

CASE STUDY: Bangor Public Library

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

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Introduction

Purpose of the case

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

Overview of the case

The Mt. Auburn team initially selected the Bangor Public Library as a case study for this research project because of its specialized Business Center that provides a co-working space for entrepreneurs and small businesses in the community. Rather than being a model for other communities, the case study evolved partially into a cautionary tale. The Robert C. and Linda Sutherland Allen Business Center opened in 2021 to respond to community needs identified in 2016 when the library was planning a major renovation. Unfortunately, in the five years that transpired between the conception of the center and its opening, the community context had changed significantly, with other co-working spaces and entrepreneurial support programs established. Center use was less than anticipated, and the library is struggling with the opportunity costs associated with the underuse of a prime section of the library.

On the other hand, the Bangor case study also highlights the importance of developing strong relationships with other organizations in the community that are providing workforce and business support services. Staff at the library have reached out and developed referral networks and partnerships with the Adult Literacy Center, the CareerCenter, and SCORE, a small business support provider. This case also highlights the library's role in filling a perceived gap in the broader workforce development system—providing basic computer literacy skills that many job seekers need. Finally, this case study highlights the challenges for a smaller library system in documenting its role in the system and tracking the outcomes of its workforce and business support services.

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 for further analysis.

		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 or completed virtually for those unable to meet in person. In the case of the Bangor Public Library, the Mt. Auburn team conducted nine interviews. The team conducted six of these interviews onsite in Bangor during an April 21 to April 22, 2022 site visit and three interviews virtually over Zoom later that month. Of the nine interviewees, five were library system staff, two were workforce system staff, one represented a business development organization, and one was a civic leader. The Mt. Auburn team used semi-structured protocols to guide stakeholder interviews.

Community context

To better understand the Bangor Public Library’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 Bangor.

Library system

The Bangor Public Library, the second-largest public library in Maine, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The library’s history dates back to the 1830s when the Bangor Mechanics Association started accumulating books to further the education of its employees. In 1883, the city voted to use funds from the estate of the Honorable Samuel F. Hersey to establish a library to incorporate the books collected by the Mechanics Association, and in 1913 the main library opened to the public. With no branches, this building remains the sole library facility in the community.

There was a major library renovation in 1996, with funding from the city and a

generous contribution from Stephen and Tabitha King, area residents. An additional renovation in 2016 involved the establishment of the Robert C. and Linda Sutherland Allen Business Center “to foster community and to support entrepreneurs, nonprofits, businesses, freelancers, and other enterprising individuals in Bangor.”

As a nonprofit, a nine-member board of trustees governs the library. The Bangor Mechanics Association, which still exists as a civic organization, selects four of the trustees, and the Hersey Fund established by the late Samuel F. Hersey, a local lumber baron and U.S. Congressman who left part of his estate for the maintenance of the Bangor Public Library, selects an additional four trustees. The ninth trustee is an ex-officio member representing the city of Bangor.

Library	Bangor Public Library
Service area	Bangor, ME
Population of service area	32,262
# of branches*	1
Administrative structure	Nonprofit
Operating revenue	\$2,281,847
Operating revenue per capita	\$70.73
Total paid staff (FTE)	31.34
# of adult programs**	295
# of internet computers	63
Computers per 1,000 population	1.95

* 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

As part of Maine's Regional Library System, the Bangor Public Library is one of three Area Reference and Referral Centers (ARRCs) in Maine. The ARRCs provide backup reference services for libraries, interlibrary loan assistance, and expanded collections to circulate through the district libraries.

In 2019, the Bangor Public Library had total revenues of \$2,281,847. Of this amount, about 63 percent came from the city of Bangor.¹ The library has an endowment, most of which came from donations by wealthy families associated with the lumber industry. Some parts of the endowment have restrictions attached. For example, in the 1920s, a family donated \$500,000 with a restriction that the library could use the monies only for purchasing books. Additional revenue comes from the state and fundraising by organizations, including the Friends of the Bangor Public Library.

After the departure of a longtime director, a new director took over in 2018, about a year-and-a-half prior to the COVID shutdown. Other key managers also came on board right before or during the shutdown.

