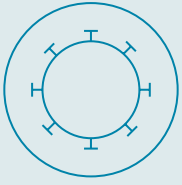# STRATEGICALLY
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A Review of New Jersey Public Libraries' Virtual Services

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HELDRICH CENTER
FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to take an unprecedented toll on the economy and society at large, creating individual, family, and community challenges on a scale never seen before. The pandemic has necessitated extensive changes in the services needed at this time, as well as how those services are delivered to people in need. With the real unemployment rate at about 10% and 10 million Americans still out of work, community-wide responses will be necessary to provide adequate, ongoing support for unemployed workers.

In July 2020, the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development released *A Review of Workforce Area Websites in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania* examining the suddenly virtual transition of every One-Stop and/or American Job Center in the region. Recognizing the central role that libraries play in community life, Heldrich Center researchers have now turned their attention to public libraries and how they have pivoted to virtual services, with a particular focus on the resources available to support the unemployed and their physical, social, emotional, and job search needs.

Research Intent

To understand the full picture of available community and job seeker services, Heldrich Center researchers reviewed 293 New Jersey public library websites, including both independent locations and county systems, across the 21 counties in the state. Researchers reviewed the websites of every New Jersey public library with the following goals:

▶ To identify the programs and services offered to patrons during the COVID-19 pandemic, including but not limited to services assisting New Jersey's job seekers and the unemployed;

▶ To gain an understanding of how New Jersey public libraries have adapted their programming and services to a virtual format; and

▶ To review the extent of the library's online presence and how programming and services are being communicated to patrons in a virtual space.

Heldrich Center researchers reviewed the public library websites from a consumer or patron perspective, including that of an out-of-work job seeker. Researchers assumed the mindset of an individual entering the website in need of assistance or services and searched for what was available at the library, as advertised by the library's website.

Researchers assumed the lens of a general patron curious about what services were available to them, with an eye toward virtual and job seeker services.

It is important to note that the 293 public library websites were surveyed between July and October 2020. The observations made about these websites represent a particular point in time and do not reflect more recent changes to those websites. Additionally, in the public library website review, it could be unclear if or when a website had been last updated, or if the website currently or at any point in time provided information for all library services available. This lack of clarity could create confusion about the services that were currently available to patrons. This observation is of note since this kind of confusion would also be the message communicated to community members or patrons searching for assistance.

In addition to the website review, Heldrich Center researchers hosted three roundtable discussions with librarians and library staff across New Jersey to gain a better understanding of what was happening in the local libraries. These roundtable discussions were hosted in conjunction with the New Jersey State Library. Approximately 50 librarians and library staff participated in these conversations, and their insights have been incorporated into this brief.

Website Review Observations

In the course of the website review, Heldrich Center researchers made several observations:

▶ **Ninety percent of New Jersey public libraries have a website, while 10% of New Jersey public libraries do not have a website or their website link is broken.** As previously stated, this measure is based on the accessibility of library websites from July to October 2020 and does not account for libraries that may have built a digital presence outside of this timeframe or have fixed their website links. Some libraries have their contact information embedded in their town's government website.

▶ Example: **Ridgefield Park Public Library**'s website has a clear layout with specific callouts for services available to patrons as well as departments for adults, teenagers, and children. Within the website's services section, there is designation between programming events and digital services. Navigation is simple and information is laid out in a straightforward and intuitive manner.

▶ **Approximately 75% of New Jersey public libraries' websites indicate that they offer at least some virtual services and programs.** This includes libraries that are actively providing practical and/or community-building services (i.e., virtual events via Zoom or Facebook Live,

staff-assisted hotlines). The extent of virtual services and programs advertised to patrons varies considerably across library locations and counties throughout New Jersey.

▶ Example: East Brunswick Public Library offers extensive virtual services, which are promoted clearly on its website. The website's homepage includes specific callouts for online learning and virtual programs. This library offers a full calendar of virtual events that can be accessed from anywhere patrons have an Internet connection. This website's organization is done very well and makes clear that this library has pivoted to offering a robust virtual library of services to patrons.

▶ **Approximately 25% of New Jersey public libraries' websites do not indicate if they have virtual services available.** Those websites also do not clarify what is or is not offered in person, nor indicate if and how existing services are accessible online. This measure includes libraries that do not clearly indicate they have virtual service offerings and that do not clarify whether existing or formally in-person services are available remotely in light of the pandemic. This metric also includes libraries that have not updated their websites since the pandemic-related shutdowns began in March 2020, as it can be assumed changes in service provision and delivery have occurred since that time.

