

CASE STUDY: St. Joe County Public Library

Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.

September 2022

Introduction

Purpose of the case

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

Overview of the case

The St. Joe County Public Library is a district system with ten outlets, including its main branch in South Bend, Indiana. The recently renovated Main Library includes a newly constructed Community Learning Center building, a community hub that provides space for individuals, businesses, and nonprofits to meet and hold meetings. Additionally, SJCPL is the implementation partner for the Bendable pilot, an innovative lifelong learning initiative developed in partnership with the Drucker Institute. Bendable is a “community-centered lifelong learning platform... designed for residents to acquire new knowledge and skills through online courses and in-person opportunities in order to create more resilient individuals, economies, and communities. The platform provides users access to a wide database of resources to learn online, including over 1,500 resources—for professional and personal learning—from 20 local and national content partners.”¹ Pilot implementation of Bendable included a developmental evaluation that provides information on SJCPL's efforts to evaluate the initiative's outcomes. The Bangor case study also references this initiative.

¹ FSG, “Bendable Lifelong Learning System: Developmental Evaluation Report. December 2020. Funded by the Lumina Foundation. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/bendable-lifelong-learning-system.pdf>

Methodology

During the first phase of this project, the Mt. Auburn team completed a literature review on libraries' role in workforce and business development and identified public libraries with interesting or exemplary models. In addition, the team developed a Theory of Change (TOC) that presents a framework for thinking about the public libraries' role in contributing to the economic wellbeing of residents. The TOC identified three distinct roles that public libraries play: standard, specialized, and community hub (see sidebar). This framework became an important element in the case study research. Working with an Advisory Committee, the Mt. Auburn team identified 80 public libraries to consider for case studies, developed criteria for site selection, and selected ten public library systems.

		Role of libraries in workforce and business development system	
		Workforce development	Small business development
Library Designed and Led Services	Standard services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to computers for resume writing • Help filling out applications or submitting resumes • Books and online information related to job search • Access to online training programs • Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to computers for tax, regulatory, and other forms • Books and online information on entrepreneurship, small businesses, specific industries • Access to databases for business plans and market studies • Access to technology for prototyping - 3D printer • Direct librarian assistance and referral to other resources
	Specialized services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer literacy workshops and training • Career readiness workshops and training • Occupational training • Adult education and ESOL training • Digital navigation and one-on-one coaching • Designated career space • Facilitate job search support groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business plan development and other specialized workshops • Maker spaces, co-working space, media and technology space • Pitch contests and other specialized programs • One-on-one coaching or mentorship programs by dedicated small business staff • Entrepreneur networking events
Partnerships	Community hub services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Stop Career Center location • Facilities for training providers • Training programs run with other partners • Host job fairs with partners • Trusted convener of community service providers • On-the-job training and internship placements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint programs and workshop with other small business service providers such as SCORE • Facilities for small business support organizations to meet clients and hold workshops • Trusted convener of community service providers

The first step in the case study process was to conduct baseline research on the communities in which the libraries reside. This baseline research included a demographic and economic overview of the market area that the library system operates within, an overview of the library system, an analysis of the state policy environment relevant to libraries and workforce development, and background information on the workforce development and business development ecosystem in the community. After gathering the baseline information, the Mt. Auburn team had an introductory phone call with the library system lead to further our understanding of the library and identify the internal and external stakeholders whom system leaders believed would be critical to interview.

In terms of the library system, the Mt. Auburn team interviewed library system staff, including leadership at both the system and outlet levels, library staff directly involved in workforce or business development activities, and communication- and technology-related staff. The external interviews focused on stakeholders in the workforce and business development ecosystem in the library's service area, including "partner" organizations engaged in active collaboration with libraries,

organizations providing workforce or business development services in the region but not engaged in a formal library partnership, and other civic leaders.

The case study interviews were in-person as part of a site visit to each library system or completed virtually for those unable to meet in person. In the case of SJCP, the Mt. Auburn team conducted 11 interviews, ten onsite in St. Joseph County during an April 7, 2022 site visit and one virtually on Zoom during the second and third weeks of April. Of the 11 interviewees, six were library system staff, one was a Drucker Institute representative, one was a representative of an economic development organization in the region, one represented a workforce development organization, and two were civic leaders. The Mt. Auburn team used semi-structured protocols to guide stakeholder interviews.

Community context

To better understand SJCP’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 St. Joseph County more broadly.

Library system

SJCP is a library system in St. Joseph County, Indiana, in the city of South Bend. SJCP has ten library locations throughout its service area but does not serve all of St. Joseph County, which has multiple library systems. The structure of the library system, like most in Indiana, is that of a library district and, under Indiana state law, considered a municipal corporation with taxing authority.² As a district, a library board oversees its financing, policy-making, and hiring of the library director. The seven board members are appointees. In the case of SJCP, the South Bend Community School Corporation (SBCSC), St. Joseph County Council, and St. Joseph County Board of

Library	St. Joe County Public Library
Service area	St. Joseph County, IN
Population of service area	167,606
# of branches*	10
Administrative structure	Library District
Operating revenue	\$16,631,208
Operating revenue per capita	\$99.23
Total paid staff (FTE)	127.75
# of adult programs**	1,098
# of internet computers	291
Computers per 1,000 population	1.74
* 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	

² 2016 Kyle K. Courtney, Emily Kilcer, Sarah Racicot, “The Fifty State Library Laws Survey” *The Political Librarian*, Volume 2 Article 8.

Commissioners appoint two members each, and the John Glenn School Corporation and Union-North United School Corporation have the authority to appoint one board member.³

In FY19, the system had total operating revenue of \$16,631,208.⁴ As a district, SJCPL gets most of its revenue through its property tax levy. In addition, it receives an annual allocation of about \$2 million from the county income tax. As a district, it also has bonding authority and, in 2021, had \$17.755 million in bonded debt.⁵

The Friends of the St. Joe County Public Library, a nonprofit membership organization with a mission to engage in advocacy and philanthropy support on behalf of the library’s vision, raises funds and advocates for the library. In addition, the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, a charitable endowment, provides grant funding. In 2019, it committed \$10 million to support a \$36 million renovation and expansion of the downtown Main Library and civically oriented Community Learning Center.⁶ South Bend’s City Council also contributed \$4 million toward the renovation project.