Community conditions

Bangor, located in central Maine on the Penobscot River, is the third most populous city in Maine, the county seat of Penobscot County, and part of the Bangor, ME Metropolitan Statistical Area. With a population of 31,753, according to the 2020 U.S. Census, Bangor is predominantly white (89.6 percent). According to the U.S. Census ACS 2020 5-year average, the median household income in Bangor of \$47,538 is significantly below the U.S. average and its poverty rate of 16.5 percent is relatively high.

Community Conditions	Bangor	United States
Unemployment rate	4.6%	5.4%
Persons in poverty	16.5%	11.4%
Median household income	\$47,538	\$64,994
In civilian labor force	60.4%	63.0%
HS graduate or higher (> 25 y.o.)	94.7%	88.5%
BA or higher (> 25 y.o.)	36.7%	32.9%
Foreign-born persons	4.3%	13.5%
Households with internet access	84.8%	85.2%

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

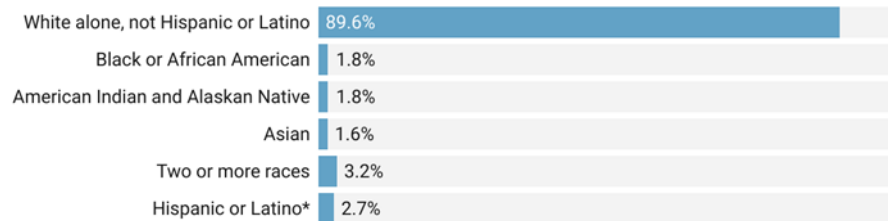
Bangor, located on the land of the Penobscot people, officially incorporated in 1791 and became a part of Maine in 1820; at this point, Bangor was already a northern hub for settlers involved in fishing and fur trading. By 1850, Bangor was considered the lumber capital of the world, with over 300 sawmills in the city.² As wood construction declined in the early 20th century, Bangor’s dominant industry shifted to the production of wood pulp and paper.³

¹Financials: Maine Public Library Financials. Counting Opinions (SQUIRE) Ltd. Accessed June 14, 2022. <https://www.countingopinions.com/pireports/report.php?671c967c99286da45cd1e9fad35c61d7>

²Robbins, Ryan R. “Bangor History.” Bangor, Maine. Accessed June 14, 2022. <http://bangorinfo.com/history.html>

³Welcome to the City of Bangor, Maine - History. City of Bangor, Maine. Accessed June 14, 2022. <https://www.bangormaine.gov/content/2037/1495/1864/default.aspx>

Racial and ethnic breakdown of Bangor



* 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

Today, Bangor has a labor force of 69,056, and healthcare is a cornerstone of its economy, with its largest employers including Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center, Northern Light Health, Hannaford Bros. Co., and St. Joseph Hospital.⁴

A city council of nine at-large elected officials governs Bangor. The city council oversees city policy, budgeting, and oversight. The city council selects a chair, who serves as the mayor.⁵

Relevant systems

The state-enabling environment—the policies and practices of state agencies related to both public library support and workforce development policies and priorities—influences each public library.⁶ Moreover, each public library operates within a very different local environment related to the workforce and small business ecosystems. This section reviews the state-level and community-level systems in which the Bangor Public Library operates.

State-level support: policies, funding, and infrastructure

State Library administrative agency

The state agency overseeing libraries in Maine is the Maine State Library, an independent state agency. The Library Commission, which comprises 15 voting members whom the governor appoints and two permanent members representing the ARRCs, oversees State Library policies and operations. The Maine State Library has three divisions:

1. The Library Development Division library staff to provide locally relevant and impactful services throughout the state.
2. The Public and Outreach Services, Research and Innovation Division oversees direct services at the State Library facility.

⁴ Employment Data. Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce, July 23, 2021. <https://www.bangorregion.com/our-region/employment/>

⁵ City Council. Welcome to the City of Bangor, Maine - City Council. City of Bangor, Maine. Accessed June 14, 2022. <https://www.bangormaine.gov/content/1538/1751/default.aspx>

⁶ While there is an established state workforce development system due to requirements related to the flow of federal funds, there is not a similar state small business support system that plays a role at the city and regional levels. As a result, this case study does not provide an overview of the state small business system but focuses instead on the city and regional entrepreneurial and small system support ecosystem.

3. The Collection Development, Digital Initiatives and Promotion is responsible for building a statewide digital repository and acquiring, cataloging, repairing, and preserving library collections.

