

CASE STUDY: Memphis Public Libraries

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

September 2022

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 Memphis Public Libraries (MPL) primarily for its innovative workforce development services, including a mobile career center, and as an example of a midsize library system in the southern U.S.

Overview of the case

MPL, which provides services to residents in Memphis, Bartlett, and unincorporated Shelby County, Tennessee, is a valued community institution with workforce and small business development among its core services. MPL is unique in its connection with the city's social service network and its ability to innovate by bringing workforce services directly to residents who may otherwise feel disconnected from the library or unable to access a computer or the internet. MPL staff understand community needs and respond by delivering appropriate programs and services. The library system plays multiple roles, as a community resource, connector, and direct service provider.

This Memphis case study provides valuable learning related to data and measurement. MPL currently shares a bi-monthly and annual summary on its website of the high-level data it collects on the usage of library resources, attendance of programs, etc. Additionally, MPL uses data from health and human services calls to the city's 211 line to identify community needs. In the past, MPL staff employed survey tools that did not sufficiently serve their needs and required significant labor resources. MPL's experience with identifying community needs and combining the tracking of outputs with patron quotes and pictures for storytelling may generate learning for how libraries can effectively and realistically use data for program development and demonstrate their impact.

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
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
	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
Partnerships			

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 and completed virtually for those unable to meet in person. In the case of Memphis Public Libraries, the Mt. Auburn team conducted 12 interviews. The team conducted 11 of these interviews onsite in Memphis, Tennessee, during an April 7 to April 8, 2022 site visit and held one virtually over Zoom the following week. Of the 12 interviewees, three were library system staff, seven were branch staff, one was from the workforce system, and one was involved in small business development. The Mt. Auburn team used semi-structured protocols to guide stakeholder interviews.

Community context

To better understand MPL's role in providing workforce- and business development-related services, it is necessary 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 city of Memphis.

Library system

Memphis Public Libraries is a city library system with 18 outlets, including the central branch. Almost all of the system's branches are within the city of Memphis, with one in the suburb of Bartlett. Residents of Bartlett, Memphis, and unincorporated Shelby County are eligible for a library card.

The library system is part of the Memphis city government. The Memphis Public Libraries Board is responsible for advising the mayor on library services and leases, providing data to the state library agency, and establishing fees and rules.

The current library director has run the library since 2008 and has overseen the development of many innovative programs and initiatives. In addition to its workforce and business development programs, which are the subject of this case study, MPL is the only public library system in the country with its own television and radio station, and it houses Cloud901, a teen learning facility that “contains a state-of-the-art recording studio staffed by a professional audio engineer, a robotics lab that fields a highly competitive team in regional and national championships, and a video lab where local teens have made award-winning films. Cloud901 also features a fully equipped maker space.”¹ Its innovations have received national attention, with a 2021 *Smithsonian* article

Library	Memphis Public Library
Service area	Bartlett, Memphis, and unincorporated Shelby County, TN
Population of service area	823,667
# of branches*	18
Administrative structure	City/County
Operating revenue	\$22,248,275
Operating revenue per capita	\$27.01
Total paid staff (FTE)	296
# of adult programs**	3,325
# of internet computers	587
Computers per 1,000 population	0.71
* 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	

¹ Grant, Richard. “How Memphis Created the Nation's Most Innovative Public Library.” *Smithsonian Magazine*. Smithsonian Institution, November 1, 2021. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/memphis-created-nations-innovative-public-library-180978844/>

dubbing MPL “the nation’s most innovative public library.” Also in 2021, IMLS awarded it the National Medal for Museum and Library Service.

In 2019, the MPL’s total operating revenue was \$22,248,275. The city provides a significant portion of library funding (\$21,760,200 from the city’s general funds), with additional support in the form of direct contracts from the state (\$53,893) and federal government (\$106,849).²

Moreover, the Friends of the Memphis Public Library raises funds and conducts outreach for the library. The organization raised over \$400,000 last year for library needs, providing funding for all adult programs at the library.³ There is also a Memphis Library Foundation, with a mission to enhance the 18 Memphis Public Libraries by securing funding through grants and private support.⁴ The foundation partners with other organizations on projects for the community, such as engaging activities for seniors. The MPL board, the foundation, and Friends make up the three-legged stool of funding and support for MPL.

MPL’s 2020 strategic plan describes its vision as to “create inviting and engaging public spaces that offer programs and resources for all Memphians and bring people of different life circumstances together in meaningful ways. We promote literacy for all, provide economic and workforce development, and create opportunities for our city’s most important asset—its youth.”⁵ The plan lists MPL’s goals as:

- create equitable access;
- champion literacy for all ages;
- promote economic advancement and workforce development;
- advance the library’s role as a community anchor;
- increase community awareness of MPL offerings;
- reach beyond the library walls with strategic outreach and innovation; and
- strengthen the backbone of MPL by supporting staff.