▶ Example: Beach Haven Public Library's website specifies that the physical library location is open with limited hours and accessible to patrons by appointment only. Unfortunately, there is no additional information about the services available in person or if there are any virtual offerings at this time.

▶ **Approximately 38% of New Jersey public libraries offer some sort of content, resources, or programming catered specifically to adults, older people, or both.** This measure does not include resources and programs directed to families, teachers, or the general public (i.e., community resources). This references only resources and programs that are targeted specifically to adults or older individuals. While Heldrich Center researchers were primarily

interested in looking at help available to adults and the unemployed via libraries, it was apparent that a majority of libraries have focused on establishing their community presence in the children, teen, and family areas.

▶ Example: East Orange Public Library's website features an events calendar that includes all the library's programming, but can be filtered by event type and age group. This library has recreational programming geared toward adults and older individuals, which includes events such as Zoom craft hours, book club, and virtual one-on-ones. These adult programs are clearly advertised with the corresponding information on how to participate virtually.

▶ **Approximately 31% of New Jersey public libraries offer at least some degree of content, resources, or programming catered specifically to job seekers.** This measure includes content, resources, and programming that directly cater to job seekers, the job search, job skills, or career development. Not included is unemployment information or pandemic-related Unemployment Insurance assistance.

▶ Example: Cherry Hill Public Library offers virtual resources dedicated to job seekers. The library website's resource page features tools to assist job seekers, including library databases; computer classes; local, state, and federal resources; access to a librarian by appointment; resources for the long-term unemployed; and a community job board. The library does an excellent job of curating resources, which include a balance of in-house resources as well as referrals to specialized services equipped to assist job seekers' needs.

These observations paint a picture of an expansive network of public libraries and hardworking librarians and library staff all trying to adapt to a changing environment as effectively as possible. While considerable progress has been made to transition to an online environment, there is still room for growth in creating a robust ecosystem of services and service continuity to assist the many unemployed — especially long-term unemployed — individuals in the community.

Emerging Themes

The pandemic has necessitated changes to the way services are communicated and delivered, and libraries should continue to lean into adapting to these changes. In today's virtual environment, having an operable, navigable, and up-to-date website is more essential than ever before. Clarity of communication is another high priority. Today, in order to be more effective to members of the community, service organizations must be able to communicate vital information to customers and patrons, such as if a physical location is open or closed, where services are located, how people can seek assistance, and more. Clear communication strategies can also help to offset the resources staff, such as librarians, must devote to answering phone calls, emails, or chats about rudimentary service questions. Moreover, targeted services for special populations, such as children and families, job seekers, older individuals, and more, are a great way to deliver effective assistance for sub-populations in need within the community. These critical components are all part of having a customer-oriented strategy in a virtual first world.

From Heldrich Center researchers' observations of the 293 New Jersey public library websites, a few themes emerged:

▶ **A majority of libraries have made significant adaptations to operate in a COVID-19 environment.** Libraries have pivoted many of their services to operate in the digital world, with many individual public libraries and librarians taking great care to understand what patrons need at this point in time and how they may offer that kind of programming. Common adaptations include virtual programming on videoconferencing service platforms, COVID-19 information and resource offerings, curbside pickup, technology loaner programs, extended Wi-Fi availability, and more.

▶ **Job seeker resources and job search programming is sparse overall.** As stated earlier, only 31% of New Jersey public libraries have dedicated job search-related content and resources available on their websites. Some librarians reported that job search-related assistance was only available at their local library if an individual librarian had an interest in working with customers in this way. As the needs of job seekers in local communities persist, libraries could consider having staff members who specialize in this area of service. Relatedly, as a trusted community

institution, libraries reported that they had to field an influx of questions and requests for assistance from customers trying to file for and collect Unemployment Insurance benefits. Librarians and library staff noted that they experienced a wave of calls and emails, and observed an uptick in in-person customer interactions with patrons in desperate need of assistance with their Unemployment Insurance claims as well as other social assistance benefits. In such circumstances, librarians noted that they were often unsure how to best assist these customers and where the boundaries were in getting involved in an individual's specific benefits case or claim. With community needs continuously present and undoubtedly exacerbated during the pandemic, more consideration could be given to the types of training librarians and library staff could receive as frontline staff members directly interacting with customers and the ways to effectively respond to the ever-growing, ever-changing, and sometimes dire needs of patrons.