The Maine Five-Year State Plan: 2018-2022 set out the goals for the Maine State Library and priorities for the use of Federal Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) funds.⁷ The fourth goal, “Expand and enhance lifelong learning opportunities Maine residents,” is the one most relevant to how the state approaches workforce development. The Maine State Library allocates some of the federal funds to support the Digital Maine Library that provides Maine residents with access to online resources such as the Career Preparation Center, which offers online skill development related to specific occupations. The Digital Maine Library also provides access to the LearningExpress Library, the Computer Skills Center, and the Job and Career Accelerator Center. In addition, to address life-long learning, the Maine State Library plans to adapt the *Bendable model*, a learning platform developed by the St. Joe County Public Library in South Bend, Indiana, to a statewide lifelong learning platform. Bendable Maine will have workforce development and small business resources as a central focus. The goals of Bendable Maine closely align with those of Governor Janet Mills’ Economic Development Strategy.⁸ (See related case study.)

Maine’s annual LSTA Grants to States allotment from the IMLS in 2021 was \$1.34 million. In addition, Maine received approximately \$2.3 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) State Grants. The ARPA funds were particularly relevant to workforce development, as \$600,000 went to develop and launch Bendable.

While not providing significant resources to local libraries for workforce development or business development, the Maine State Library strongly supports libraries in Maine playing a significant role in the workforce development system. The State Library has a statewide specialist responsible for rural and small libraries and workforce. The current specialist had previously worked in the Maine workforce system. Given her background, she has played a prominent role not only in the state of Maine, where she sits on the Women’s Employment Committee of the State Workforce Board, but also nationally in promoting libraries as critical players in the workforce system.

State workforce system

Workforce development in Maine includes a wide range of service providers ranging from nonprofit and community-based organizations running training and job access programs, the Maine Community College System, and Maine CareerCenters, which all connect residents with employment, training, and other services. The Maine State Workforce Board is responsible for assisting the governor in performing the duties and responsibilities mandated by the federal

⁷ Maine State Library. Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA), Maine Five-Year State Plan: 2018-2022. Accessed June 14, 2022. <https://www.maine.gov/msl/libs/lsta/>. Submitted June 28, 2017, approved by the Maine Library Commission June 19, 2017.

⁸ Bendable Maine. Maine State Library. Accessed June 14, 2022. https://www11.maine.gov/msl/libs/grant_projects/BendableMaine.shtml

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. The board oversees the state’s public workforce development system and is responsible for developing the state’s “Unified State Plan” for WIOA. Maine has only three local workforce boards that coordinate workforce development investment activities and administer and oversee certain WIOA programs.

Maine’s most recent state workforce plan, covering 2020-2023,⁹ included explicit directions for the state’s workforce entities to partner with the public library system. The plan outlines the specific resources at libraries relevant to workforce development and states:

“Local Boards will develop agreements with regional libraries and, using best practices already available in state, engage in staff cross-training that will inform workforce system staff about the resources libraries offer and how to promote these to their customers.”

To implement this priority, CareerCenter consultants now have office time at local libraries as part of a state Department of Labor initiative.

Local workforce and business development ecosystems

Workforce development system

The Northeastern Workforce Development Board (NWDB) oversees the public workforce system in the region. Its headquarters are in Bangor, but it serves a large geographic area that includes Aroostook, Hancock, Penobscot, Piscataquis, and Washington counties. According to NWDB's most recent strategic plan:

“As the Board endeavors to develop new partnerships and reinforce existing ones, the goal is always the same: to effectively provide services to job seekers and employers, address skill gaps impeding economic growth, and develop and share career pathways that support the efforts of workers to access higher wages and more skilled employment.”¹⁰

None of NWDB’s strategic documents explicitly discusses the role of libraries in this system.

The one-stop operator in the region is a consortium that includes the Aroostook County Action Program, Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC), and Eastern Aroostook Adult and Community Education. The CareerCenter of most relevance to Bangor residents is the Tri-County CareerCenter, which EDC operates.

Finally, another key player in the workforce system is Bangor Adult and Community Education, which offers courses in high school completion, college transition, adult basic education, ESOL, and some specialized occupational training programs.