Under its goal related to economic advancement and workforce development, its priorities include connecting opportunity youth to education and workforce opportunities, building on MPL’s financial literacy curriculum, installing Career Readiness Resources Centers in all branch libraries, enhancing JobLINC Career Center offerings, and enhancing resources for new citizens, among others.⁶ The plan also includes priorities related to MPL’s role as a convener in the community, such as building upon

² Grants. Tennessee Department of State: Tennessee State Library and Archives. Accessed June 16, 2022. <https://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/lps/grants/grants.htm#:~:text=State%20Funding%3A%20The%20Tennessee%20State,budget%20of%20approximately%20%247.6%20million>

³ Memphis Public Libraries, Friends of the Library. City of Memphis, May 20, 2022. <https://www.memphislibrary.org/support/friends/>

⁴ Memphis Library Foundation: About. Memphis Library Foundation, February 23, 2022. <https://memphislibraryfoundation.org/about/>

⁵ “Strategic Plan 2020 - Memphis Public Library.” Memphis Public Libraries. City of Memphis. Accessed June 16, 2022. <https://www.memphislibrary.org/memphislibrary/wp-content/uploads/Strategic-Plan-2020-Overview.pdf>

⁶ “Strategic Plan 2020 - Memphis Public Library.” Memphis Public Libraries. City of Memphis. Accessed June 16, 2022. <https://www.memphislibrary.org/memphislibrary/wp-content/uploads/Strategic-Plan-2020-Overview.pdf>

a housing partner network and Welcome Home Memphis model to convene partners around community needs.

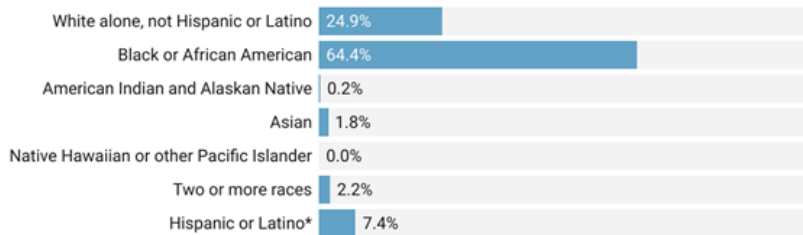
Community conditions

Memphis, a historically and culturally significant city in the southern U.S., is located in the southwest corner of Tennessee on the Chickasaw Bluffs, sharing a border with the Mississippi River to the west (with Arkansas beyond it) and Mississippi to the south. Memphis has a population of 633,104 people according to the 2020 U.S. Census, a population decrease of 2 percent since 2010 and a 3 percent decrease since 2000. Memphis is the county seat of Shelby County, Tennessee, and part of the Memphis-Forrest City Combined Statistical Area, TN-MS-AR Metropolitan Statistical Area. Memphis is the second most populous city in Tennessee and the 28th most populous city in the United States. The city is predominantly Black (64.4 percent), with large white (24.9 percent) and Hispanic or Latino (7.4 percent) populations. Memphis is one of the 19 U.S. cities over 100,000 with a majority Black population, second only to Detroit with the largest Black majority population. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, the median household income in Memphis is \$41,864, and the poverty rate is 24.6 percent.

Community Conditions	Memphis	United States
Unemployment rate	8.6%	5.4%
Persons in poverty	24.6%	11.4%
Median household income	\$41,864	\$64,994
In civilian labor force	63.0%	63.0%
HS graduate or higher (> 25 y.o.)	86.5%	88.5%
BA or higher (> 25 y.o.)	26.6%	32.9%
Foreign-born persons	6.0%	13.5%
Households with internet access	74.4%	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 Memphis



* 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

Memphis sits on the traditional land of the Chickasaw peoples. The city became part of the United States in 1819 after brief stints as French and Spanish forts throughout the 18th century. Due to its transit access by river and rail, Memphis was a slave-trading center and hub for the production and export

of cotton during the 19th century. As a Confederate military center during the Civil War, Memphis fell to Union forces in 1862 and experienced a tumultuous antebellum period, including an armed raid on the Black community in 1866, which left 44 Black people dead and initiated the exodus of approximately three-quarters of the city’s Black population.⁷ Throughout the end of the 19th and

⁷ Harkins, John E. “Memphis.” Tennessee Encyclopedia. Tennessee Historical Society, March 1, 2018. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/memphis/>

early 20th centuries, the city had a booming cotton and lumber trade but had to weather numerous devastating yellow fever outbreaks and the loss of its charter. The arrival of railroads, electricity, sanitation, and the automobile restructured life in Memphis at the dawn of the 20th century⁸ while World War II brought military and industrial expansion to Memphis. In the latter half of the 20th century, Memphis became a central battleground for the fight over civil rights, especially after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination there in 1968.

Today, the top industries in Memphis are transportation and warehousing, healthcare and social assistance, retail trade, and manufacturing,⁹ with top employers including FedEx, the Tennessee state government, the United States government, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare, and Shelby County Schools.¹⁰ FedEx began operations in Memphis in 1970 and today remains a major presence in the city. Memphis has long served as a cultural hotspot for blues, soul, and rock music and was the storied home of Elvis Presley. Currently, Memphis has an unemployment rate of 8.6 percent, down from a peak of 13 percent in April 2020.

Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland took office in 2015 and began his second term in January 2020 on a platform of reversing population loss through the city's first long-range plan in 40 years, increasing public safety, and advancing government transparency.

Relevant systems

The state-enabling environment—the policies and practices of state agencies related to public library support and workforce development policies and priorities—influences each public library in a state. 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 Memphis Public Libraries operates.

State-level support: policies, funding, and infrastructure

State Library administrative agency

Tennessee State Library & Archives (TSLA) has a number of functions, most notably collecting and preserving books and records related to the state of Tennessee and its history, coordinating the Tennessee Regional Library System, overseeing the Tennessee Library for the Blind and Physically

⁸ Harkins, John E. "Memphis." Tennessee Encyclopedia. Tennessee Historical Society, March 1, 2018. <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/memphis/>

⁹ Quinn, John. "Memphis Economy: Top Industries, Biggest Employers, & Business Opportunities." Web log. REMAX Experts, Moving Guide (blog). REMAX Experts, September 9, 2021. <https://www.johnquinnrealestate.com/blog/memphis-economy/>

¹⁰ Bolton, Jason. "Largest Memphis Area Employers." Memphis Business Journal. American City Business Journals, July 13, 2018. <https://www.bizjournals.com/memphis/subscriber-only/2018/07/13/largest-memphis-area-employers.html>

Handicapped, and supporting public libraries throughout the state.¹¹ The Planning and Development section of TSLA provides assistance, statewide consultation, and leadership to local public libraries throughout the state and is responsible for developing the five-year Library Services and Technology Act Plan (LSTA). The Tennessee Advisory Council on Libraries (TACL) advises TSLA on longer-term policy. The secretary of state has the authority to appoint TSLA members.