▶ **Virtual programming for adults has generally been geared toward well-being and recreation** (e.g., painting classes, book clubs for adults, poetry workshops, mindfulness and meditation sessions, yoga classes, etc.). However, adult programming is overall less present, particularly when compared to the availability of children, teen, and family programming. Librarians reported that adult program attendance is often sparse, but are unsure if that is due to a lack of interest or if patrons are simply unaware of the available programs. One librarian noted that many class-like activities for adults are harder to transition to a virtual format due to the logistics of online learning and time requirements of participation.

▶ **Many libraries' websites have become sites for community health updates, offering public health guidance and information and resources related to the COVID-19 pandemic.** Libraries are promoting "wraparound services" (food assistance, food pantry resources, housing support information, etc.) as well as specific mental health resources/support and/or well-being resources in response to the pandemic.

▶ **Libraries seem to be addressing the holistic needs of their patrons and acknowledging the hardships many community members are facing right now.** Libraries have historically been in touch with their specific community

needs, and this community hub aspect of local libraries and librarians seems to have been magnified during the pandemic, particularly as community needs evolved.

▶ **Libraries have made great use of social media like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram to expand their reach and increase engagement with the communities they serve.** In this way, libraries have expanded their virtual presence on social media where many patrons may already have accounts or frequent regularly.

▶ **Libraries adopted the customer-focused mantra of meeting patrons where they are, expanding service reach and deepening their roots within the community.** In the virtual space, libraries have also made adaptations to their virtual presence in the form of updated library websites and designated resource pages for virtual programming information.

▶ It appears that the transition to virtual has come with challenges, as some library services have not moved to a digital space. **Many websites showed that some of the existing services and programming have been canceled.** Librarians noted that along with the closure of libraries at the beginning of the pandemic, some programs "died with it." Many of the programs that were discontinued centered around in-person contact, such as concerts and art programs, which were difficult to emulate in an online format.

▶ **In terms of programming and services, there appears to be little sharing of assets across libraries in a virtual space. Libraries within counties appear to be operating in silos.** While many innovative practices have been observed in this review (i.e., digital hotspot rentals, mental health presentations, support groups), many of those practices are not shared within or across counties in New Jersey. Some librarians reported that coordination between libraries was difficult to arrange, particularly during the ever-shifting conditions presented by the pandemic. Other librarians reported that they were still in the process of determining the program that worked for their particular library and library patrons, and were not in a place to expand offerings.

▶ **There appears to be large disparities between the resources, programming, and protocols between libraries within the same geographic areas, which has potentially led to confusion for patrons in need of services.** Librarians reported dealing with the frustrations of patrons confused by the differences in library practices from one library to another. Many libraries are operating with practices that fit their specific library's needs, such as closing midday to clean, allowing people inside to use services such as computers, or only offering curbside pick-up and services. The variety of arrangements in the physical library locations as well as those online has created some confusion. Many librarians reported that their patrons do not know if their locations are open or where to access services.

Emerging Promising Practices

Overall, the most innovative practices observed in the Heldrich Center's review of New Jersey public libraries' websites represent a pivot in thinking and service delivery to more proactively meet customers where they are and respond to the needs of customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Local libraries and librarians have a long-standing reputation of being a trusted entity with a dedicated customer and relationship-building focus. Librarians also go to great lengths to maintain an understanding of their specific community's needs. This identity and role as community hub has been further deepened during the pandemic, with librarians having a keen understanding of the issues and challenges their customers deal with on a daily basis.

Librarians have exceptional insights to the wide-ranging and holistic needs of those struggling at this time, noting everything from Internet or electronic device access, computer literacy, food insecurity, issues with submitting job applications, difficulty collecting benefits, and more. For this reason, many libraries are offering services that aim to support their patrons more holistically throughout the pandemic.

Holistic Care

These expanded holistic services often include mental health and wellness components, as well as more traditional wraparound services that address the needs and concerns of

a whole person, such as food assistance, housing assistance, and more. Programming that addresses the whole person also takes shape in the physical wellness classes that are prevalent in many local libraries. Examples include Zoom chair yoga, outdoor Tai chi classes, and socially distant strength training classes. Holistic care and services often serve to amplify other programming efforts, as they help to get customers in a healthier state to take action and execute their plans, including looking for a job or making a career change. Person-centered programming that responds to people's needs right now can be seen throughout various libraries across the state and could continue to be expanded.

▸ Example: The Trenton Free Public Library lists extensive information on food banks and housing services in the area. The Somerset County Library System offers chair yoga classes, mental wellness meetings, virtual programming on making healthy choices such as cooking for one and a recipe club, and events focused on financial literacy.