⁹ Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research. (Approved by USDOL and USDOE June 2020.) Maine PYs 2020-2023 - WIOA State Plan Common Elements - Workforce Analysis - 36db23d0-e358-411e-be65-992f47004cbc | WIOA State Plan Portal. Retrieved June 14, 2022, from <https://wioaplans.ed.gov/node/20546>

¹⁰ Northeastern Workforce Development Board, Strategic Plan 2021-2025. Northeastern Workforce Development Board, June 1, 2021. <https://www.northeasternwdb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-Northeastern-Workforce-Development-Board-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

Business development system

The Bangor region has a strong infrastructure of entrepreneurial and small business support organizations that work together collaboratively to serve the needs of local entrepreneurs and small businesses. A number of business support organizations, including Maine SBDC (operated by Coastal Enterprises), EMDC, Four Directions Development Corporation, MaineStream Finance, New Ventures Maine, SCORE, and Scratchpad Accelerator, have joined together to form the Business Resource Partners for Greater Bangor. However, this group only includes a subset of the business support entities in the Bangor region. UpStart Maine, a coalition of entrepreneur-support programs and organizations in the greater Bangor Region, is a collaborative group that includes specialized incubators, co-working spaces, community finance entities, and business accelerators. The Bangor Public Library, while working with SCORE, is not part of any of these broader coalitions.

Library workforce and business development services

Overview of the library's approach

As a single-outlet system, a relatively small staff at the main library design and implement all Bangor Public Library service offerings. The system has historically played a prominent role in the community and has always valued having its staff develop relationships with organizations in the community. In addition to providing standard reference services, the library has run its own computer literacy classes and partnered for many years with SCORE, the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) organization that matches its volunteers with small businesses and entrepreneurs. The one distinctive business development approach is the Robert C. and Linda Sutherland Allen Business Center, a co-working space that came about as part of the library's renovation in 2016. This section reviews these services in more detail.

Workforce development services

Standard services

Many residents in the Bangor region who are seeking employment come to the library for computer access, word processing software, access to digital resources, and in-person guidance for job applications and the job search process. There is a wide range of competencies in terms of the individuals who come into the library for this purpose. The most common need has been for access to a computer and help on how to use the computer.

For those individuals seeking assistance, the library's circulation staff will refer them to the reference department. The reference staff consider job seekers as the core demographic they serve. Staff at the reference desk have experience providing general resources to assist those seeking employment or needing specific help on applications. If there is a significant gap in their abilities related to computers, staff refer the patron to the reference librarian with a particular focus on computer literacy.

The reference staff are also well versed in the general online resources of importance to a patron looking for job opportunities or training for specific occupations. For those who need help with resume writing or identifying local training options, the staff are also well aware of local resources and actively refer residents to the CareerCenter located in Bangor.

Finally, part of the library's standard services is connecting job seekers with resources the Maine State Library system makes available. This includes LearningExpress, which provides access to classes, some of which offer continuing education units. The library also provides access to many sources of test prep software.

Specialized services

The specialized services that the library provides all focus specifically on computer literacy, as the library views this as a particular gap in the community's workforce development system. Services include:

- *Workplace Tech Skills Group:* The digital media librarian offers regular classes on a range of technology skills. Classes include how to use Microsoft Excel and Word and a Workplace Skills Class that covers subjects such as managing email. The library also hosts a weekly informal small group class focused on technology skills for office workplaces.
- *Technology workshops:* About once a month, the library offers technology workshops on a variety of subjects. While some do not focus on job-related skills, some workshops support building technology skills needed for many jobs, such as Microsoft Excel and Word and Google Drive and Google Docs.
- *One-on-one technical assistance on computers and software:* The library also offers one-on-one technology tutoring appointments. The digital media librarian is available for up to 60-minute appointments to help with computer questions in-person, by phone, or over Zoom.

Community hub services

There are no partner-operated workforce development services co-located at Bangor Public Library facilities.

Small business development services

Standard services

While not nearly as common as job seekers, individuals who want to start a business or already own a business and are looking for resources often come to the library seeking assistance. Because of the library's relationship with SCORE, there is a relatively active referral process. SCORE, a national nonprofit organization supported by the SBA that provides mentoring and educational workshops for small businesses, will refer business owners to the Bangor Public Library for research and data needs, often for market data, and the library will refer business owners to SCORE mentors.

