wage jobs, diversify and stabilize the local economy, and create a sustainable environment."¹⁸
- *Southeast Washington Economic Development Association (SEWEDA)*: SEWEDA "seeks to create a more prosperous, successful, diversified and sustainable region within Southeast Washington by providing leadership and resources for the success of future businesses." SEWEDA is responsible for developing the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) every five years (funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce), and its strategy cites libraries as an infrastructure asset.

¹⁶ WorkSource locator. WorkSourceWA. Accessed July 6, 2022.

<https://www.worksourcewa.com/microsite/content.aspx?appid=MGSWAOFFLOC&pagetype=simple&seo=officelocator>

¹⁷ North Central Idaho Small Business Development Center. Lewis-Clark State College. Accessed July 6, 2022.

<https://www.lcsc.edu/sbdc>

¹⁸ Our Mission. Port of Clarkston, June 14, 2022. <https://portofclarkston.com/your-port/meet-us/>

- *Clearwater Economic Development Association (CEDA):* CEDA drives regional development and provides local governments guidance on economic diversification, improved community livability, and collective prosperity within the Idaho counties of Clearwater, Idaho, Latah, Lewis, and Nez Perce.¹⁹

Library workforce and business development services

Overview of the library's approach

ACL's signature workforce development service is its Job and Career Catalyst Center in the main branch. At the career center, patrons can receive one-on-one career coaching services. If a patron requests workforce development services at a branch, staff will refer them to the career center at the main branch, which is between four and six miles away from the branches. If preferred, ACL can provide career-coaching services via Zoom. ACL does not currently provide small business development services, although staff expressed a desire to do so in the future.

Workforce development services

Standard services

ACL has many standard services available to patrons seeking employment, including:

- *Online training programs and employment databases:* ACL offers patrons access to workforce development training, courses, and support through Brainfuse (JobNow), LearningExpress Library, LinkedIn Learning, Gale Courses and databases, Tech-Talk, and Washington Career Bridge.
- *Reference desk questions and supports:* Librarians help patrons with resume and job search questions, including software-related questions, or by directing them to relevant print resources (e.g., a book of sample resumes), but they typically refer to the career coach for these types of assistance.

Specialized services

For a small library, ACL has developed an extensive set of direct services to address the needs of patrons seeking employment or looking to advance their careers:

- *Job and career kits:* With a \$1,500 grant, the library created 100 "job and career kits" that included information on the resources ACL offers job seekers as well as information from other partners, including Walla Walla Community College, Lewis-Clark State College, and the Washington and Idaho state employment offices. The kits, distributed in 2021, also included a notepad, pencil, and a postage-stamped thank you card that the job seeker could send to an employer after an interview. In the kit, ACL marketed a \$5 gift card incentive for making an appointment at the career center and a \$5 gift card incentive if the client filled out an evaluation about their experience. Library staff gave kits to community partners to share with their clients and distributed them to patrons.

¹⁹ Clearwater Economic Development Association. Accessed July 6, 2022. <https://clearwater-eda.org/>

- *Job and Career Catalyst Center:* The career center opened in January 2015 with State Library grant funding from IMLS. With a focus on digital literacy, the library-funded career coach at the time offered classes on basic computing and various software platforms. Presently, the regular operating budget provides funding for the career center and focuses on one-on-one career coaching (see sidebar). The career coach is open for walk-ins or appointments between 12 and 16 hours a week. Services offered include resume development, skills inventory, practice tests for the GED and licenses, and other career services. The career center primarily serves Asotin County residents but never denies service to visitors outside of its service area, including residents of Lewiston, Idaho, as the Lewiston City Library does not have this resource and will refer patrons.

Job and Career Catalyst Center

ACL's Downtown Branch is home to the Job and Career Catalyst Center, which provides patrons with access to career services Monday through Thursday. Residents can arrange a meeting with the library's career coach, who offers appointments throughout the week. The career coach assists patrons with resume development, skills inventory, practice tests for the GED and licenses, and other career service needs.

The career center opened in 2015, driven by a specific staff member's interest in providing career services that aligned with a grant opportunity. A State Library IMLS grant initially funded the career center, but ACL operation's budget currently funds it.

The career coach is a retired former vice president of a community college with extensive experience and training in career education and curriculum development. Many stakeholders credit the quality of the career center services to the expertise the current coach provides.