The 2020-2024 strategic plan for the library lays out its firm commitment to meeting community needs through providing programmatic and service support to small businesses, entrepreneurs, and individuals in the workforce.⁷ This plan also includes a commitment to meeting the needs of the diverse community through efforts to provide services to immigrants and non-English speakers.

Community conditions

St. Joseph County sits in north-central Indiana and encompasses

two cities (Mishawaka and South Bend), seven towns, and 13 townships. St. Joseph County is the fifth most populous county in Indiana, out of 92 counties, with a population of 272,912, according to the 2020 U.S. Census (a population increase of 2 percent since 2010). South Bend is the county seat of St. Joseph County, and the county is a part of the South Bend-Mishawaka, IN-MI Metropolitan Statistical Area. South Bend is the most populous city in St. Joseph County. The county is predominantly white (71.8 percent), with large Black (13.8 percent) and Hispanic or Latino (9.1 percent) populations. According

Community Conditions	St. Joseph County	United States
Unemployment rate	4.6%	5.4%
Persons in poverty	12.7%	11.4%
Median household income	\$54,433	\$64,994
In civilian labor force	63.5%	63.0%
HS graduate or higher (> 25 y.o.)	89.8%	88.5%
BA or higher (> 25 y.o.)	31.0%	32.9%
Foreign-born persons	6.3%	13.5%
Households with internet access	81.4%	85.2%

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

³ Library Board. St. Joe County Public Library, April 28, 2022. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://sjcpl.org/library-board/>

⁴ Institute of Museum and Library Services, *Public Libraries Survey: Fiscal Year 2019* (Washington, DC: IMLS). <https://www.ims.gov/research-evaluation/data-collection/public-libraries-survey>

⁵ <https://www.sjcindiana.com/DocumentCenter/View/52979/St-Joseph-County-IN-2020-Annual-Information-Report>.” Disseminated by Cender & Company, LLC, Draft: June 14, 2021.

⁶ Community Learning Center and Library Renovation. Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, January 31, 2022. <https://cfsjc.org/initiatives/community-learning-center/>. Accessed June 24, 2022

⁷ “Strategic Plan 2022-2024.” South Bend: St. Joe Public Library, n.d. <https://sjcpl.org/wp-content/uploads/Strategic-Plan-2022.pdf>

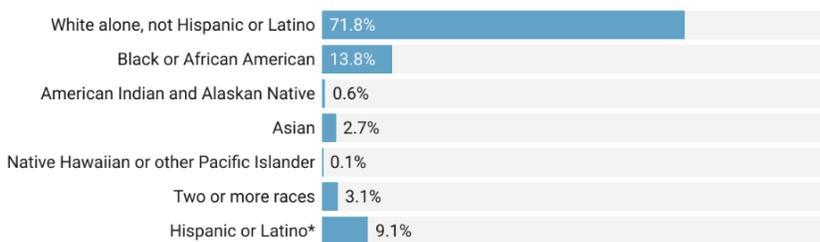
to the 2020 ACS Five-Year Average from the U.S. Census, the median household income in the county is \$54,433, and the poverty rate is 12.7 percent.

St. Joseph County, founded in 1830, was originally a fur trading post. South Bend became home to manufacturing facilities like Bendix and Studebaker in the 20th century. While the county’s economy had to evolve with the loss of those manufacturers, the 21st century has brought a new wave of small manufacturers, and the St. Joseph County region has become a robust economic and cultural hub that attracts commerce and businesses from surrounding Illinois and Michigan. South Bend is home to the University of Notre Dame.

Today, the largest industries in St. Joseph County are higher education, business services, and health care. The county’s largest employers include the University of Notre Dame, Liberty Mutual, Martins Supermarkets, and Saint Joseph Regional Medical Center. As of December 2021, the county

unemployment rate was 4.6 percent, down from a peak of 19.8 percent in April 2020.

Racial and ethnic breakdown of St. Joseph County



* Hispanics and Latinos may be of any race, and are also included in applicable race categories. Total percentages exceed 100%.

Source: 2020 Census • Created with Datawrapper

A Board of County Commissioners serves as the executive and administrative authority for the county. A County Council oversees taxation, finance, and operation of county government.

Relevant systems

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

State-level support: policies, funding, and infrastructure

State Library administrative agency

In Indiana, the Indiana State Library is an independent agency. Its mission is “serving Indiana residents, leading and supporting the library community and preserving Indiana history.” The State Library has four articulated responsibilities:⁸

1. developing and providing library services to state government, its branches, its departments, and its officials and employees;
2. providing for the individual citizens of the state those specialized library services not generally appropriate, economical, or available in other libraries of the state;

⁸ Indiana State Library. Indiana State Library: Mission. State of Indiana, December 2, 2020. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://www.in.gov/library/about/general-information/mission/>.

3. encouraging and supporting the development of the library profession; and
4. strengthening services of all types of publicly and privately supported special, school, academic, and public libraries.

The Indiana State Library is the lead agency for the State Data Center, serves as the State Center for the Book affiliate, facilitates statewide public relations and library promotion campaigns, and provides a statewide virtual reference service. It also offers continuing education, library planning, evaluation and research services, literacy programs, and consultation on library organizational development, continuing education, technology, marketing, and adult literacy. The State Library supports literacy programs related to information, digital, financial, and health literacy. There is also the Indiana State Library Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that solicits and accepts tax-deductible contributions to support the State Library and statewide library services and programs.

Indiana's annual Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) Grants to States program allotment from IMLS in 2021, which goes through the State Library, was \$3.4 million.⁹ In addition, the State Library received \$608,313 in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) funds in 2020, and \$3,471,810 in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds through IMLS. A sub-granting process focusing on effective responses to the pandemic and addressing related economic and community needs through equitable approaches was the method for distribution of most ARPA funds to eligible libraries.

Goal 3 in the Indiana State Library's current strategic plan is to leverage partnership opportunities to enhance services to the communities its libraries serve. The strategic plan also directs the State Library to "create guidelines for and implement staff liaisons to other state agencies" and "create a list of current and potential partners and include what their organization does. Plan to reach out to other similar organizations to discuss potential partnerships. Facilitate and encourage cross-promotion of events and services offered by partner organizations."¹⁰

In 2017, the Indiana State Library hosted a webinar with guest representatives from the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to share with librarians the work DWD does and discuss how the workforce system and libraries can better collaborate. In the webinar, DWD staff acknowledged that libraries and DWD often serve the same individuals and that many individuals may be more comfortable entering the library for services versus local workforce offices. The webinar centered on encouraging libraries to reach out to local WorkOne offices, the name for Indiana's American Job Center locations.