The reference staff also point patrons to the library's own considerable business-related resources. There are numerous books about starting your own business and running a business, and many digital resources such as legal data forms databases are helpful. The Digital Library and collection of databases that the State Library provides access to are also valuable resources.

Specialized services

The Robert C. and Linda Sutherland Allen Business Center, on the second floor of the Bangor Public Library, is a specialized space with eight workspaces for patrons and two rental spaces for video calls and meetings. Business Center members have access to computers, a high-capacity printer, and business-related software, including Adobe InDesign, QuickBooks, and Photoshop. No library staff

work directly in the center, though library staff are responsible for the booking and management of the facility. The library structured the center as a membership model, with patrons paying for access to the facilities. The library intended that this new center would play a key role in supporting entrepreneurial and small business development in the region (see sidebar).

Community hub services

In addition to the specialized services library staff provide, the library has partnered with SCORE, which uses the library space to meet with clients and host specialized workshops. SCORE partners with the library on the following program:

- *SCORE Lunch and Learn sessions:* The local SCORE branch has had a relatively longstanding relationship with the Bangor Public Library and has partnered with the library on monthly workshops. These Lunch and Learn sessions were quite popular pre-COVID, and, according to staff, provided an opportunity for not only learning but also networking. Library staff shared that it was hard to get people to leave the room following a workshop because *“people were sort of naturally building relationships as a result of being here in this space for programs.”* While SCORE and the library tried to continue these workshops virtually during the pandemic, it was difficult to replicate online and attendance was low. There are plans to try to revive the sessions in an in-person format in the fall of 2022.

Service administration

Staffing and management

Of library staff, the four reference librarians are most relevant to the workforce and business services. Of the four, the digital media reference librarian has had the most interaction with job seekers and entrepreneurs, though all of the reference librarians provide support and referrals when they are staffing the reference desk. The digital media reference librarian has done

The Robert C. and Linda Sutherland Allen Business Center: A Cautionary Tale

As part of the 2016 renovation of the Bangor Public Library, there was considerable outreach in the community to identify potential community needs that the library could fulfill. One of these needs that many organizations in the community identified was a place for entrepreneurs and small business owners to work and a space for community meetings. As part of the fundraising, a local family contributed funds to establish a business center in the library bearing the family's name. The concept was similar to a co-working space and included a membership fee.

For several reasons, the center has not been successful:

1. The renovation took so long that the timeframe between the center's conception and its actual opening was over five years. During that time, many other similar facilities opened in the community. For example, the local chamber, a big proponent of the center, moved into larger offices during this period and now could host meetings and businesses in its own facility.
2. There was insufficient attention to the practical needs of entrepreneurs. In particular, the library's limited hours did not align with how entrepreneurs wanted to use the space.
3. The booking system (which initially required a phone call) and membership fee model may have detracted some potential patrons of the center.
4. Outreach has been limited, primarily through word of mouth and the relationship with SCORE.

Given the limited use of the center, there is concern that a coveted section of the library is sitting vacant rather than serving other needs. While it does not cost the library money to operate the center, the staff are thinking more about the opportunity cost of having such prime real estate within the library remain underutilized. Staff are currently brainstorming strategies for other uses of the space that respect the intentions of the family that donated the funds for the center while better serving community and library needs.

the most outreach and relationship building. As she commented, *“I took it upon myself to just start building some relationships with some organizations that were working in the same sphere to make sure we knew what each other were doing and to coordinate and cross-promote our work.”*

System support and role

As a single-branch system, management of the workforce and business development services is relatively straightforward. The library director supports a culture of collaboration within the library and encourages staff to play a role in the broader community.

Funding

The library supports the workforce and business development services through regular operations with no special funding. Contributions for the most recent renovations funded the build-out of the Business Center, and there are no additional costs to keeping it open and no staff assigned to work in the Center. The only additional funding for any of the workforce and business development activities came from local banks, which subsidized the lunches at the SCORE Lunch and Learn workshops.

How they determine what to offer

The decision to develop the Business Center emerged from a needs assessment the library conducted as part of the renovation project. At the time of the assessment, some of the business organizations in the community noted the lack of workspace for entrepreneurs and small business owners. However, there was minimal effort to reach out and meet with the individuals who would be potential customers of the center. The focus on computer literacy materialized from a similar, informal assessment of gaps in the workforce system based on discussions with other workforce development providers in the region.