Tennessee also has a regional library system that provides a range of services to small and midsize libraries in nine regions of the state. Each regional system has staff involved in providing leadership and staff development, promoting coordination of programs, and offering other assistance related to information technology. MPL, in addition to Tennessee's three other metropolitan systems, operates independently of the regional library system and receives support directly from the state.

In 2021, TSLA received \$3,438,619 through its annual LSTA appropriation from IMLS. These resources are critical to Tennessee public libraries, which as a state ranks 50th in total operating expenditures per capita.¹² One of the most significant uses of this grant over a number of years has been to support the Tennessee Electronic Library. Of relevance to workforce development and small business, this resource provides access to Peterson's Test and Career Prep, Gale OneFile Vocations and Careers, and Gale Business, among other resources. Federal funds also support technology infrastructure, particularly at small and medium-sized libraries.

TSLA received \$3.5 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds¹³ and used these resources to provide grants to public libraries in the state for technology equipment, website design, digital materials, library materials, and furniture and equipment.¹⁴

Since 2019, Tennessee has offered grants annually to libraries through the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development Training Opportunities for the Public (TOP) Grant program. This program requires grant recipients to use the funds for training (in classroom settings or one-to-one) and for hotspots, solar charging tables, internal connections, and the digital navigator's pilot project.¹⁵

¹¹ "Sherrill, Charles A. "Tennessee Standards for Non Metropolitan Public Libraries." Tennessee State Library and Archives, Revised 2014. <https://sharetn.gov.tnsosfiles.com/tsla/lps/Library%20Standards%20for%20Non-Metropolitan%20Libraries.pdf>

¹² Tennessee State Library and Archives staff. "Tennessee State Library And Archives Library Services and Technology Act Plan 2018 – 2022." Institute of Museum and Library Services, June 30, 2017. <https://www.imls.gov/>

¹³ FY 2021 American Rescue Plan Act IMLS Appropriations (Public Law 117-2.) Institute of Museum and Library Services. Accessed August 22, 2022. <https://imls.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/arpaallotmenttablefy2021.pdf>

¹⁴ Grants for Public Libraries. Tennessee Secretary of State. Accessed June 16, 2022. <https://sos.tn.gov/tsla/services/grants-public-libraries#arpa>

¹⁵ Grants for Public Libraries, Tennessee Secretary of State. Accessed June 16, 2022. <https://sos.tn.gov/tsla/services/grants-public-libraries#tops> website

State workforce system

Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development (TDLWD) is the primary state agency overseeing workforce-related policies and programs in Tennessee. TDLWD administers services related to the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), including managing job training and employment-related activities through the Division of Workforce Services and administering adult education and family literacy through the Division of Adult Education. The State Workforce Development Board, a requirement of WIOA, is responsible for advising the governor on all matters related to workforce development strategy in Tennessee.

Several other state agencies provide workforce services, including the Department of Correction, Department of Human Services, Department of Education, K-12 Education, and the Community College System. TDLWD is taking the lead in trying to better align the workforce-related endeavors of these different agencies and systems.¹⁶

The WIOA plan focuses on four key elements:

1. improving skills and credential attainment by expanding vocation education and workforce development programs;
2. supporting regional and rural economic development strategies;
3. enhancing services and opportunities for justice-involved citizens; and
4. streamlining the delivery of support services in workforce development by collaborating with key agencies and organizations.

Although the WIOA plan calls for streamlining service delivery and collaboration across agencies, the plan does not mention the state's public libraries, and there is no explicit focus on public libraries as part of the workforce system in the state.

Local workforce and business development ecosystems

Workforce development system

The workforce development system in Memphis is under the umbrella of Workforce Mid-South, a partner of the American Job Center of Greater Memphis, which provides services to residents and businesses in Fayette, Lauderdale, Shelby, and Tipton counties of West Tennessee. Workforce Mid-South oversees the three American Job Centers in the greater Memphis region, and two regional WIOA Youth Programs, Career Leap Youth program and Career LAUNCH Young Adult program. Under Workforce Mid-South is the Greater Memphis Local Workforce Development Board.

A number of nonprofits focusing on workforce development are active in the Memphis region, including Hopeworks, Inc. (workforce skills training), National Offender Re-Entry Association (workforce training for those with experience in the justice system), Dress for Success Memphis (workforce readiness), Memphis Moves (an initiative of the Greater Memphis Chamber), and Opportunity Memphis (young adult workforce readiness).