The State Library's LSTA five-year plan includes several references to workforce development. It identifies enhanced library services to reach different populations, including lifelong learners, job seekers, entrepreneurs, and individuals with print disabilities, as one of the top challenges that Indiana libraries face. The State Agency Partnerships project is the primary detail the plan provides related to workforce and economic development:

⁹ "Grants to States: State Allotments." Institute of Museum and Library Services. Accessed June 15, 2022. <https://www.imls.gov/grants/grants-state/state-allotments>

¹⁰ Indiana State Library. Indiana State Library Strategic Plan 2018-2021. State of Indiana, December 2, 2020. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://www.in.gov/library/about/general-information/strategic-plan/>

*“Indiana State Library staff and administration will continue to network with various Indiana State agencies, including the Department of Education, Department of Workforce Development, Department of Correction, State Health Department, and others to identify opportunities for ISL to promote programs which increase and improve upon the library’s role in the users’ lives. Additionally, partnering with other agencies will enable us to help meet Governor Holcomb’s Goal #1: Cultivate a strong and diverse economy to ensure that Indiana remains a magnet for jobs.”*¹¹

State workforce system

DWD oversees all workforce activities in Indiana. DWD has divided the state into 11 multi-county Economic Growth Regions, each with multiple WorkOne Centers offering employment, training, and career services to residents. Indiana’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act plan for 2022-2023 mentions libraries in several contexts:

- As partners in co-location or shared spaces for WorkOne services, this option allows for “portable WorkOnes that pop up in different centers of community activity. This initiative seeks to expand the reach of workforce resources by going to places with high community activity, rather than waiting for Hoosiers to come into the office.”¹²
- Although it does not call out libraries specifically, the state plan mentions locally negotiated and informal referral relationships to ensure direct contact with partners.
- The state plan also cites a Region 1 pilot that deployed staff to partner community agencies, including career advisors serving customers at local library branches.

Local workforce and business development ecosystems

Workforce development system

Indiana DWD’s Region 2 Northern WorkOne workforce development system comprises Elkhart, Fulton, Kosciusko, Marshall, and St. Joseph counties.¹³ Each county in WorkOne Northern Indiana has an office that provides employment information, skill assessments, job search assistance, resume writing, and career counseling.

In addition to public workforce system services, the South Bend region has several community-based organizations and collaborative programs operating within the workforce ecosystem.

- *South Bend Regional Chamber:* In addition to traditional economic development activities, the South Bend Regional Chamber supports the local talent pool by working to recruit new talent to the region; retain graduates from local higher-education institutions; reconnect students who went away to college with local employers; increase awareness of community assets among young professionals; connect K-12 students and educators to education, training, and career opportunities and create pathways to success; and build partnerships to help individuals reach their full potential and meet employer needs.

¹¹ “LSTA Five Year Plan: 2018-2022.” Indiana State Library, June 30, 2017. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://www.in.gov/library/files/Indiana-LSTA-Plan-2018-2022.pdf>

¹² “Indiana PYS 2022-2023 (MOD),” March 31, 2022. Accessed June 24, 2022. https://www.in.gov/gwc/files/IN-WIOA-Combined-Plan_3.31.22.pdf

¹³ WorkOne Locations. Indiana Department of Workforce Development. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://www.in.gov/dwd/WorkOne/locations.html>

- *South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership*: The partnership, a collaboration of economic development partners from 47 communities in northern Indiana and southwest Michigan, focuses on a long-term systemic approach to advance the region’s economy by aligning the efforts of various stakeholders around five key areas: educating a world-class workforce, recruiting and retaining great talent, attracting and growing new economy companies in complement to existing manufacturing industries, promoting inclusion and sparking opportunities for minorities, and helping entrepreneurs thrive. Among the many initiatives it sponsors is the Labs for Industry Futures and Transformation (LIFT) Network.¹⁴ The LIFT Network supported the construction of the Community Learning Center.
- *University of Notre Dame*: Notre Dame is a frequent community partner and also hosts its own workforce development programming. For example, the Center for Civic Innovation summer internship program is the centerpiece of the University's Community-Engaged Educational Ecosystem Model that brings people from different backgrounds and different sectors together to address challenges in the local community.¹⁵
- *iNDustry Labs at Notre Dame*: iNDustry Labs is a platform for collaboration with local industry, providing strategic and technical support for manufacturing industry advancement. iNDustry Labs’ talent pipeline and skills development arm provides educational and work-based learning opportunities for students and professionals.
- *enFocus*: enFocus is a nonprofit dedicated to talent attraction and community development in northern Indiana. It matches local graduates to high-impact projects with regional organizations to provide meaningful professional experiences.¹⁶

Business development system

In addition to the standard services the federal Small Business Administration offers, several local organizations and initiatives support small business development. South Bend Regional Partnership’s Startup South Bend-Elkhart serves as a connector, providing information, networking, and resources for investors and entrepreneurs alike. The Startup South Bend-Elkhart¹⁷ website lists numerous entrepreneurial support organizations operating in the region, including regional chambers, 101Co3, Elevate Ventures, INVANTI, Regional Innovation and Startup Education, North Central Indiana SCORE,¹⁸ and accelerators at local universities, including the IDEA Center at the University of Notre Dame¹⁹ and SPARK Business Accelerator at Saint Mary’s College.

¹⁴ New. Lift Network Internship Program. South Bend - Elkhart Regional Partnership, January 4, 2022. <https://southbendelkhart.org/lift-network/internship-program/>

¹⁵ Center for Civic Innovation. University of Notre Dame, January 31, 2022. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://civicinnovation.nd.edu/internships/>

¹⁶ enFocus: Mission. enFocus. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://en-focus.org/mission>.