Marketing of services

Other organizations in the community incorporate information about the library’s computer workshops in their newsletters. The CareerCenter dedicates a page of its newsletter to library services and workshops. According to one library staff person, *“I can tell the day that their letter gets mailed because I get 20 calls that day.”* Partners at both the Adult Literacy and CareerCenters supply their clients with brochures that have information on the types of technology-related help that the library offers. There has been somewhat limited outreach related to the Business Center, particularly since it was open for a relatively short period prior to the library closing due to COVID.

Aspirations

Implementing the Bendable initiative in Maine is an aspiration of the State Library system, with the Bangor Public Library identified as one of the three state hubs for this initiative. Launched in June 2020 in South Bend, Indiana, the St. Joe County Public Library, with support from the Drucker Institute, designed the Bendable initiative as a “community-centered lifelong learning system.” According to the promotional material, *“The system’s aim is to make the residents of a particular place more resilient in the face of a fast-changing economy.”* The system helps individuals access the training and education resources they need and also includes “community collections,” which are lifestyle-oriented learning resources that the community contributes. The Maine State Library found

Bendable a compelling model and, with federal ARPA funding, is working with the Drucker Institute to implement the system in Maine.

At the time of the case study interviews, Bangor Public Library staff were still a little unclear about how the program would roll out and what additional resources it could bring to serve library patrons. However, they sensed that the state would be subscribing to additional training resources that patrons could use to upgrade their skills or obtain a credential to improve their careers.

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

Library collaboration with ecosystem partners

The Bangor Public Library leadership and staff have long promoted building relationships with local organizations in the community and the hiring of a new digital media librarian in 2020 further enhanced these relationships. This staff person did considerable outreach in the community and sought to strengthen existing and build new relationships with organizations involved in workforce development and business development in the community.

1. *Partnership with Adult Literacy and CareerCenter:* The digital media librarian reached out to develop a new relationship with Bangor Adult Education, which is part of the Bangor School Department and the Bangor CareerCenter. The director of the Adult Literacy program at Bangor Adult Education realized that many residents interested in participating in its programs lacked basic computer literacy. With a new understanding of the services the library provides, the program now refers these individuals to the classes and support at the library. Similarly, the CareerCenter will now refer individuals it serves who lack basic computer skills to the library.
2. *Partnership with SCORE:* The Bangor Public Library has had a longstanding relationship with SCORE. Their joint execution of the monthly Lunch and Learn sessions prior to the pandemic was the most visible part of this partnership. Beyond these events, the SCORE counselors work with individual businesses to make them aware of the data and resources available at the library and visit the library for mentoring sessions with businesses.

Library's position in the greater ecosystem

The workforce system in the Bangor region was historically very fragmented. In recent years, several key players, including Adult Education, the EMDC, the CareerCenter, Job Corps, and others, have been having partner meetings to share what they are all doing and identify areas of gaps or duplication in the system. While Bangor Public Library staff do not attend these meetings, a representative from the State Library does participate and is there to represent libraries. In terms of the small business support system, there is no evidence that other players in the system, such as the Business Resource Partners for Greater Bangor or Upstart Maine, include the Bangor Public Library in their perception of organizations serving entrepreneurs and small businesses.

- *Evidence of filling system gaps:* Other workforce development service providers consider the computer literacy classes that the library offers as filling a critical gap in the system. Staff at these other providers remarked that individuals often come in for their assistance but lack the basic skills needed to write a resume or apply for a job online. Moreover, basic skills individuals need to function in the workplace, such as how to use email or Word, are lacking. These service

providers believe the library provides a significant resource for job seekers by offering classes and assistance.

- *Evidence of expanding system reach:* While it is clear that many individuals use the Bangor Public Library to access computers and information as part of their job search, there is little direct evidence of if and how this expands system reach. However, one can assume that a number of individuals accessing the libraries would not have any knowledge of other workforce-related services in the region without the information the library supplies.

Pandemic response and recovery

Overview of library services during the pandemic

Like many libraries, the Bangor Public Library completely shut down at the beginning of the pandemic, from March 2020 to June 2020. In June, the library started to offer curbside pickup of reserved books, and, in July 2020, the library started taking computer appointments in the reference department. Many of these appointments were from individuals who lost their jobs and were filling out online employment applications. In September, the children's room reopened, with one household at a time able to visit. By April 2021, the library was open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., with an eventual return to pre-pandemic hours and unrestricted access later in 2021.