- *Specialized training classes:* A library-paid certified instructor delivers free Microsoft Office Suite training classes at the library. ACL is a Certiport Certification Center, which is an authorized testing center for Microsoft Office Suite. While offerings have varied over time, additional examples of classes ACL has provided include financial literacy, library databases, and the Google Suite.
- *Digital navigators:* ACL's new digital navigator program is an expansion of the library's longtime standard service of providing one-on-one digital literacy appointments in-house. ACL partnered with Connect Washington to join a large pandemic-related grant opportunity (Emergency Broadband Benefit) from the state broadband office to fund two digital navigators.²⁰ One digital navigator is a full-time library employee who spends eight to ten hours a week in this role. The other is a part-time employee whose only responsibility is as a digital navigator in the community. At the time of the site visit, ACL had successfully identified a regular community digital navigator placement at the Clarkston campus of Walla Walla Community College who provides technology help and online skill training in the college's library two days a week. Navigators use Northstar, a digital literacy assessment and skill-building platform. The navigators also help patrons apply

²⁰ The Emergency Broadband Benefit is a federal assistance program that (and the subsequent Affordable Connectivity Program) provides subsidies for household internet service (<https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>). Connect Washington Coalition is a collaborative of digital access stakeholders in Washington working to increase digital access for marginalized communities (<https://connect-wa.org/>). The ConnectWA grant is through the Washington State Broadband Office at the Department of Commerce.

for the Affordable Connectivity Program, which provides subsidies for household internet connections.

- *Work placement site:* ACL contributes to workforce development directly by acting as a worksite for youth. Rural Resources, a WorkSource contractor, places youth participating in WIOA Title II with paid work experience at the library. ACL and Rural Resources staff jointly manage youth participants. ACL is also a Pre-Employment Transition Services work placement site for students with disabilities receiving Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Community hub services

ACL currently does not offer community hub services in the workforce development sphere.

Small business development services

ACL does not provide small business development services outside of standard offerings in its print collection and online training platforms. Library staff will refer patrons to a small business development center in Lewiston.

Standard services

Standard services for business development include business skills and entrepreneurship courses in Gale Courses and LinkedIn Learning.

Specialized services

ACL does not provide small business development specialized services.

Community hub services

ACL does not provide small business development community hub services.

Service administration

Staffing and management

The career coach, who has an advanced degree in career education and is retired from a career as a community college administrator (see sidebar above), predominately provides workforce development services. The career coach was initially working on contract, and ACL later hired the coach. The adult services librarian also helps patrons with services and supports that intersect with workforce development but refers patrons needing that specialized support to the career coach. ACL encourages all staff to help patrons with digital literacy needs, but the library has guidelines on when to refer patrons to one of the two digital navigators.

In terms of specific workforce development training, staff have pursued many of the software-related trainings and certifications available to patrons, as well as library staff-specific trainings, like Google-sponsored Libraries Lead with Digital Skills, to better support community learning of certain products. ACL contracted with a Microsoft-certified local high school teacher to conduct the Microsoft Office Suite classes.

System support and role

ACL offers all workforce development services out of the main branch. Library staff refer any patron requests for workforce development services to the main branch.

Funding

ACL is an independent taxing district funded through property taxes. It receives support for some databases from the state. Specialized services are mainly or exclusively grant-funded, including state library grants. Community partners do not provide any funding for ACL's workforce development services.

Since grantors are typically interested in funding start-up costs and rarely fund ongoing operations, ACL has had to contend with maintaining continuity in workforce development service offerings and staffing in a changeable funding environment. However, when possible and prioritized, ACL rolls specialized services into the operations budget once a grant sunsets. For example, when the initial career center State Library grant expired, ACL absorbed the costs for the career coach into the library budget (approximately \$15,000 annually). Funding for ACL's classes is half by grants and half through the library's budget. Additionally, the State Library supports workforce development online databases. ACL may seek grant funding for databases outside of those supported by the state and typically rolls the database costs into operations once grant funding runs out. ACL now pays approximately \$8,000 annually, specifically for online career-related database subscriptions. Grants fund the current digital navigators program and the past acquisitions of laptop kits, hotspots, and job and career kits. ARPA and Emergency Connectivity Fund dollars cover the cost of hotspot service plans.

How they determine what to offer

The signature workforce development service of Asotin County Library, the Job and Career Catalyst Center, is in honor of a former employee who died unexpectedly at age 28 and had always wanted a career center at the library. Momentum around the idea grew when ACL was planning its expansion, adding a second floor to the library that could include space for the center. ACL was finally able to act on this vision with the help of a State Library grant to staff the career center.