¹⁶ 2020-2023 TN WIOA State Plan. Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, October 29, 2020. Accessed June 16, 2022. <https://www.tn.gov/workforce/contact-the-department0/boards---commissions/boards---commissions-redirect/state-workforce-development-board/state-plan.html>

Business development system

Small businesses in the city of Memphis receive support from a variety of resources. The Tennessee Small Business Development Center (TSBDC) is an accredited member of the National Association of Small Business Development Centers and funded, in part, by the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA). Hosted by Middle Tennessee State University, TSBDC has an office in Memphis on the campus of Southwest Tennessee Community College. The state also hosts the Business Enterprise Resource Office, an advocate for disadvantaged Tennessee business owners that provides technical, financial, and management information assistance. Other ecosystem players include the Small Business Council under the Memphis Chamber of Commerce, the Entrepreneurs Network Center, the Black Business Association, and the Memphis Area Minority Contractors Association. Many nonprofit organizations serve the business development ecosystem in Memphis, including SCORE, Emerge Memphis, and Epicenter. The Greater Memphis Chamber recently released Prosper Memphis 2030, a strategic growth plan for the city and region that outlines priorities for creating high-quality jobs with a focus on minority employment, attracting high-growth advanced manufacturing industries, and nurturing future-ready talent prioritizing Black STEM graduates. The city is currently working on 55 economic development recruitment projects, which could create 15,000 new jobs and capital investments totaling over \$10.6 billion.¹⁷

Library workforce and business development services

Overview of the library's approach

Memphis Public Libraries is a known community resource, gathering place, and service center. Business and workforce development are central offerings of MPL, evident in the provision of services and extensive network of support partners available across the system. Uniquely, MPL hosts LINC211, the region's social service hotline, and JobLINC, which brings workforce and

A library is not what it used to be ... of course books are still our bread and butter. We want to serve those to our patrons ... but it's so much more that we do, and sometimes people don't know that until they come to us or hear of us when we go out into public. So a lot of times we have to take the library outside of the building so we can share what the library really stands for and what we do.

small business services to the entire city. MPL has a Business/Sciences Department that houses the Small Business Center located in the central branch, and staff across the 18 branches receive training and support small business or workforce development services. MPL considers its role in workforce development and small business services as one of a trustworthy guide. It has vetted information and can support individuals navigating complex systems.

¹⁷ Poe, Ryan. "Chamber Unveils Growth Plan Prosper Memphis 2030." Momentum Blog. Greater Memphis Chamber, June 6, 2022. https://blog.memphischamber.com/chamber-unveils-growth-plan-prosper-memphis-2030?utm_content=210983811&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_hss_channel=tw-44387915

Workforce development services

Standard services

MPL supports patrons seeking to find a job, grow their skills, or begin a new career path through its JobLINC Career Center, which has been serving the Memphis community since 1990.¹⁸ Standard services include an online job and career platform for job postings and employer contact, access to technology and internet services, and online adult learning and training resources. While there is a concentration of these resources in the physical space at the central branch, the adult services staff across the system's branches are highly knowledgeable of the resources available throughout the system and online and can refer patrons accordingly. Computers are available to cardholders throughout the library system, and WiFi hotspots are available for checkout, a valuable asset to many patrons who may not have a computer or internet connection available in their homes. Among the standard services available to MPL patrons are online databases, ebooks, and skills training tools, such as LearningExpress, LinkedIn Learning, Grow with Google, the Microsoft skills initiative, GitHub, Microsoft Digital Literacy, Gale OneFile, and statewide online services through the Tennessee Electronic Library. These resources provide training and tools to help participants grow their skills and careers, including tools for industry-recognized certifications, computer literacy, adult literacy, and career planning.

MPL has strong relationships with many of the organizations involved in workforce development. Given this broad network of stakeholders, partnership maintenance and open referral networks are very important to MPL. MPL often refers patrons to its partners and, whenever possible, attempts to facilitate a "warm handoff." This entails making a personal connection between a patron and a specific person or organization, if possible, in the hopes that the personalized introduction yields a more productive connection. In the opposite direction, other community partners refer MPL to job seekers, although MPL would like to see this happen more frequently.

Specialized services

In addition to the standard services, Memphis Public Libraries provides more hands-on programming and assistance to support job seekers, including its JobLINC and LINC211 programs, both of which amplify MPL's role as an information resource and community connector.

JobLINC career specialists provide career counseling, which currently is available primarily virtually and by appointment. Staff support job seekers through one-on-one resume review, interview preparation, and job application assistance. Additionally, MPL offers a variety of programming and workshops, including programs for teens and young adults to gain skills such as JavaScript, music production, filmmaking, robotics, and a free course on personal finance and money management. JobLINC's primary location is within the Benjamin L. Hooks Central Library, but its services reach those in the city without transportation or computers via JobLINC's Mobile Career Center (see sidebar). This 38-foot bus, equipped with ten laptops, internet access, digital resources, and specialized staff, aims to increase community engagement with the career services MPL offers without requiring individuals to travel to the central branch.

¹⁸ Memphis Public Libraries, Job and Career Services, JobLINC. June 10, 2022. Accessed June 16, 2022. <https://www.memphislibrary.org/joblinc/>

MPL oversees the LINC211 Resource Center, a citywide resource connection and information service. LINC211 originates from the nationwide 2-1-1 program of the Federal Communications Commission and is available to anyone who dials 2-1-1 within the city limits of Memphis and the surrounding 11 counties. Trained LINC211 operators can answer a broad range of questions and facilitate connections to social supports and services that the city and nonprofit partners offer. Unlike other 2-1-1 services across the country, city employees fully staff LINC211. LINC211 receives funding from United Way Mid-South but does not rely exclusively on private or philanthropic funding because it receives funding from the city. LINC211 fields a wide swath of calls related to workforce development and has an online database of job assistance agencies to assist with employment searches.

Community hub services

While, as noted, MPL has forged strong relationships throughout the workforce system, most of the service offerings are directly through JobLINC rather than through partner organizations.