¹⁷ Entrepreneurial Support Organizations - Startup South Bend. South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://startupsouthbendelkhart.com/resources/esos/>

¹⁸ About SCORE North Central Indiana. SCORE Association. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://northcentralindiana.score.org/about-north-central-indiana-score>

¹⁹ University of Notre Dame. Center for Civic Innovation. University of Notre Dame, January 31, 2022. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://civicinnovation.nd.edu/internships/>

Library workforce and business development services

Overview of the library's approach

Coinciding with the COVID pandemic, SJ CPL recently completed a major renovation of its main library and restructured its internal organization. The main library includes new circulation facilities and Studio 304, a creation and design space. The renovation project also involved the construction of the new Community Learning Center with meeting rooms, a ballroom, an auditorium, and boardroom space. To meet the demands of these new spaces, the library aligned its education and programming, communications, development, and venue departments into a single division under a chief engagement officer. This organizational structure recognizes the role of these departments in engaging with the community and signals the importance of community engagement for the library. Library stakeholders regard SJ CPL's central role as providing a space for community services, activities, and engagement.

Prior to the pandemic, SJ CPL delivered its workforce development and business development services primarily through its standard offerings: ad hoc walk-in patron assistance to support job search, resume writing, technology assistance, setting up emails, business planning, and navigating online library databases and resources such as Gale Courses and LinkedIn Learning. Beyond these ad hoc standard services, SJ CPL has a signature platform, Bendable, for developing and delivering workforce development services, which includes curated, specialized career curricula developed in partnership with individual employers who will accept the coursework as a demonstration that participants have gained the skillsets they need to acquire or advance in a position. As one stakeholder remarked, *"Bendable is complementary, not duplicative of existing offerings in the ecosystem...Bendable is a clearinghouse for different agencies' content."*

Workforce development services

Standard services

Access to faxing, printing, computers, and WiFi are fundamental elements of SJ CPL services that support job seekers. Furthermore, all frontline library staff have the capacity to provide foundational services in support of workforce development, such as helping people create an email account, access job search databases, fill out resumes, and navigate library resources. Staff provide these services ad hoc and one-on-one. If patrons need more extensive help, staff will refer them for a tech appointment with a workforce-trained librarian.

SJ CPL's website has a landing page for unemployment resources with contact information to a librarian to answer employment questions, a description of how to file for unemployment, and links to resources on coping with job loss and unemployment and training and upskilling for a new job. The training links include Bendable, Your Next Step Indiana, NextLevel Jobs, and JobsforFelonsHub.com. The site also provides phone, chat, and email links to DWD. SJ CPL also offers a range of databases on training and career exploration, including JobNow, VetNow, LinkedIn Learning, Gale Courses, Brainfuse, and the Careers Internet Database.

Specialized services

SJ CPL has episodically offered digital literacy classes, but attendance at regular offerings was inconsistent, and patrons typically want digital help in the moment rather than waiting for a class to

build capacity. As a result, SJCP staff provide real-time support on a walk-in basis and refer patrons to online resources for more advanced training.

In addition to a few targeted trainings, SJCP's primary workforce development service is Bendable, which this case study describes in more detail below and in the sidebar.

Bendable Career Collections: Bendable is the primary platform for SJCP's workforce development services. SJCP and the Drucker Institute developed the content in partnership with community providers, area economic and workforce development agencies, and employers. It is market-driven and based on career paths in South Bend. The Career Collections consist of curated training material selected by local employers to meet their workforce needs. As such, Bendable is more of a hyperlocal resource with bona fide currency among regional employers. As patrons complete each course, they receive a digital badge to mark their progress, culminating in a Bendable Badge for their chosen collection. For example, Bendable currently offers a child development associate Career Collection, "Ready to Grow St. Joe," in partnership with the United Way of St. Joseph County. Patrons can complete the program in one to one-and-a-half years, and the United Way works with SJCP to deliver in-person, peer cohort activities and workshops that supplement online learning. Current Career Collections accessible on Bendable include:

- *IT:* technical support specialist or software developer positions backed by the IT Sector Partnership.
- *Healthcare:* medical coder, pharmacy technician, and patient care associate positions backed by Beacon Health System.
- *Manufacturing:* CNC operator backed by General Stamping and Metalworks, material handler backed by Ridge Napa

Development of Bendable

Bendable is SJCP's signature platform for developing and delivering workforce development services. SJCP developed the program in partnership with the Drucker Institute to provide locally driven, lifelong education and training opportunities that respond to regional employer needs and community interests. Initial conversations regarding Bendable were within the city government. The mayor at that time, Pete Buttigieg, recognized that it would be better anchored in a trusted community institution, such as the library, that did not experience political changes in administration. The Bendable team engaged employers, municipal organizations, service providers, and the public for their input in the creation of the platform.

The Drucker Institute developed Bendable with funding from Google, Walmart, the city of South Bend, and other local and public entities. The initial \$1.5 million of funding covered staffing, services, and roughly two years of courses. Ongoing financing is still under discussion.

The Drucker Institute's Bendable for Libraries is a product within Bendable for Communities that serves as the container for multiple training providers and local resources. The Drucker Bendable team works with libraries to craft a user-friendly digital catalog that provides easier access to learning resources. Bendable for Community is a pilot program that involves broader community engagement. South Bend is currently piloting the initiative with SJCP as the cornerstone organization. Stakeholders noted that Bendable has encouraged SJCP to collaborate with diverse community providers and develop more outward-facing strategies for ongoing engagement.

Bendable's continuing education resources are designed to interest users across the lifespan and include personal interest topics as well as more targeted employment-focused modules. Its workforce development resources primarily center on assisting workers making between \$8 and \$18 per hour in wages to help them advance their careers; however, some stakeholders considered the collections to be more advanced professionally than this target range.

Auto Parts, or welder backed by South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership.

- *Sales and services:* customer service representative or sales representative backed by South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership.
- *Childcare and education:* child development associate backed by United Way of St. Joseph County.

Bendable Boards: Bendable Boards are another element still under development. The intent is that Bendable Boards will function as a physical manifestation of the learning board on the Bendable website. They will generally reside at local partners or employers, and Goodwill, enFocus, and the Technology Resource Center are current pilot sites. They will integrate virtual and in-person training and skill curricula responsive to their employee needs and workforce gaps. For example, enFocus is a local nonprofit focused on talent attraction; it will likely focus skill building on data analytics and other skills relevant to its workforce needs. While the final structure of Bendable Boards is still in development, the intent is to integrate them with the training the agency is providing.