ACL pursues other offerings, including digital navigators and classes, based on perceived need and if the library can secure funding.

Marketing of services

ACL's central marketing strategies include networking, relationship building, and word of mouth. ACL uses both informal and formal means to market its career services. The primary method is through informal networking out in the community or when interacting with consortia members (additional details below). This also includes participation in community events. For example, the career coach attends four job fairs annually to share information on the library's career center offerings.

Formal means of marketing include paid newspaper, radio, and TV ads, which ACL is using at this time to advertise the digital navigators and Microsoft Office Suite classes. ACL also uses social media, its website, and its newsletter to distribute information about its services. Rural Resources stakeholders reported that they display library flyers in their offices. As described above, ACL's job and career kits, which were a resource for job seekers in the region, also acted as a marketing tool

for the career center. To increase career center patronage, ACL leveraged grant funds to give clients a Starbucks or Walmart gift card if they made an appointment.

One marketing challenge for the career center is that many of its clients are economically disadvantaged and may not view the library or the library's website as the "go-to" place for job-seeking assistance. For these potential clients in particular, referrals from other agencies are the key path to the career center.

Aspirations

At present, library leadership has no interest in doing more in the area of workforce development services, as well as in other domains, because the staff is already spread thin. However, ACL leadership did express tentative interest in expanding business-related resources and collections, although they did not identify anything concrete.

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

Library collaboration with ecosystem partners

ACL has cultivated relationships with many workforce development, economic development, and social service providers in the region. These relationships take the form of limited formal and frequent informal partnerships and participation in consortia.

- *Informal and formal partnerships:* Except for the new digital navigators program, ACL does not have formal partnerships with other service providers. However, ACL is interested in more formal partnerships and has pursued them in the past. For example, the library sought a WIOA grant through WorkSource to expand its workforce development services into Dayton in Whitman County with partners in the area. However, ACL found the rules around WIOA-funded services too limiting and decided not to submit the grant application.

ACL also hoped to partner with Walla Walla Community College to implement the 21 Plus Program to help people over age 21 without a high school diploma achieve a diploma (not a GED). However, a program requirement for a cohort of ten at each location (the library and the college) stymied this endeavor. A small community like Clarkston was not likely to meet that participation threshold.

ACL is currently in initial conversations with a new local program in development, Stone Bridge Reentry Services, which will serve formerly incarcerated individuals, to see what career coaching or digital literacy services the library can provide for the program.

Several stakeholders indicated that they would be interested in partnering with ACL. For instance, Vocational Rehabilitation stakeholders expressed an interest in potentially working with the library on digital literacy and social media awareness training for its clients. Vocational Rehabilitation lacks the computers for robust training of this kind. School district stakeholders suggested an interest in a community classroom experience where Career and Technical Education students create and implement a marketing plan for the library. And community college stakeholders would like to see a collaboration of diverse industry sectors, workforce

development actors, educators, and the library to develop regional strategies to address the labor shortage.

Despite limited formal partnerships with workforce development providers, interview respondents from the public workforce development system noted the importance of ACL in augmenting service workforce development capacity in the region, especially considering the limited presence, schedules, and proximity of more traditional providers.

- *Participation in regional consortia:* ACL spearheads or is involved in several regional consortia, including taking the lead in developing a Broadband Action Team to increase broadband access to residents. A key partner in this effort, the Port of Clarkston, received several million dollars to expand broadband access. The Broadband Action Team was responsible for gaining the support of local internet service providers (ISPs) to back the effort.

Additionally, ACL is involved in a “career development team” that comprises representatives from Vocational Rehabilitation, Walla Walla Community College, WorkSource, Rural Resources Community Action, Lewis-Clark State College, SEWEDA, the local school districts, and others. The group started meeting several years ago and currently meets once or twice a year. Meetings consist of networking and information sharing, including grants ACL is working on or career center offerings.

In January 2022, the Walla Walla WorkSource office implemented a new Clarkston Pullman Business Services Team to reconnect with employers. ACL’s career coach is a participant on that team. This collaboration brought the library’s workforce development efforts to the attention of the WorkSource staff, who view the library as both providing needed in-person capacity (the Clarkston office has not fully re-staffed) and serving a population that may not be eligible for WorkSource. They also see the library as providing an important role for individuals who need to acquire basic digital literacy skills before they can participate in WorkSource services or need computer and internet access to participate in virtual training. WorkSource staff interviewees considered the collaboration with ACL a collective effort, with both agencies working in tandem to fulfill customer needs. The business development team collaboration is currently informal, although there is talk about ways to formalize the partnership and better weave their services together.