Small business development services

Standard services

Similar to MPL's workforce development offerings, the small business services MPL provides are concentrated in the central branch and diffused throughout the branches by the adult services staff. Standard services the Business/Science Department offers include an extensive collection of physical and online materials on business development. Memphis Public Libraries' cardholders have access to an assortment of online resources that can help with the market research necessary to start a small business, including the Greater Memphis Chamber, the Tennessee Electronic Library, Data Axle, and ReferenceUSA.

Specialized services

The central library has a Small Business Center with staff and resources available to support anyone who walks in. MPL also runs programs targeting small businesses, including programming on how to access COVID recovery funding and free legal clinics.

JobLINC Mobile Career Center

Memphis Public Libraries launched the JobLINC Mobile Career Center in 2012. The approach to the JobLINC Mobile Career Center was to use the bookmobile or library on wheels models, similar to other libraries across the country, but instead of exclusively carrying books, the mobile unit would also bring career resources and support staff along to help job seekers throughout the process of finding a job. Anyone can walk onto the Mobile Career Center for help finding a job opening, writing a resume, preparing for an interview, and other job readiness skills. The JobLINC Mobile Career Center also occasionally hosts job fair events with employers that are ready to hire. Given MPL's trusted role as a purveyor of facts and vetted information, it was able to arrive in a community and serve as a trusted advisor to job seekers. The staff at the JobLINC Mobile Career Center do not have a set program of focus; they are adaptable and prioritize offering services that meet the unique needs of their patrons. One library staff member commented, *"Just on our basic day, it's everything job readiness related. So it's not planned...if you happen to be walking down the street and you see [the Mobile Career Center], as you walk on, whatever your question is, we're going to try to answer it."*

JobLINC works with a variety of local workforce development partners, including the local American Job Center (a partner of Workforce Mid-South), the Society of Human Resource Managers, South Memphis Alliance, The Urban League, and Dress for Success, in addition to local employers such as FedEx, Amazon, and Google.

Community hub services

When a community organization presents a library program or service, MPL often hosts the event at the library. This speaks to the community's perception of the library as an accessible community space. By offering free and welcoming meeting space to a variety of partners and programs, MPL has become a trusted and reliable partner to many local organizations and programs.

Memphis Public Libraries works closely with the Memphis chapter of the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), in association with the SBA, to support new business owners and small business development. SCORE's mission is to provide free and expert counseling/mentoring services for start-up businesses and educational services for small business owners. Memphis SCORE works with MPL to run business educational workshops once a month, hosted within the central library's Small Business Center. SCORE runs numerous other workshops. The most popular topics include how to write a business plan, use QuickBooks/bookkeeping, use social media for business promotion, and secure small business financing. Other workshop topics cover government contracting, franchising, taxes, and patents/copywriting. Before COVID, these workshops had high participation, with an average of 30 to 40 attendees per workshop, but attendance dropped during COVID due to the virtual format. MPL and SCORE often cross-refer patrons for support and, recently, Small Business Center staff provided training for SCORE volunteers to share new online resources and tools available at MPL so that SCORE could be a more effective referral partner.

Service administration

Staffing and management

MPL's branches are in the northern region, southern region, and central library, and each region has a regional manager. Regional managers work with branch managers to develop a set of strategic goals informed by the system's strategic plan. These goals then filter down to the reference librarians and service coordinators to inform programming and resources. Each branch library has at least three librarians—for adult services, teen services, and child services. The adult services librarians oversee workforce and business development supports.

Currently, JobLINC has three full-time staff members, down from its total capacity of eight full-time staff, which has shrunk over the past few years. The city of Memphis staffs the LINC211 department though MPL hosts the program at the central branch. At present, LINC211 has 23 staff members, 16 full-time and seven part-time, in addition to supplemental volunteers. Staff at JobLINC and LINC211 receive cross-training so that staff in each department can work with the other and field calls as needed.

System support and role

MPL has one central library and 17 branch locations in addition to a virtual digital "branch" that oversees all of the online resources across the entire library system. A virtual digital branch manager, a virtual digital coordinator, and a digital archivist staff the virtual digital branch. There are six departments within the central library: humanities, history, LINC211, children's, CLOUD901 (teens), and business/science. All workforce and business development offerings are under the Business/Science Department. Across the entire MPL system, there are close to 1,000 computers available for use.

The adult service staff from each library branch meet monthly as the Adult Services Group to discuss their programming, troubleshoot any shared problems, and exchange information. These meetings contribute to the dissemination of information and empower staff to refer library patrons to events happening not only in their specific branch but also across the system. The Adult Services Group also undergoes training on topics of civic importance for adults, such as voter registration, tax preparation, and the 2020 census.

Funding

Funding for MPL's workforce and business development offerings, similar to its general operation, comes from the city of Memphis, Friends of the Library, and the Memphis Library Foundation. Workforce and small business support occasionally receive supplemental funding from program-specific philanthropic grants.

How they determine what to offer

Branch librarians are the primary decision-makers as to which programming or support to provide, a delegation of responsibility that is widely respected within the system. MPL sees librarians as frontline staff, having the most direct contact with patron needs and requests; therefore, there is a culture of deference to librarians. One library system staff member shared, *"I don't hold the view that I know more about what the city needs or what our customers need than a librarian. So when a librarian comes to the manager or comes to me and says, 'Hey, I had this idea for a program,' I do what I can to support that because...our frontline staff are the ones that see customers day in and day out and know exactly what their needs are. So, as a system, we try and be really supportive when someone has an idea for a program. Most of our programs start that way. They start from, you know, the frontline staff up, not from an admin down."* While MPL does undergo strategic planning at the system-wide level, the librarians shape and inform the day-to-day programming and support offerings.