Bendable Community Collections and presenters: Bendable Community Collections tap local expertise to leverage the capacity in the community on both professional and personal topics. The topics community members offer may or may not be workforce-related. Beyond the online Community Collections, individuals may also apply to serve as a presenter through the library. Interested individuals complete a form on the library website that articulates the expectations of community presenters and describes library support for presentations. SJ CPL selects individuals as presenters and includes them in the library's partner directory by topic. To vet community presenters, library staff first consider if their proposed topic aligns with SJ CPL's data on community needs. Staff then assess the credibility of the prospective presenters based on their electronic or social presence. If staff cannot assess credibility in these formats, they will set up a phone call with the prospective presenters to determine if they have the expertise to speak on that topic. For both the Community Collections and presenters, library staff remove individuals intending to sell services or products and focus on the "three Cs" of character, commitment, and communication in the review process.

How do we create a resource that meets people's learning needs that kind of spans across their life? Not necessarily just work because if you build the habit when doing the fun light stuff, you're more likely to be able to use it for the more work type stuff. So that was pretty much our thinking. We went out. We asked everyone you know, "What do you like to learn? How do you like to learn and, and what barriers or challenges do you face from learning?" And from there, we kind of combined all of that into a platform that serves the needs that we got from all the people we spoke to.

Online clearinghouse: SJ CPL eventually wants its Bendable website to serve as a clearinghouse for all workforce development resources. For example, it envisions a platform where WorkOne will send the library all its events and resources so that if patrons go to SJ CPL's workforce portal, they will have access to that information and that of all other partners engaged in the workforce development ecosystem. Through the portal, community members and organizations can also request time and space to provide workshops or informational outreach related to their activities.

Community hub services

SJCPL views itself as providing integral community space and sees opportunities to grow this role at its newly expanded main library facility and Community Learning Center with meeting rooms, an auditorium, a ballroom, and a boardroom. Leveraging this space, the library currently serves as a community hub, providing classroom space for the SBCSC Adult Education program and meeting space for the chamber and other partners. The Adult Education program currently offers high school equivalency classes at the library as well as English language learning and life skills classes.

The program's presence also serves as an entry point for further certifications, such as welding and bookkeeping, which patrons may work toward elsewhere. SJCPL also participated in the 21st Century Scholar Success Coalition, a “team of more than 20 key partners in K-12 education, higher education, economic development, and social services in a coordinated effort to increase the number of low-income students who achieve well-paying jobs in the region by completing postsecondary degrees through Indiana’s 21st Century Scholars program,” which the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County launched with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.²⁰

The library also partners with local providers on some training classes. Although SJCPL has found attendance at regular digital literacy classes inconsistent, it has had more success in offering these classes in conjunction with community organizations that have identified a training need. For example, SJCPL offers bilingual digital literacy classes in partnership with La Casa de Amistad and classes for foster grandparents volunteering for REAL Services. SJCPL also recently partnered with WorkOne of Northern Indiana, Ivy Tech, and University of Notre Dame to bring in career professionals to discuss techniques for resume writing, interviewing, and searching for a job. SJCPL also plans to organize rotating office hours for other community service organizations, such as Goodwill, to base themselves out of the library for regular hours to optimize library foot traffic and increase public access to their services. Library branches have previously hosted teen job fairs, and staff expressed interest in increasing the library’s job fair activity in partnership with other agencies, including nonprofits and area employers.

Small business development services

Standard services

SJCPL provides small business access to WiFi, computers, business databases, business reference books, and advanced digital technology through Studio 304. Business databases include AtoZdatabases, Business Source Complete, Consumer Reports, Entrepreneurial Studies Source, Gale LegalForms, Health Business Full Text, Legal Information Reference Center, and Morningstar.

Specialized services

Studio 304, a public space, provides computers, printers (large-scale and 3D), and a recording studio. Library staff are available to help patrons design flyers and promotional materials, design a website, or create a Facebook page. If patrons have more complex requests that exceed in-the-moment capacity, staff encourage them to schedule a tech appointment with a library specialist. External

²⁰ 21st Century Scholar Success Initiative. Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, November 17, 2021. Accessed June 24, 2022. <https://cfsjc.org/initiatives/21st-century-scholar-success-initiative/>

stakeholders noted that access to these services supports scalable start-ups and brick-and-mortar businesses that do not have needed capacity internally.

SJCPL has a full-time research librarian to support small businesses and business development. Although all staff have a foundational level of knowledge to assist patrons in accessing business databases or reference materials, they will refer patrons with more extensive needs, such as help developing a business plan, seeking a grant for a start-up, and navigating city resources, to the research librarian. Branch librarians refer patrons to the research librarian at the main library facility for these in-depth business services. The research librarian is available for scheduled appointments but also meets informally with walk-in patrons.

The research librarian also strives to increase the library's visibility and connection to local business resources. For example, the research librarian partners with veterans' organizations to share resources, conducts outreach to the South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership to promote library services, and collaborates with a women's entrepreneurship organization to develop a roundtable for women to speak about their experiences as entrepreneurs.

Community hub services

SJCPL sometimes offers small business training in partnership with local agencies. During the pandemic, the library partnered with SCORE to facilitate business development classes through Grow with Google. Patrons would take the classes independently, and SJCPL organized learning circles with SCORE mentors to discuss the material and ask questions. The library also offers meeting spaces that businesses may use.

Service administration

Staffing and management

All librarians across branches have a foundational level of knowledge to provide basic workforce development and business development services. The chief engagement officer oversees the library's communication, education, programming, and venue divisions, all of which contribute to workforce and business development in some way. The education and programming department manager oversees all programming, including workforce development and Bendable services. The Bendable specialist focuses on further developing, promoting, and enhancing the Bendable platform but is also familiar with other library adult education and programming. Within the public service division, overseen by the chief public service officer, the business reference librarian facilitates access to and engagement with small business development resources. Other library branch staff provide additional specialized programming, including training staff throughout the library system on various public assistance programs to help patrons navigate the system.

System support and role

Branch librarians deliver foundational workforce and business development services (e.g., access to resources, walk-in, ad hoc services, as well as scheduled one-on-one assistance) across all the branches. The librarians will refer patrons seeking more advanced small business development support to the business reference librarian at the main branch.