ACL is part of Valnet, a regional consortium of 16 public and school library agencies with 42 locations. Patrons can access materials from across the consortium through Valnet. The consortium does not coordinate or collaborate on workforce or business development per se, but the director indicated that the consortium members know about the ACL career center and make referrals to it.

The adult services librarian participates in the Interagency Council, a collaborative that is broader than workforce development and consists of the area’s nonprofits and libraries. Council members meet for an hour on the first Thursday of the month to resource share. At a recent meeting, the adult services librarian shared about the digital navigators program. The director is also the president of the Rotary Club, which offers many informal networking opportunities for the library with community leaders.

Library's position in the greater ecosystem

ACL fills a significant niche in the greater ecosystem, providing additional capacity in the workforce system by delivering services for those underserved or unserved by traditional workforce and vocational rehabilitation services providers. ACL is willing to take time, which other system actors cannot, to work deeply with patrons on career development. Consequently, ecosystem actors regularly and enthusiastically refer their customers to the library.

- *Evidence of filling system gaps:* ACL's experience trying to secure a WIOA grant helped develop its sense of its niche in the workforce development ecosystem, which is providing easy and open access to career development services, particularly for patrons who would not be eligible for WIOA services. ACL staff can spend time with clients with very limited skills, which other agencies, particularly public agencies, do not have the staffing to do. As the career coach stated, "There is no one else out there doing this in the community." The agencies interviewed tended to agree, including the public workforce development providers, viewing library workforce development services as complementary, not competing. Stakeholders also valued the free classes ACL provides, noting that the expense of the training and certification can be a barrier to patrons' ability to build skill sets and advance their careers.
- *Evidence of expanding system reach:* Interviewees stated that community service agencies (like Rural Resources), public workforce development providers (like WorkSource and Vocational Rehabilitation), private companies, and secondary schools regularly refer patrons to the career center for the unrestricted workforce development service offerings as well as for standard services like computer access and printing. In terms of referring out, library staff perceived that referrals from ACL to other community services are less frequent than referrals to ACL, potentially, in part, because people tend to know the local service system and will go directly to other agencies that provide the services they need. In addition, ACL's career coach is able to help clients create online accounts with WorkSource or apply for unemployment, so referrals are not always necessary nor helpful since WorkSource's affiliate center at Rural Resources in Clarkston, which would typically provide these services, does not have adequate staffing. Nevertheless, when needed, the career coach will refer clients to public workforce development services or to the Clarkston campus of Walla Walla Community College for training programs.

Right now, I'm helping a lot of people that really have no technology skills. They don't know anything about a computer. They don't know anything about the internet. I teach them how to use the mouse. I do a lot of storytelling and explaining what the question is (for assessments required by employers) because they don't understand it. No one has time to do that. But the service we do here, the one-on-one, there is no one else out there doing this in the community.

In the future, when the Employment Security Department moves into the Rural Resources' Clarkston office and has adequate staffing, stakeholders hypothesized that there could be less need to refer customers to ACL. However, stakeholders also tended to agree that the open-access public services at ACL reach the otherwise unserved or underserved segment of the population. Moreover, they reported that the public library is a welcoming place for residents who may feel intimidated by the community college or formal service providers.

The career development tools that they have work in tandem with what (WorkSource) can provide...and it's okay that things overlap in that sense, because we want to make sure that the customer is getting the resources that they need.

ACL believes that its career center has a well-known presence throughout the region, but it still contends with the persistent image that libraries are “just books.” Therefore, ACL actively seeks partnership opportunities rather than waiting for partners to come to the library because library staff sense that partners would not see the library as a place for workforce development-type

services without this outreach. Examples of this type of proactive outreach include the digital navigators and the Broadband Action Team partnerships with the Port of Clarkston.

Pandemic response and recovery

Overview of library services during the pandemic

When the March 2020 shutdown went into effect, the Asotin County Library had already closed to walk-in traffic due to the remodel of its main branch. It had just started offering curbside services during the remodel, and, during the shutdown, it became the only method of loaning materials. The career center closed along with the library. While the career center did offer online consultations, there was little demand. During the pandemic, ACL amplified its efforts to increase digital and internet access for patrons, and that effort continues.