Marketing of services

Memphis Public Libraries employs many methods for marketing its services. The Connect Team within MPL handles outreach across the city. This team often takes MPL programming into the community, for example, having story time at laundromats, the zoo, and central business centers, to promote early childhood literacy and make communities more aware of the resources available to them through MPL. The team will go to branch libraries and run programs that normally take place in the central library as a way to expand the reach of MPL programming. Additionally, and especially for JobLINC, staff attending community events or employer job fairs market MPL programming as a way to share information about local opportunities and cross-promote library resources and programs.

For more passive marketing, the central library has a digital marquee just outside the central library parking lot facing the main thoroughfare to advertise programming and events. The virtual digital branch maintains an up-to-date online calendar of events across the system on its website. All librarians add events to this calendar, which is publically accessible, so all staff can view and cross-promote programs and advertise offerings to the broader public. MPL also maintains a Facebook presence, and the main library and branch libraries have their own pages. Memphis Public Libraries also uses its TV and radio station to advertise programming and events. The city's marketing division produces all marketing materials for MPL.

Aspirations

MPL is interested in increasing its provision of employment and business development programming across the city, as the demand for this programming often is greater than the library's capacity due to either staffing or funding limitations. Shifting public expectations of what the library can and should offer amplify this interest. In the past, print materials were the sole focus of the library. Community members now look to the library as a place to learn and better themselves, and MPL wants to ensure it meets those expectations. A library system staff member remarked, "Programming is a really core focus of what we're doing in libraries these days—not that we're not checking out books or having story time, but we see more people who sort of expect more from libraries. These days...they want to know, 'What can I learn? What can I do?'" For MPL to meet this aspiration, it must address the financial and capacity challenges that currently limit its offerings.

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

Library collaboration with ecosystem partners

The Memphis Public Libraries is a hub for workforce development services citywide. MPL collaborates with a robust network of community partners on programming and often hosts events and job fairs in library space. Key local partners include the city of Memphis, local industry (e.g., FedEx), local churches and religious groups, area schools and high school equivalency degree programs, and nonprofit organizations like Memphis Area Legal Services, AARP, Advance Memphis, Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis, Oak Street Health, and neighborhood groups.

MPL has an assistant director of strategic partnerships, whose job is to help connect with new community partners and maintain existing community relationships. In addition to

this individual, the managers, department staff, and branch staff also play a significant role in forging and maintaining connections with ecosystem partners. MPL sees itself as a middleman and community convener. Library staff often identify a need or gap in programmatic support and will seek out a community partner to provide that service, typically offering to host it in library space. As explained by a library staff member, "While the library is not significantly engaged in any type of more formal citywide workforce and business development roundtables, it does play an important role as a community anchor and partner for the business development and workforce ecosystem."

[At the library,] the organizations and the community can kind of come meet in the middle...you're never far from a library and everyone kind of knows where the neighborhood library is. It's very much a comfortable, safe place people are familiar with, and they want to come here and find the services. And our community partners recognize that and take us up on the opportunity to host their programs and events.

Library's position in the greater ecosystem

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, some sectors within Memphis government knew of the resources available through LINC211 and JobLINC, but there was a dominant culture of siloed work. Most public sector and nonprofit actors concentrated on their direct work, and few knew of, let alone collaborated with, the services MPL delivered. However, the high-profile role MPL has played in

emergency response and recovery throughout the pandemic (detailed below) has elevated its importance in the eyes of stakeholders across the city, presenting MPL and the city a chance to re-engage in collaboration and reassert their partnership. Since the library played such a crucial role during the pandemic, the city has started to see the library as a critical information and support hub, thus opening up new opportunities for collaborative partnerships. Mayor Strickland often publicly acknowledges LINC211 as a resource for residents after an emergency. Given this new understanding of the vital role MPL plays in the city, the library is looking to expand its staff capacity at LINC211 and is hoping to hire social service assistants to provide capacity for new partnerships.

MPL's workforce development services and role in the ecosystem suggest it is both filling system gaps and expanding system reach:

- *Evidence of filling system gaps:* MPL stakeholders reported that while they do refer patrons to the American Job Center, the personal intake process and length of engagement at times deter job seekers. With JobLINC, library staff do not ask patrons for personal information and can respond quickly to more immediate needs. One library staff shared, *"We're giving good info because no one else is doing it. If I send you to the AJC, it's case management. And with that being said, it's a whole lot of hoops and paperwork that you have to fill out before you can even get started...I don't want to see your income, and I don't want to know how many kids you have. I don't care about any of that. We can do this right now."* Additionally, library staff often provide services and refer patrons for baseline skill development, such as adult literacy, that contribute to job readiness before patrons are ready to engage with the American Job Center. In these ways, MPL fills a system gap by directly providing and connecting patrons to accessible services for more immediate needs than traditional workforce organizations in the city.
- *Evidence of expanding system reach:* MPL has many features or services that allow the library to expand system reach, including being a starting point for community members, having deep knowledge of social services and traditional workforce development services through LINC211, and existing as a public community space. Both ecosystem partners and community members view MPL as a trusted resource. People know they can come to the library with their workforce-related needs, including seeking referrals to wraparound services that support them in gaining stable employment. In interviews, library stakeholders often reported that when people are not sure where they can go, they go to the library or call LINC211, and the library is able to either serve them directly or more effectively refer them to where they need to go. Additionally, MPL hosts events such as job fairs in collaboration with partners because it has the space and because community members feel comfortable going there.