Approach to workforce and business development services during the pandemic

During the pandemic, library staff and SCORE attempted to continue their Lunch and Learn workshops virtually. Participation was low, and they eventually decided to pause the sessions.

Another new service resulting from the pandemic was the increased use of Zoom for one-on-one assistance. Library reference staff also offered one-on-one Zoom calls for patrons with specific workforce or business needs. For example, an entrepreneur needed help with market research, and the reference librarian set up a Zoom meeting to help him. The staff also worked with the CareerCenter to direct individuals who did not have access to technology or were not comfortable enough with technology to apply for unemployment or for jobs. Patrons could come to the library and use library technology for virtual appointments with the CareerCenter.

Other than shifting from in-person to virtual assistance and training, the library did not deliver any new workforce and business development services during the pandemic. While the reference staff involved in meeting business and job seeker needs pivoted and became more flexible about how they provided services, overall, the sense was that in-person services and in-person workshops work much better with the population they serve.

Learning from the pandemic

Library staff faced significant challenges during the pandemic but reported that they learned some valuable lessons:

1. Staff realized that they were more resilient than they realized, and the library competencies allowed them to adapt and continue to meet the needs of patrons.

2. Staff learned what is easy and what is difficult around conducting programming online. While some online events were successful, others were a total bust. This has allowed staff to think more about if and how they continue to provide online programming and services.

Tracking and measurement

The library system's approach to tracking and measurement

The Bangor Public Library primarily sees its data collection process as responsive to data that the state of Maine requires (partially for submission to IMLS' annual Public Libraries Survey) and, for some limited efforts, to track outputs for some internal learning. No single staff person oversees all of the data collection processes or systems. Efforts to make the case to funders, most notably the city of Bangor, are more informal, often relying on anecdotal data that librarians in the system provide. Specific areas of data collection include:

1. *General data collection on library operations:* The library has a spreadsheet with categories that each department head contributes to, and then the library director consolidates the department data into a report to the state. The library collects data on the number of active cardholders, the number of books it owns and usage, eBook usage, collection size and usage, the number of books it lends to other libraries or that other libraries request, and data on programming and computer usage. The library uses these data as the basis of the reporting the state requires, but they also inform staff if some material usage is not enough to justify its costs.
2. *Information requests and referrals:* The reference librarians keep track of certain requests with pencil and paper tallying, which they input into an Excel spreadsheet. There is some frustration concerning the time it takes to keep these tallies and the usefulness of the data they are collecting. The library most often uses the data to identify staffing needs, both in terms of number of hours and hours of peak need. The library is not tracking any data on its referrals to the CareerCenter or Adult Literacy, nor the number of individuals that other providers refer to the library for services. Anecdotally, staff hear frequently from patrons that the CareerCenter recommended that they come to the library for help filling out an application or printing materials they need. However, the library does not record the number or types of requests.
3. *Usage of specialized online resources and website:* While basic data are available on the use of the website, the library does not use these metrics for detailed analyses at the time of this study.
4. *Outputs related to specialized and partner services:* The Bangor Public Library staff involved in running specific programs like technology classes, the Business Center, and the SCORE workshops, keep track of the number of patrons who attend specific workshops and classes and the number who receive one-on-one assistance. Similarly, staff keep data on the number of individuals who have different types of membership in the Business Center and the use of the meeting rooms.
5. *Outcomes related to specialized and partner services:* There is no follow-up with the individuals receiving services in terms of collecting outcomes related to learning, employment, business start-up or growth, or application of skills.
6. *Anecdotal evidence:* Often, patrons proactively email and report to library staff about how library services have helped them obtain employment, advance their career, or start a business. While individual librarians might keep an informal record of these stories, they do not do it consistently. The librarians often keep emails that provide some indication of a patron's satisfaction or

outcomes and use these when sharing positive stories about how the library is serving the Bangor community.

As part of the formal federal WIOA system, the CareerCenter does formal tracking of the outcomes of its participants independent of library input. For individuals receiving services, the CareerCenter sends their social security numbers to the state, which tracks their employment status through the state's wage records. The CareerCenter also tracks the employers and individuals who attend their job fairs. Four weeks after any event, it sends out a survey asking employers how many individuals they hired through the job fair and asking job seekers about their experience at the job fair. However, the CareerCenter does not record referrals from the library.