Mental Health and Wellness

Similar to the move to address the holistic needs of patrons, libraries have also taken great strides in directly addressing the need for mental health support during these uncertain times, as well as providing resources from licensed professionals about how to manage mental health during the pandemic. Some libraries have started wellness check-ins for patrons by request, where library staff personally call patrons to check on their health and well-being. In addition, libraries have collaborated with local mental health professionals to host webinars and meetings with patrons in order to discuss mental wellness and offer ways to cope with pandemic stress and anxiety.

While mental health and recreational programming for adults seems to be popular, there is potential to expand adult programming to target specific groups that are known to be in need of greater wellness supports. One such population is job seekers. Opportunities could exist to provide job search-related support in conjunction with the mental health and recreational programs already being offered. Examples to consider are painting classes for job seekers, mental health services/support groups for job seekers, and more.

▸ Example: Verona Public Library offered customers a virtual presentation by clinicians from the Intensive Family Support Services entitled *Managing Mental Health while Returning to School During Covid-19*.

Community and Connection

Heldrich Center researchers point to the lessons learned from the libraries in a recently released brief, *Strategically Virtual: Building Communities of Care in Workforce Development Programs*. The unique culture and positioning of libraries as free community resources open to all, presents a distinct model of service and customer relationship dynamic rooted in community, care, and connection. Libraries maintain an emphasis on building lifelong relationships with community members, offering programming and services that span the needs of individuals from childhood through adulthood. As the need for human connection and wide-ranging supports continues, libraries have stepped up to offer support groups, including those for parents, caregivers, and job seekers. This programming addresses the isolation many are feeling during the pandemic and offers an innovative way to promote connection, information and experience sharing, and much more.

▸ Example: The Maywood Public Library offers multiple recreational events focused on bringing people together, which include virtual game nights, movie nights, and a series that invites patrons to grab a cup of coffee and join library staff for a virtual coffee break.

Resources to Address the Digital Divide

In terms of new or expanded programming, extensive services are available that recognize the importance of digital literacy in this new virtual environment and that aim to provide the knowledge and tools necessary for patrons to participate in a virtual world. This is particularly important as technology has become a lifeline for communication as well as critical to engaging in routine day-to-day activities that have transitioned online for safety reasons. Many local libraries have established themselves as a community resource for tools to address the digital divide, both in terms of knowledge and access to technological devices. Examples include technological device rentals, remote hotspot lending, and digital literacy lessons that educate patrons about how to use search engines and digital products like Microsoft.

To help address the gap in broadband and digital device access, libraries are bolstering their supply of mobile technology devices and Internet hotspots to get more patrons connected to the virtual world. Internet and device access

have become necessary for participation in school and work, and libraries have centered themselves as key community resources for connection assistance.

▶ Example: The Technology Learning Center at Cape May County Library offers a series of classes to increase customer familiarity with common technologies as well

as information on how to avoid viruses and scams. The Hoboken Public Library maintains a technology lending program that offers patrons access to a variety of electronic devices, including Kindles, Nooks, iPad Minis, Wi-Fi hotspots, and laptops.

Moving Forward: Opportunities to Serve Local Communities

As the needs of job seekers and communities evolve, libraries as well as other community organizations could take steps to further deepen their roots into the pulse of the community and its needs, in order to identify targeted opportunities for assistance.

A system of collaboration and sharing could be established to effectively meet the needs of patrons in the weeks and months to come.

With all of the innovative practices and programs being developed in libraries and other community organizations across a state, it should be noted that these assets could be shared for the mutual benefit of program creators as well as program participants. Every library or library system does not have to "reinvent the wheel" in terms of developing programming. Shared or collective resources can minimize the burden on individual libraries or library systems to produce programming, so that these entities may focus on the tasks and projects that require human intervention. System collaboration would not only benefit patrons, but it would also benefit staff.

In a digital environment, communication and collaboration are more critical than ever. Librarians and library staff reported still working on their internal collaborative processes for sharing information, as evidenced by one librarian's sentiments: "There are issues with communication across the board, even within libraries with staff divided into two alternating teams that come together in sporadic department meetings only."

While the difficulties of remote teams can exacerbate communication and collaboration breakdowns, it is critical that libraries and other community organizations try to rise above and prioritize the creation of a continuous network of services and programming. Shared assets within and across libraries throughout a state could exponentially increase the effectiveness of patron engagement and the robustness of virtual programming available to those in need at this time.

Place-based boundaries no longer matter.