Pandemic response and recovery

Overview of library services during the pandemic

The Memphis Public Libraries, including all branches, closed their doors for approximately six weeks at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This excluded LINC211, which the city of Memphis designated as an essential service. It remained fully operational throughout the pandemic. During this time, all physical library spaces closed, there were no in-person events, and all library staff worked remotely. While programming initially halted, most offerings eventually transitioned to an online format once MPL reopened. At that point, library staff worked quickly, shifting as much of MPL's resources online as possible, including transitioning some print materials to digital and curating online resources for topic-specific online exhibits. After that was up and running, the staff

reintroduced program offerings in the virtual setting. However, the number of patrons attending programs that support job search, career development, and entrepreneurship plummeted, from 10,759 in FY2020 to 399 in FY2021.¹⁹ MPL was preparing to resume complete in-person programming at the beginning of 2022 but had to postpone due to the increase in COVID cases. Currently, the library is operating a hybrid model; buildings are open to the public, but many programs remain online either entirely or in part to maximize accessibility.

Approach to workforce and business development services during the pandemic

Throughout the pandemic, library staff saw higher numbers of patrons engaging with e-resources for digital and other professional skills through platforms like LinkedIn Learning. Library staff working on workforce and career support also noted that during the pandemic, they experienced an increased interest in remote jobs. This new interest is likely because workers grew accustomed to remote work and the work/life flexibility it allows and perhaps because of concerns about working in person while community transmission remained high.

Once Memphis Public Libraries reopened and shifted to virtual programming, it scaled up and restarted many programs it offered pre-pandemic in a new online format. Attendance and engagement in the virtual setting looked different, but few programs stopped altogether. Library staff also became adept at facilitating programs outdoors, which expanded the type of events MPL can bring to the community. Another innovation resulting from the pandemic was that MPL began to offer patrons access to a Zoom account that they could reserve for virtual meetings. Just as patrons can reserve a physical meeting room in the library, they could also reserve a Zoom room. These changes may be relatively small individually; combined, they illustrate a culture of innovation to meet emergent needs during a crisis. These new practices have proven valuable beyond the emergency response, and library staff continues to utilize outdoor and virtual programming to reach patrons.

MPL was a valued partner in distributing Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES ACT) and ARPA funding. Throughout the pandemic, LINC211 continued to respond to 2-1-1 calls, playing a vital role in coordinating emergency responders and social service providers to assist individuals in getting the support they needed, from distributing food to the elderly to connecting unemployed individuals through to JobLINC for support. LINC211 expanded its work to meet community needs. Pre-existing analysis from the LINC211 team on the frequency of 2-1-1 calls showed certain neighborhoods were more vulnerable to socioeconomic risks. Using this analysis, MPL collaborated with the Memphis Division of Housing and Community Development and the Shelby County government to hire new/reassign existing staff to set up and oversee LINC211 pop-ups at five library branches. These pop-ups help Memphians submit applications for unemployment insurance, emergency rental assistance, and other pandemic-related funding.

Learning from the pandemic

Although there were some initial technology glitches during the transition to a virtual format, numerous library staff mentioned that, because of the pandemic, they learned they could provide online programming and virtual support, which they had not contemplated pre-pandemic. Similarly, outdoor programming, something MPL previously rarely did, became a new option. Staff anticipate

¹⁹2022 Fiscal Year Adopted Operating Budget. City of Memphis, fiscal year ending June 30, 2022, p. 284.

continuing to offer outdoor and/or virtual programming in the future, even beyond public health reasons. Perhaps most impactful, the pandemic broke down traditional siloes and broadcast to the entire city the wealth of resources available through the MPL. Library staff are optimistic that the pandemic has created an opportunity for increased collaboration across sectors in the future.

Tracking and measurement

The library system's approach to tracking and measurement

Because of its dedication to protecting patron privacy and serving as a neutral information resource, MPL collects virtually no personally identifiable information about its patrons unless an outside source mandates it. The primary data MPL collects and uses to communicate its value is program attendance. MPL also collects data on attendance at job fairs and trainings, primarily headcounts.

The digital branch oversees the collection and distribution of some system-wide statistics, and MPL posts this summary, MPL by the Numbers, on its website. MPL shares this one-page document bimonthly, as well as a "Year in Review," annually. MPL by the Numbers highlights MPL events and services through select data points. It typically covers high-level information, such as number of library card signups, number of programs, program attendance, attendee age, program location, and program type (categories include job and career and business/nonprofit development), along with pictures and quotes from events. The annual edition includes data related to database usage, items patrons check out of the library, changes in program attendance, etc.

Specific components of the data collection processes at MPL include:

1. *General data collection on library operations:* MPL shares "MPL by the Numbers" with the mayor's office, state agencies, funders, and other stakeholders as requested. Sometimes MPL will need to respond to specific data requests. For example, grant requirements or Memphis Library Foundation fundraising may necessitate data reporting. To respond to these requests, MPL has a grant writer on staff who coordinates any data needs for grant requests or reporting. The grant writer will coordinate with the digital branch to compile relevant data from what is available, but this is limited primarily to the data points included in MPL by the Numbers. Another example is, recently, the state of Tennessee provided the Memphis Public Libraries with increased funds tied to the stipulation that these funds must lead to an increase in literacy. To prove this without undertaking a longitudinal surveying effort, MPL relied on correlational logic—more money allows for the purchase of more books, more books means more people checking out books and more books in houses, which assumes literacy is increasing—and this was sufficient to both MPL and the state. The city of Memphis provides MPL with funding, which requires MPL to advocate for the library system at city council budget hearings, also motivating data collection.
2. *Information requests and referrals:* This type of data collection did not surface in MPL stakeholder interviews.
3. *Usage of specialized online resources and website analytics:* MPL reports usage of databases and specialized resources, such as LinkedIn Learning, Ancestry Library, etc., in the by the Numbers annual report.
4. *Outputs related to specialized and partner services:* MPL tracks program attendance and headcounts for events such as job fairs.