Approach to workforce and business development services during the pandemic

The pandemic revealed to the community that a considerable proportion of the population in Asotin County lacked internet access and digital literacy skills. Given the impact this lack has on the ability to work and operate in an increasingly digitized world, many of ACL's pandemic-related activities centered on addressing these deficiencies by increasing the library's WiFi signal to its parking lot and loaning patrons hotspots.

After the initial shutdown, the career center was the first service that ACL reopened for physical access. The career coach would meet with clients one at a time, using shared screen capacity to allow the patron and the career coach to sit eight to ten feet apart while still viewing the same screen. This technology did not get significant use, but patrons and staff were happy to have it as an option.

Like many libraries, ACL increased its Wi-Fi signal to its parking lot and loaned patrons hotspots. Toward the end of the pandemic, ACL was the recipient of a Microsoft LinkedIn Learning grant that the library used to purchase laptop kits for patron checkouts, which consisted of a laptop, headphones, and a hot spot, which patrons could check out for a week at a time. ARPA and Emergency Connectivity Fund dollars support the hotspot service plans.

As soon as the Emergency Broadband Benefit dollars became available, ACL actively marketed that program, including sending someone door-to-door to promote access to subsidies for internet access. ACL participated in, and still participates in, the Asotin County Broadband Action Team, a consortium of community agencies seeking to expand high-speed internet access in Asotin County.

Learning from the pandemic

ACL reported the following learnings and observations:

- ACL did not feel that keeping the career center open virtually during the shutdown was very successful, partly because patrons using the career center may not be comfortable using Zoom or digital technology in general.
- In the past, ACL successfully implemented learning circles through Peer 2 Peer University, where groups of people get together to study a topic using an online course but with no teacher. This model translated well to virtual implementation for most topics, but the library found that it was not conducive to career development.
- ACL's emphasis on increasing digital literacy and access has continued into the post-pandemic period.
- The pandemic allowed staff to participate in professional development that they may not have had time for in the past. For example, the career coach participated in webinars on business development, entrepreneurship, and Bitcoin.

Tracking and measurement

The library system's approach to tracking and measurement

ACL primarily uses networking and storytelling to communicate its value to the community and the local workforce development system, although it did attempt to field a career center client satisfaction survey. In general, it appears ACL does not have a formal data strategy. ACL collects and analyzes data largely on an as-needed basis to create board and grant reports.

1. *General data collection on library operations:* ACL collects standard data necessary for state reports, but that report does not include workforce data. Similarly, the monthly report to the library's board of trustees includes statistics on circulation, door counts, meeting room use, event attendance, database searches, internet usage, website hits, volunteer hours, and additional miscellaneous statistics. Library staff reported using a collection of Excel documents to populate grant reports depending on grant requirements. ACL has not collected patron demographic data until the recent digital navigators grant that requests, but does not require, participant demographic information.
2. *Information requests and referrals:* At the front desk, staff track the services they provide, such as help logging on to the computer, printing, or using a particular database. Staff do not track workforce-related service requests and pointed out that they refer patrons with those questions to the career coach. The coach tracks the number of people the career center serves and the type of service provided. ACL does not track referrals into or out of the library.
3. *Usage of specialized online resources and website analytics:* ACL has access to usage and analytics data that staff compile on an as-needed basis.
4. *Outputs related to specialized and partner services:* The career coach counts the number of patrons using the career center and records the purpose of their visit by service areas, including interest inventory, job search, career coaching, test preparation, skill assessment, resume help, and other (e.g., food service cards).

ACL counts the number of patrons who visit the digital navigator out-stationed at the Walla Walla Community College library. Additionally, ACL gets assessment data from the digital navigator's implementation of the Northstar Digital Literacy assessment. Stakeholders hoped that community college students who engaged with the digital navigator program would see longer-term outcomes in increased online navigation and competency in the classroom; there is no effort at present to assess this other than anecdotally.

WorkSource's Clarkston Pullman Business Services Team, of which ACL is a part, is still in the early stages of development but plans to set goals for outreach and tracking progress on those goals. The group has just begun to discuss data sharing and may eventually use a joint tracking portal for all participants to record its outreach efforts.