As the world has become more accustomed to operating in a virtual space, physical boundaries are no longer an obstacle or deterrent when it comes to accessing services, education, and work. The COVID-19 pandemic is a testament to this principle, as many schools and workplaces quickly transitioned to a virtual format at the onset of the public health crisis. For libraries, this brings a new opportunity to serve not only patrons within their geographical confines, but patrons from across different areas. As one librarian noted, "We can serve everyone now."

Libraries and library systems can consider how they may lean into this new virtual world and open their doors, both physically and virtually, to everyone in need of services at this time. In the roundtable sessions, some librarians reported that their library was still observing residential requirements to access library services and how this caused confusion and difficulties in turning people away. While existing regulations such as residential requirements are still observed in some New Jersey counties, it may be time to consider if those are

most appropriate for the new virtual first environment as well as if they are an appropriate response to the sheer extent of the need present in some communities at this time.

An ongoing need to convey information to patrons with greater clarity.

While great strides have been made to create websites that offer patrons helpful tools, resources, and information, there is still potential for some libraries to more clearly articulate the extent of their available programming and where services can be found, whether in person or online. An ongoing issue that was reported by librarians and library staff was the confusion surrounding whether libraries were open or closed during the pandemic, and exactly what open or closed means in a virtual world. According to some librarians, patrons expressed frustration at not knowing if their local library location was physically open or closed, and the lack of clarity that surrounded the issue of being closed physically but open virtually. Communicating service availability and being open virtually were two issues that many libraries, as well as other service-oriented organizations, have struggled with since the start of the mandated building closures. In one of the roundtables, a library staff member described the issue as: "All libraries have different procedures at this point — open/closed, appointment only, walk in, computer use allowed/not allowed, etc. Libraries within the same county do not have the same policies and it is frustrating for patrons."

For this reason, clarity of communication is critical to properly convey open status and where services can be found as well as how to access them. A library's website should be thought of as another front door, therefore librarians and library staff could consider how they may take more steps to create a welcoming and clear experience in a virtual world. Moreover, with greater clarity, patrons may experience fewer obstacles in the process of trying to access services in these stressful times. Ease of access and reducing barriers to participation are ways in which libraries can continue to respond to the needs of patrons and serve their local communities.

Libraries are trusted community entities with deep and far-reaching community ties, which makes them uniquely positioned to be in touch with the evolving needs of patrons and the community at large.

Libraries aim to build lifelong relationships with their patrons and community members, as they provide services and programs for people of all ages. Libraries' relationship-

building customer approach ensures that patrons continue to return for assistance as their needs evolve over their lifetime. While other service organizations maintain transactional approaches to customer service, the mentality and uniqueness of libraries' status within their communities makes them the ideal entity to offer highly localized and customized services that will effectively address the needs of their specific population. Moreover, as the needs of all customers, particularly job seekers, continue to grow at this time, libraries will undoubtedly need to be a central part of recovery efforts moving forward.

Libraries also have a unique reputation of offering high-touch assistance and services. This reputation leads many community members to the conclusion that if they are in need, they should contact the library, and someone will be there to assist them. The ability to reach a person on the phone who will listen and may be able to assist with a problem should not be taken for granted at this time. Many individuals, particularly those who are unemployed, have reported experiencing extreme difficulties in collecting benefits or filing for public assistance during the pandemic, with little customer service recourse available to them.

Librarians and library staff are aware that they play a unique role within their communities, and this role seems to have been magnified over the past year. Regarding the difficulties in circumstances librarians are seeing on the ground, two roundtable participants noted: "We are interacting with people who are coming in with no other options for assistance" and "We don't want to abandon people coming in as their last resort." With libraries positioned to capture community members most in need of assistance, more could be done to support these efforts and empower librarians with the resources, tools, and knowledge to offer effective assistance to those struggling at this time.

Greater local and state assistance is needed to empower local libraries to assist patrons with a diversity of needs.

Librarians confront such a diversity of community needs on a daily basis and often find themselves serving as an information gatherer, service connector, career coach, counselor, technology expert, and more, within the span of one day interacting with patrons. With libraries serving as such a central community hub, more resources could be directed to empowering them as frontline staff to meet the needs of the patrons they are actively engaging with daily. One librarian asked, "Is there a way for librarians to be

trained for social services and job seeker support?" Libraries and librarians are on the front lines of tackling community needs, and could be empowered with greater local and state assistance to make effective change in the lives of the patrons and community members they are tasked with serving.