All librarians can also provide an initial introduction and access to online Bendable resources. If a patron has more extensive questions on Bendable, staff refer them to the Bendable specialist. As

Bendable services continue to evolve, the plan is to centralize all in-person activities at the main branch, pilot them there, and then the central library staff will support the implementation of services at the branches. Over time, the capacity of the branch staff will grow, and they will implement in-person Bendable services on their own.

Branches tend to develop and provide their services in response to local demand. The same services are generally available, but the branches may not offer them at the same frequency depending on patron need. For example, one branch saw increased requests for help navigating public assistance resources. As a result, the branch started to offer assistance appointments for its patrons and leveraged its experience to develop workshops and resources to train staff throughout the library system on the material.

Funding

SJCPL's funding comes primarily through local property taxes and income taxes. SJCPL did not receive ARPA funding for workforce development services. SJCPL's partnership with the Drucker Institute still provides funding for Bendable. Bendable grant funding supports members of the Bendable Hub team as well as online resources. Ongoing financing of Bendable as it transitions wholly to the library is still under discussion.

How they determine what to offer

SJCPL provides an open, trusted space in the community. While it had been offering digital literacy training and standard access to workforce and business development services, it did not feel it was meeting community workforce needs in the moment. At the same time, the Drucker Institute was partnering with IDEO, a global design company, and the city of South Bend to develop and pilot Bendable in response to the changing nature of work and the need for ongoing skill development. As SJCPL joined the effort, Bendable gave it the momentum and platform to develop more intentional and robust workforce development offerings. Bendable now serves as the library's primary workforce development programming.

Bendable's development involved extensive engagement with local economic development institutions, community agencies, and employers to determine the demand for skills and identify responsive curriculum and training tools. As Bendable continues, this community engagement is critical to refining and expanding programming. For example, the Bendable Hub team, which consists of staff from the Drucker Institute and SJCPL, works extensively with local employers to develop Career Collections to bridge workforce gaps. Bendable also encourages continued engagement with community service providers, which, in turn, helps provide ongoing input into new Bendable offerings or modifications to existing programs. In this way, determining what to offer is both proactive, through increasing its outreach to and input from diverse stakeholders, and reactive, in building new programs to meet specific requests.

Marketing of services

SJCPL markets its workforce and business development services through diverse channels, including flyers, email newsletters, social media, word of mouth, community outreach, and the library's digital signs. It also relies on partnerships to spread the word on library services, such as the South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership and the chamber of commerce marketing upcoming library workshops on business databases, for example. Library staff noted the benefits of getting the information to

the providers of the target patrons to increase the number of times they are likely to see the material and provide a trusted source for the information. Bendable also has extensive promotion capabilities, including networking with community partners, a Bendable table at most community events, and QR codes throughout the neighborhood to link to targeted programs.

Aspirations

Stakeholders identified several goals for continued library work. Internally, stakeholders suggested opportunities to increase staff capacity for adult programming, from short-term offerings that increase foot traffic to longer-term innovations. They suggested recruiting staff from different career backgrounds to help diversify library programming. Stakeholders also expressed interest in increasing SJCP's job fair activity in partnership with other agencies, including nonprofits and area employers, and expanding support for small businesses.

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

Library collaboration with ecosystem partners

Although SJCP has several sustained collaborations with ecosystem partners, such as the partnership with the SBCSC Adult Education to provide high school equivalency, English Language Learners classes, and life skills classes at the library, Bendable's momentum is driving much of the current synergy.

- *Employer engagement:* The Bendable Hub team, which the Drucker Institute and SJCP co-manage, has developed relationships with employers and community-based organizations to develop specialized Career Collections. In addition, the team is engaging United Way, Goodwill, and other community partners to investigate additional ways to leverage Bendable.
- *Business and economic development:* SJCP also has relationships with the chamber and South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership. SJCP's chief engagement officer is on the chamber's Talent Attraction and Retention Committee, and a member of the Bendable Hub team is on the chamber's Education and Workforce Committee. SJCP partners with the chamber on communication, each promoting the other's events, such as during the chamber's manufacturing week. The chamber has also developed a Bendable Collection targeted at interns. SJCP is now on a South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership committee, and the partnership has developed Career Collections as part of on Bendable.
- *WorkOne:* SJCP's partnership with WorkOne is evolving. WorkOne has developed a collection on Bendable on looking for work and has presented at the library's career development programming, which has increased library foot traffic and contributed to WorkOne attendance counts. Bendable staff have shown WorkOne staff how to use their resources. SJCP is currently working with WorkOne on getting displaced workers, particularly those in the retail sector, library cards so they can access Bendable resources for different certifications. They are working to determine how to fund library cards for displaced workers outside the SJCP service area. Despite these examples of partnership, stakeholders reported that the relationship with WorkOne could be more strategic and sustained. Stakeholders are looking for opportunities to mutually increase each other's awareness of SJCP and WorkOne services, respectively, and create more ongoing, less "one-off" programs. Additionally, stakeholders from SJCP and

WorkOne expressed interest in helping WorkOne further optimize Bendable for workforce development services.

- *Ivy Tech*: Bendable has enhanced SJCP's relationship with Ivy Tech Community College, whose material is part of several Career Collections. SJCP does not see Bendable as a competitor to Ivy Tech but, instead, considers it an opportunity to reach more people who would not otherwise be accessing education and training. Besides content-specific Career Collection courses, Ivy Tech has provided a free "introduction to college preparation" course on Bendable. Library staff mentioned that many patrons might start their training on Bendable, and as they develop their sense of career development self-agency, continue with further courses at Ivy Tech.
- *Community organizations*: Bendable has also increased SJCP's relationship with other community organizations, such as United Way, Goodwill, and other providers that are developing collections for participants in their programs as well as internally for staff development. The court system refers individuals to SJCP for help preparing legal documents; library staff may help them directly or provide a referral to another organization. As noted above, SJCP is a member of the 21st Century Scholar Success Coalition, which includes collaboration with the chamber, secondary and postsecondary education providers, economic development organizations, and community agencies. Stakeholders identified several potential opportunities for increased collaboration with the library, including:
 - optimizing library staff capacity and economic development resources, such as business, marketing, and economic databases to support labor market studies;
 - expanding promotion of resources to existing business owners so they are aware of available library capacity;
 - increasing use of library facility for workforce trainings, such as those held by the Manufacturing Extension Partnership and Goodwill, to leverage the library's central location;
 - providing a Career Collection or other targeted resources around starting a nonprofit to fill a perceived gap in current offerings; and
 - creating a one-stop-shop environment for workforce development and support services.