5. *Outcomes related to services:* The career coach asks career center patrons for an email address to conduct follow-ups and learn whether patrons were successful in their job hunt. That has been unsuccessful due to low response rates. Often, word of mouth or simply seeing a former client out in the community is how the career coaches receive feedback. To combat the lack of feedback, ACL recently leveraged a grant to fund giving gift cards to clients who filled out an evaluation about their experience with the coaching session.
6. *Anecdotal evidence:* ACL uses stories in grant reports to drive home the impact of funded programs. For example, when the career center opened, the job-seeking cohort taking courses together became a close-knit group, and participants would return to report back to the group when they got a job. But that feedback only happened because of the relationships built; this has not been a common occurrence since. ACL emphasized how numbers alone can underreport success simply due to the challenges of following up with patrons. Further, ACL pointed to the multiplier effect that rarely factors into the numbers: for each person that the library helps find a job, the whole family benefits.

Outcome measurement challenges

ACL would like to know how many former career center clients obtained work, where they found a job, and how long they stayed. The career center's attempts to acquire this kind of outcome data have been challenging. Even with an email address (which coaches are not always able to get), follow-up with former career center clients is difficult. The career coach estimated that out of approximately 25 email addresses she collected and emailed, she received only one response a year later. And, despite requests, most patrons who receive career center coaching do not return to report on their success.

ACL's recent post-service evaluation survey did not provide the helpful feedback the library anticipated. The survey was simple "yes and no" questions, and staff felt clients filled the evaluations out quickly without much thought. It is possible that a better tool would generate more useful data.

Further, staff mused that interpreting the meaning of follow-up outcome data, even if they could collect it, warrants caution given the career center's self-service model and the potential for self-selection bias. That is, those who come to the career center may be more motivated people in less need of career services (and perhaps would have gotten a job anyway), while lower-skilled patrons who could benefit the most from career services may be less likely to seek them out. On the other hand, as noted above, ACL staff can spend time with clients with very limited skills, which other agencies, particularly public agencies, do not have the staffing to do. So, ACL works to circumvent

potential self-selection bias, at least in part through its networking with community partners and receipt of referrals from agencies that serve marginalized communities.

Interest and feasibility of implementing new outcome measurement systems

ACL staff spoke about the challenge of intentionality around measurement, actually deciding what is useful to track and then tracking it when staff are pulled in so many different directions. Particularly with new programming, ACL sees an opportunity to more intentionally identify intended outcomes and attempt to measure whether it was successful. ACL staff noted that they would value any assistance from the State Library or other resources that make it easier to collect data and share the library's story.

ACL staff generally thought a short, anonymous pop-up computer survey to measure workforce-related universal service usage would be an asset, as long as it was very easy to opt-out. Staff acknowledged the potential annoyance of a pop-up survey but felt the data would be valuable. Ensuring patrons could click it away would mitigate the annoyance.

Stakeholders from the workforce development system and Vocational Rehabilitation spoke about their mandated outcome measurements, evaluation, and continuous quality improvement systems in place to measure their workforce development outcomes and increase their impact. There may be metrics or strategies from these systems that could be adapted to library use while still maintaining patron privacy and retaining the open-access nature of service delivery. For example, Vocational Rehabilitation in Idaho and Washington use depersonalized unique identifiers to track clients.

To improve measurement, ACL is working with a University of Washington student on a database into which the library can input its statistics that align with all public libraries in the country and then create visualizations that compare ACL with other libraries of similar size.

Observations

✓ Relationship-building and extensive external engagement may be effective strategies to market library career services.

Asotin County Library primarily uses networking and relationship building to promote its career services, and this strategy has been successful. Ecosystem partners are keenly aware of the workforce development services ACL supplies, value the additional capacity it provides the system, and regularly refer customers to the library.

✓ Libraries might not necessarily need to prove their value in the workforce system through systematic outcome measurement.

Career center outcome measurement has proven challenging due to the open-access nature of services but, despite the lack of solid data, ecosystem stakeholders viewed ACL's offerings very favorably and do not appear to need outcome data to recognize and promote the value of the career center. Instead, their experience interacting in partnership with the library and observing participant experiences, either directly or anecdotally, provides renewed confidence in the value of library workforce development activities.

- ✓ **The skills of specific coaching staff may be a key factor in the success of a library's efforts to meet the workforce needs of patrons.**

Several stakeholders felt that the career center's success was due in large part to the current career coach's skills and experience. This, in turn, prompted concerns about the future of the career center when the current coach retires.

- ✓ **Library leadership that focuses on workforce development combined with state financial support may be key drivers for a library taking on specialized workforce development services.**

The ACL case study suggests that dynamic leadership supported by financing from the State Library was critical to the creation of the career center. A theme for further research may be the extent to which both, or one or the other, are needed to promote library engagement in workforce development.