



LIBRARIES BUILD BUSINESS

Business and Career Opportunities for the Formerly Incarcerated

The public library is a lifeline for people who have experienced incarceration and are re-entering society. Library resources for job seekers and prospective entrepreneurs are especially critical for successful re-entry. Conviction status makes it more difficult to seek and maintain employment and lacking gainful employment results in increased rates of recidivism. To break this cycle public libraries help formerly incarcerated individuals with needed workforce skills preparation, including technology and broadband access, digital literacy programming, assistance with resumes and job searches, and referrals to community organizations.

Public libraries across the U.S. are also increasingly taking the initiative to support formerly incarcerated people with targeted career readiness and entrepreneurship programs. Business ownership allows formerly incarcerated individuals to support themselves outside of typical employment opportunities and the associated barriers and stigma—including scrutiny brought on by background checks.

Libraries bolster their workforce development programs and services with wraparound support and referrals for formerly incarcerated community members, including connection to assistance for housing, healthcare, and more.



The average annual **cost of incarceration** for one individual in a federal facility is \$39,158, or roughly \$120 per day in 2020.¹



Formerly incarcerated individuals are **45% more likely to become entrepreneurs** compared to non-formerly incarcerated individuals.²



The 2021–22 Library Services and Incarceration Survey reported that **25.4% of responding libraries provide job preparation and re-entry support.**³



Formerly incarcerated individuals with stable employment were **less likely to reoffend (19.6%)** than those who were unemployed (32.4%).⁴



LEARN MORE AT
ala.org/advocacy/economic-opportunity

1. tinyurl.com/fed-reg 2. tinyurl.com/res-gate
3. tinyurl.com/ussc-rch 4. tinyurl.com/lj-growing

CASE STUDIES

Library Career and Entrepreneurship Programs Supporting Successful Re-entry



Gwinnett County (GA) Public Library's New Start Entrepreneurship Incubator is a small business education program designed to help individuals who have spent time in jail or prison to start and maintain their own small businesses. Participants receive laptops and Wi-Fi hotspots and are **matched with a mentor from the local business community**. Graduates from the program have started businesses in the cleaning, catering, beauty, and care sectors.



St. Louis County (MO) Library developed the Small Business Launchpad for formerly incarcerated people. The program provided participants with a library card, a laptop, a Wi-Fi hotspot, and **entry into a business fundamentals course**. One graduate went on to start a mobile car wash and auto services company, while others have founded legal and tax service ventures.



Brooklyn (NY) Public Library operates jail-based library services as well as programs that help incarcerated individuals **maintain connections with their families**. The library's re-entry program, *Welcome Home*, provides practical assistance via its computer services, Adult Learning Center, and small business services, including business counseling and eligibility for the Brooklyn PowerUP! Business Plan Competition.

McCracken County (KY) Public Library, recognizing the need for services for formerly incarcerated patrons, developed "re-entry kits"—containing loaned materials such as **Chrome-books, Wi-Fi hotspots, a flip phone, a USB drive, and a mouse**. The library preloaded the computers with links directing users to resume building instruction, digital literacy resources, legal aid, and housing and education assistance.



San Francisco (CA) Public Library operates **Reference by Mail services** for incarcerated individuals in California, handling information requests from currently incarcerated individuals, including queries on housing assistance and jobs upon re-entry. The library partners with area re-entry organizations to advocate for recently incarcerated people, as well as to provide digital literacy and workforce readiness services.



The **New Mexico State Library** and **Santa Fe (NM) Public Library** serve incarcerated community members in the Santa Fe Adult Detention



Center and the Penitentiary of New Mexico. With community partnerships, the library hosts **Re-entry Library Resource Fairs** to provide basic information on re-entry for jobseekers, college and career readiness, digital skills, and transportation.