Library's position in the greater ecosystem

SJCP's position in the greater ecosystem is evolving, partly due to the burgeoning implementation of Bendable. The library is a trusted resource, and patrons who are not unemployed but interested in career development may think of the library before they think of WorkOne or other traditional workforce service providers, especially as Bendable's visibility grows. During the pandemic, SJCP also stepped in to help residents apply for unemployment, SNAP, and other social service programs. Historically, in peak unemployment periods, SJCP has provided space and increased staff capacity at the library to meet the economic crisis needs of patrons.

We're meant to be a hub for everything. So come through us to get to what you need. We'll be that front-facing door. So that's why I think the partners leverage us. Like when we collaborate together, we can mutually benefit. And we can do that for any topic.

Stakeholder feedback suggests that SJCP's workforce development services both fill system gaps and expand system reach.

- *Evidence of filling system gaps:* The Career Collections, in particular, are likely filling system gaps for highly localized, relevant training materials that meet resident needs and employer demand. SJCP co-created the trainings in partnership with local employers or agencies, intending that these trainings will have more currency with area employers than generic training typically offered through the workforce system. That said, as Bendable ramps up, SJCP still has a relatively low profile as a primary workforce development stakeholder in the community, which may inhibit the volume of requests for assistance and subsequent referrals. Parallel to Bendable implementation, SJCP is working to build capacity in adult programming and serve as a primary workforce connector and resource for adult patrons. Stakeholders cited that the implementation of Bendable and the resulting community partnerships have helped align and attune SJCP with community needs, enabling it to better understand how it can proactively change its services. SJCP consistently reviews what others are doing throughout the community and identifies gaps so it can develop responsive programming. For example, SJCP is collaborating with the University of Notre Dame and Civic Switchboard to help area community organizations increase their ability to collect, interpret, and use their data for program decision-making and adaptation.
- *Evidence of expanding system reach:* Library workforce development offerings both expand referrals to more traditional providers and serve segments of the population other workforce agencies are not capturing, such as low-skill workers and individuals experiencing homelessness. Bendable contributes to reach by serving as a springboard to postsecondary coursework or further training. For example, Ivy Tech is a community college that delivers free courses through Bendable, including a college-preparatory course that Bendable staff believe Ivy Tech uses to capture a new population and increase enrollment in the community college. On the other hand, Bendable provides career development services to new populations, including entry-level and more experienced workers who had not previously engaged with the library for workforce support. Library staff awareness of the broader workforce ecosystem also results in referrals to WorkOne, Goodwill, and other organizations for training.

Pandemic response and recovery

Overview of library services during the pandemic

SJCP was an active community member throughout the COVID crisis. During the pandemic, SJCP met weekly with other key community agencies, such as the city of South Bend, United Way, WorkOne, and the chamber on the St. Joseph County Messaging Amplification Project to publicize important messages related to testing, food, vaccinations, and mental health. The agencies jointly used their respective networks to communicate information across the county. SJCP only closed to walk-in visitors for a limited period, during which time it made staff available for help with applications or other questions over the phone or via videoconference and promoted the extended parking lot WiFi, laptop, and hotspot check out. Additionally, SJCP offered free faxing and printing services throughout the pandemic, which were in high demand, particularly for patrons printing unemployment assistance paperwork or other government forms. The library has continued free faxing and printing and it has become one of its core service offerings for residents.

Approach to workforce and business development services during the pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SJCPL implemented an “Ask A Librarian” service to help patrons cope with job loss, mental health issues, and other hardships while offering solutions through one-on-one appointments. The program helped people access resources such as unemployment benefits and rental assistance.

In response to high job loss rates through the COVID-19 pandemic, SJCPL offers a list of online resources for patrons to access state and local resources on navigating the unemployment process, including several job websites. SJCPL also expanded its role as a resource and referral source during the pandemic, including providing help with completing applications for diverse forms of assistance, from unemployment to food, cash assistance, housing, and health insurance. Stakeholders noted that requests for assistance in applying for these programs, especially unemployment insurance, increased significantly over the pandemic while typical book circulation decreased.

The increasing request for help in completing applications spurred one library staff, in particular, to learn about the application and eligibility processes for various service streams. They, in turn, trained library staff across branches through weekly internal trainings and maintained an updated online drive for ongoing reference by other staff members. SJCPL promoted its ability to help with these topics through flyers, posters, and social media campaigns. It also invited agencies, such as WorkOne, to cross-train library staff to better serve patrons seeking support in completing applications for assistance.

The pandemic coincided with the start of the library renovation as well as the launch of Bendable, creating a confluence of events that impacted service offerings and delivery. The immediate impact on the Bendable launch was the pivot to all online service delivery instead of in-person and hybrid offerings. The online delivery reduced Bendable’s ability to capture broad community attention through diverse in-person, written, and virtual outreach and limited the “market capture” of its initial offerings. The implementation of Bendable has been a period of incremental adjustment to adapt launch plans post hoc and develop multiple contingency plans based on future pandemic outcomes.

Learning from the pandemic

The ongoing presence of the pandemic has stifled momentum for the in-person Bendable component, and stakeholders indicated they are in the process of navigating how to bring the Bendable learning experience to an in-person, physical space. As originally designed, Bendable was to work with partner organizations to help develop physical Bendable spaces, such as a Bendable Corner, within their organizations. As many have been working through false starts of reopening, organizations have not been able to fully realize this element and have been working on smaller tasks until foot traffic resumes to sufficient levels.

Outside of the need to refine their Bendable implementation plans, SJCPL stakeholders noted several learnings from the pandemic. Without needing to find a time to meet in person, SJCPL was better able to quickly join and sustain community conversations on a range of topics. Additionally, SJCPL’s flexibility in programming enabled it to respond nimbly to community needs. The library was able to pivot staff capacity and develop internal training to address patron demands, such as the need for help with program assistance applications. The pandemic also increased SJCPL’s visibility among community patrons and agencies. As one of the few organizations that remained open for most of

the pandemic, community residents and agencies became more reliant on library services and now have a better understanding of the wide range of services the library provides.