Outcome measurement challenges

Library staff noted many challenges to better tracking workforce and business development outcomes:

- ▶ *Time and focus of frontline staff:* Reference staff at the library believed there were many challenges in converting the pencil and paper tallying of the reference desk to a more robust digital system for tracking patron services and referrals to outside organizations. When the reference desk was busy, librarians felt it would divert the technology resources needed for patron support. Since they often use their computers to provide services, reference staff believed it would be too difficult to pivot to recording data on a computer-based data system. They also questioned the value of spending additional time on this task when they were unsure of the benefits of keeping better track of their time. As one of the reference staff commented, *“With the number of transactions that happen every day at the reference desk, the more granularity you tried to break out what you have done, the more time that librarian would need to spend [recording data] when there are so many calls and people coming.”*
- ▶ *Culture of protection of patron privacy:* The major hurdle for a more robust outcome tracking system was the librarians' concern regarding protecting patrons' privacy.

Interest and feasibility of implementing new outcome measurement systems

There was openness among library staff to a number of possible methods for improving tracking:

- *Logging success stories:* Library staff responded positively to the idea of more formally tracking the anecdotal evidence of outcomes. Currently, the process is entirely ad hoc. Having a platform for providing information on success stories could be helpful, particularly when the library is pursuing relevant funding.
- *Tracking of referrals to the library:* There was interest in developing a more functional tracking system for reference librarians that would allow them to track the number of people other service providers referred to the library for services and for which services they were making referrals.
- *Tracking of referrals from the library to other community partners and systems:* Currently, the other service providers are also not tracking which individuals the library referred; however, the CareerCenter does have an intake form for all visitors. While it does not ask whether they heard about the services through the library, staff from the center said that would be relatively easy to implement.

Observations

Some interesting observations emerged from the Bangor case study:

- ✓ **Proactively seeking out relationships with other organizations involved in workforce and business development in the community can contribute to changing external perceptions of the role of the library.**

Although the leadership at the Bangor Public Library have always valued relationships with local organizations in the community, the focus of the new digital media librarian was more deliberate in going out and meeting with workforce-related organizations in Bangor. She considered building these relationships and filling in gaps that others saw in the system as a core element of her job. Once these partnerships develop, there is a sense that they will expand and become more institutionalized over time.

I don't think there is anything explicitly in the job description about doing outreach ... but it seemed a good opportunity when I was starting here to just think about what partnership there might be with some overlap in terms of people looking for technological skills and job seekers was obviously a big group...I took it upon myself to just start building some relationships with organizations that were working in the same spheres.

- ✓ **If there is a long time period between the design and launch of a new program or center, it may be important for a library to be aware of the changing context within which it is operating.**

One of the significant challenges in the success of the Business Center was that the library developed a detailed plan for the center but did not build in flexibility to account for potential changes in workforce system conditions over the years it took to build the center.

- ✓ **Buy-in from staff directly involved in the data collection process may be important to expanding data tracking efforts.**

The Bangor Public Library does ask staff to track certain data. However, staff are unclear if and how the library uses some of these data. For a tracking system to be successful, frontline staff may need to understand why they are collecting the data and the benefits to the library and patrons related to its collection.

- ✓ **While libraries play a prominent role in navigating residents through complex services, there is often very little awareness of this role at the broader community level.**

Some of the partners with direct relationships were aware of the library's services; many other service providers in the region were unaware that the library played any role in the workforce development or small business support ecosystem. Even the library's partners were not fully aware of the navigating role the Bangor Public Library plays in the system.

- ✓ **Directly engaging community residents through surveys, focus groups, or interviews in program design could potentially improve programs and their outcomes.**

The Bangor Public Library staff, reflecting upon the limited use of their new business center, recognized that many individuals interested in starting a new business or who are operating a small business require access to their workspace during the evening or on weekends. A facility that is only open during regular library hours makes it a less desirable workspace. If the library had engaged

local entrepreneurs and small business owners during the design phase through either focus groups or a more extensive interviewing process, they might have realized earlier that access to the library during hours that the library was not open was important.