A culture of agility and flexibility could be established for libraries to embrace being strategically virtual moving forward.

Libraries, and other service organizations, must continue to adapt to the virtual world and should not wait for the day when service delivery is completely in person again, or be overly reliant on how things used to be done. Regarding her library's culture of outreach to patrons, one librarian noted, "There seems to be an unwillingness to change." In this instance, this library was primarily still using printed flyers to inform people of upcoming programs and did not want to alter its marketing strategy. While many libraries are facing constraints in resources and staff bandwidth, more could be done to be strategically virtual and expand or redefine practices and programming to be most effective for patrons. As such, agility and flexibility are core tenets of adapting to the ever-changing circumstances and rising above familiarity and uncertainty to continue to meet customers' needs.

In the Heldrich Center's review of the websites of New Jersey public libraries, there was an apparent contrast between libraries that responded to patrons' needs during the pandemic (e.g., updating websites, offering virtual programming, clarifying service availability, rethinking supports, etc.) and the libraries that did not make such adaptations. An accessible and informative website is now a prerequisite for operating in the new, virtual first landscape.

Therefore, those libraries and other service organizations that have not yet made such virtual adaptations should strongly consider doing so.

Prepare now to get in front of the difficulties ahead. Communities are struggling. What can be done to help?

A majority of those who lost their jobs during the pandemic began collecting Unemployment Insurance benefits in mid to late 2020. Looking ahead, as these individuals phase out of Unemployment Insurance benefits and extensions, they will be considered long-term unemployed. Long-term unemployment creates an additional series of obstacles with job search that these individuals will have to navigate. As such, there will be a pressing need for more job seeker support and mental health and well-being support for this population. Assistance in navigating the "new" job market and guidance to find family-sustaining and sufficient employment will likely be necessary to assist this population. In addition, greater ties to wraparound services such as food assistance, housing assistance, child and older adult care, transportation assistance, mental health support, and more, will likely be another demand placed on frontline service organizations such as public libraries. For all these reasons, libraries should consider how they may offer more job seeker-specific and holistic services to actively assist job seekers through dedicated programming efforts.

As one librarian stated, the goal is to "serve as many people as we can and in a safe way." With this sentiment in mind, libraries can consider what issues are coming up in their local communities and how they may be able to get out in front of those issues now.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has and will continue to have an impact on the economy, as well as society at large. To accommodate the millions of unemployed Americans, steps must be taken to adopt supportive practices that reflect the changing labor market in order to bring these individuals back into the workforce. Because of the nature of this economic downturn, community-based programming is vital to support the recovery ahead. With their reputation as a trusted community hub, libraries have the opportunity to step forward and provide aid during these uncertain times, as well as contribute to the economic recovery that is much needed. This is further heightened by the opportunity to provide comprehensive virtual services, since physical boundaries are no longer a major factor at play as the world steers toward virtual. Libraries are in a unique position to be able to provide this community-based programming in a virtual-friendly environment.

Looking toward the future, libraries would benefit from a more collaborative system of sharing content both within counties and across a state, so that innovative practices are put into place that benefit all state residents. In addition, libraries should consider offering job seeker-specific services to help those who are long-term unemployed reenter the workforce. To succeed in this endeavor, state and local entities must allocate additional resources to public libraries so that existing services can continue to be provided and to allow the potential for newer services to be developed for patrons' benefit. All in all, libraries are a valued community resource that should be utilized to their fullest potential, so that individuals may be able to recover socially and economically from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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About the Heldrich Center

The John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University is devoted to transforming the workforce development system at the local, state, and federal levels. The center, located within the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, provides an independent source of analysis for reform and innovation in policymaking and employs cutting-edge research and evaluation methods to identify best practices in workforce development, education, and employment policy. It is also engaged in significant partnerships with the private sector, workforce organizations, and educational institutions to design effective education and training programs. It is deeply committed to assisting job seekers and workers attain the information, education, and skills training they need to move up the economic ladder.

As captured in its slogan, "Solutions at Work," the Heldrich Center is guided by a commitment to translate the strongest research and analysis into practices and programs that companies, community-based organizations, philanthropy, and government officials can use to strengthen their workforce and workforce readiness programs, create jobs, and remain competitive. The center's work strives to build an efficient labor market that matches workers' skills and knowledge with the evolving demands of employers. The center's projects are grounded in a core set of research priorities:

▶ Career and Technical Education

▶ Data Collection and Analysis

▶ Disability Employment

▶ Job Seekers in Transition

▶ Program Evaluation

▶ Trend Analysis

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