Tracking and measurement

The library system's approach to tracking and measurement

SJCPL's measurement activities are output and activity driven. The library uses the OrangeBoy platform to collect and report on library collection and distribution trends, developing different library profiles based on aggregate data to help staff understand and respond to usage patterns. The Bendable data platform can count more detailed information, such as how many people have started and completed courses and how many have earned badges. FSG has conducted a developmental evaluation of Bendable. Given the nascent stage of the program, preliminary evidence thus far is output- versus outcome-based. Stakeholders mentioned the possibility of partnering with local resources, such as the University of Notre Dame, to provide ongoing evaluation of Bendable using graduate students, potentially leveraging the LIFT Grant Network to help make the task more cost-effective than the current FSG evaluation, which is not sustainable with existing funds.

Specific components of data collection at SJCPL include:

1. *General data collection:* SJCPL collects the required data for state and federal reporting. These data provide a broad picture of programming, online resource use, circulation use, and WiFi/hotspot and laptop use. They capture non-participant level data, including aggregate counts of classes held, attendees, database users, and gate counts, among others.
2. *Information requests at reference desk and referrals:* Frontline staff record and tally ad hoc reference requests from walk-in patrons and record appointments. Staff record these data generally rather than by topic. There is no effort to keep track of referrals that staff have made.
3. *Website analytics and usage of specialized online resources:* SJCPL can track general website usage analytics to understand patron website visits by topic and duration. The use of specialized resources, such as online databases, is part of the standard statistics collected via the OrangeBoy platform.
4. *Outputs related to specialized and partner services:* In general, data on participants in any specialized or partner-related library services are primarily limited to the number of participants and activity data. The Bendable initiative, in specific, collects more detailed data compared to other library workforce development programs. For example, Bendable also collects users' zip codes, which Bendable staff use as a proxy for understanding the sociodemographic characteristics of the users. Every other month, Bendable staff evaluate the data according to their established DEI and participation goals. Bendable staff use the data and the related conversations to generate responses to data patterns and intentional workstreams.
5. *Outcomes related to specialized and partner services:* In Bendable, there is the intent to capture both the depth of learning (capture by the progression in completed coursework) and breadth of learning (capture by the range of coursework). There are employment-focused outcomes related to career pathways and badges, including course completions at PennFoster, certifications, and college credit hours. Stakeholders noted that outcomes are not necessarily limited to credentials, as some participants may only be seeking one module, such as marketing skills, so course starts may be as useful an indicator as course completions. SJCPL does not capture if participants secured jobs, which would rely on follow-up surveys. Although the library does not

broadly collect personally identifiable information, if someone participates in a learning board, they can consent to share information with employers. For these individuals, SJCPL does track individual-level outcomes to share with employers who may use them in consideration of promotions and raises.

6. *Anecdotal evidence:* Staff emphasized the value of patron stories, such as “Importin’ Joe’s Ethiopian Coffee” who reportedly developed his coffee business using library computers and resources. Although staff collect quantitative information for standard reporting, they reported that qualitative stories are often more compelling to computer partners, patrons, or funders and they need both qualitative stories to show the depth of the difference and quantitative numbers to show the scale.

There is no noted ongoing data tracking or sharing across partners. Providers may count their community hub activities, such as adult education classes or WorkOne presentations, within their internal data monitoring, but they are neither requesting nor providing program data across partners at this time.

Outcome measurement challenges

Staff and stakeholders cited several barriers to data collection, including privacy concerns and user and staff burden. Similar to other libraries, staff at SJCPL are reluctant to link user activity (such as online resource use) with patron contact information. They feel this would breach the privacy norms and dilute institutional trust. Moreover, more extensive data requests at registration or follow-up may deter patrons from participating in programs or utilizing standard services more broadly. Staff also voiced that more detailed data collection is burdensome and not sustainable on an ongoing basis without more efficient systems and high utility of collected data. Stakeholders also noted ongoing challenges to data sharing or having common applications across providers. Although there has been discussion of this repeatedly over time within the workforce development ecosystem, no viable solution yet exists.

Interest and feasibility of implementing new outcome measurement systems

Library staff voiced some support for a point-in-time census to track the types of questions patrons ask, library staff responses, and the amount of time spent on different categories of assistance. Stakeholders suggested implementation with seasonal variation to provide more accuracy over the course of a year. They felt that the information captured from a computer survey or manual tracker would be valuable, but there was concern about burden and data quality (e.g., would participants just click away the pop-up survey?). Staff emphasized that patrons would need the option to opt-out and stressed the need for the survey to be brief. One interviewee indicated using a pop-up computer-based survey in the past but was unaware of the results or utility.

Observations

SJCPL’s workforce development services are in a moment of evolution, bolstered by the development of Bendable and increasing in-person and hybrid service delivery as pandemic restrictions ease. SJCPL’s new organizational structure supports a more dedicated, intentional focus on workforce development and the continued growth of community partnerships. Possible themes for future research based on SJCPL implementation include:

- ✓ **Co-creating a robust continuous learning and workforce development platform such as Bendable takes considerable time and commitment but may provide a unique value add to traditional workforce development services and yield increased collaboration with partners and capacity across the system.**

The development of Bendable was a multi-year effort that engaged many ecosystem stakeholders. Libraries, or other institutions that plan to implement a similar model, should build in sufficient time and resources for adequate planning. But, in the long term, the Community Collections developed through Bendable could leverage diverse and robust training offerings not typically promoted through traditional workforce development systems.

Assuming a role in Bendable also increased the intention and focus on workforce development services within the SJCP. In turn, SJCP has increased its collaboration with community partners, built internal staff awareness of the broader workforce development ecosystems, and created the conditions for library staff to proactively identify and pursue further workforce development programming.

- ✓ **Providing autonomy and support to motivated library staff can build system capacity.**

Enabling library staff to develop knowledge and services in response to patron demand can help libraries nimbly fill critical community gaps in real time. For example, increased patron requests for help applying for multiple public assistance programs during the pandemic prompted one librarian to educate herself on the range of programs and application processes patrons may access. This librarian then created online resources and monthly training webinars for other library system staff to help them assist patrons in navigating services, building the system capacity to respond to this demand.

- ✓ **Hiring staff with diverse external experience may increase community connection and library innovation.**

SJCP recently hired adult programming and Bendable staff with experience outside the library system. These staff may introduce new program strategies from other sectors and leverage previous experience to provide connections to new community partners.