5. *Outcomes related to services:* At times, MPL has attempted more methodical surveys using Project Outcome to assess a program's impact, but its efforts fell short primarily due to capacity limitations and staffing shortages. Staff reported that the labor required to keep up with the tracking was not sustainable, and the data gained were primarily patron perceptions of outcomes, not real outcomes. Currently, there is no long-term tracking of patrons to assess the impact of MPL's work or the outcomes of programs, not even for its big-ticket programs. For JobLINC, the nature of its work is emergent and responsive to patron needs, and there is no single path through the system for librarians to track or evaluate across patrons. As a result, JobLINC has no outcomes tracking.
6. *Anecdotal evidence:* Occasionally, there is anecdotal evidence of outcomes of patrons who received job assistance returning to share news of employment. When asked how MPL determines success without tracking outcomes, library system staff responded, *"We're still out there. And I can tell you in a heartbeat, if we weren't doing the work, we wouldn't be out there...we will be shut down. So I know that after all these years, we're still viable."* MPL stakeholders reported that through the strong relationships they have built with their community, they are able to deliver programming and services that are responsive to needs. In interviews, library staff communicated several personal stories about patrons returning and sharing stories of how their lives changed through interaction with MPL, such as through record expungement or after getting help to prepare for a job interview. While MPL does not track patron stories systematically, it is clear that MPL's relationship with patrons influences how it thinks of its impact when designing programming. In combination with other tracking methods, storytelling may be a powerful tool for MPL to demonstrate its impact. MPL by the Numbers often includes patron quotes.

MPL does participate in citywide peer learning about data, facilitated through periodic gatherings of representatives from each city division to discuss data collection and analysis. Compared to the other divisions represented in this group, the city data officer informed MPL that it was much further ahead in its use of data. Other MPL partners did not report significant tracking of workforce or small business development outcomes or present examples of data sharing.

Because MPL houses LINC211, MPL also has access to the data gathered through 2-1-1 calls. These data have provided some increased insight into community needs. Through analysis of the location of calls placed for information through 2-1-1, MPL can identify patterns of calls for specific types of information from particular zip codes within Memphis. This has allowed LINC211 staff to track and spatialize poverty within the city relative to the frequency and content of 2-1-1 calls. Since MPL already had this data analysis in place, it was able to make informed decisions about where to concentrate pandemic support such that it centered on the catchment areas of the highest-need branch libraries.

Outcome measurement challenges

The primary barrier to tracking and measuring outcomes is MPL's commitment to maintaining its position as a neutral, trusted entity. MPL collects virtually no personally identifiable information and places an extremely high value on patron privacy. The culture among library staff is to give information, not take down any information. This makes tracking long-term outcomes virtually impossible.

While MPL occasionally distributes surveys after programming, these efforts often fall short because of the lack of expertise of staff in survey management and human error. Staff forget to distribute or enter surveys, or patrons forget or are unwilling to complete a survey at the end of a program or fill it out incorrectly.

Staff capacity was another challenge. As noted, staff reported they were unable to continue utilizing Project Outcome because they could not sustain the staffing level necessary to measure some of the outcomes related to MPL programs more deliberately.

Interest and feasibility of implementing new outcome measurement systems

Interviews revealed little interest in implementing new outcome measurement systems at MPL. Librarians and staff feel that their work must remain neutral and non-evaluative to remain effective, and they seem fixed in their views. A new outcome measurement system would require not only more staff and resources but also a system change within and among the library staff, something for which few expressed an appetite.

When asked about a pop-up survey on the in-library computers, staff expressed concern that such a survey would present a challenge in Memphis, given the low rate of computer literacy and skills among the typical patron who comes in to use a computer. Furthermore, some patrons come to the library with urgent needs for information in various states of emergency. In these instances, patron willingness to take a survey could be low and prove frustrating if it prevents speedy access to critical information. One of MPL's central staff instead recommended that perhaps a pop-up survey could be more successful if posted on the website. There, it would capture patrons who were already accessing the library website, likely from home, to look for information and, therefore, may have higher computer literacy.

Observations

Some observations that emerged from the Memphis case study include:

- ✓ **Housing social services in a library location can increase the profile of what is available to job seekers and benefits both systems.**

By locating the LINC211 program under MPL's umbrella, MPL's role as a trusted community partner has only grown. MPL and LINC211 staff are highly knowledgeable of library and community resources and are qualified to make the appropriate referrals to patrons and 2-1-1 callers. Patrons and staff see MPL's role as a broad information provider and know that if they are looking for information or resources, whether for research, leisure, or in an emergency, MPL is a place they can start.

- ✓ **Creating mobile resources that meet patrons in their communities can enhance access to workforce development services that libraries provide.**

By putting its JobLINC services on the road with the Mobile Career Center, MPL is able to take its resources into communities and directly support job seekers in their neighborhoods. This more responsive, proactive approach to service provision takes the onus off patrons to come into the library and instead brings the services to them, improving access to workforce development services and technology in areas of the city where that may be a significant barrier.

- ✓ **Having strong coordination from the central branch, balanced with deference to community librarians, can allow for appropriate and effective service delivery across a library system.**

The coordination of workforce and business development services under the adult services librarians at each branch is a streamlined model that other library systems could consider replicating. MPL's staffing structure allows for both branch autonomy and system-wide coordination and referrals, ultimately serving the goal that any patron can access any service or support available within the library, no matter where they live. At the same time, branch librarians can implement programming that meets the unique needs of their communities within the cities they serve.