

PA Forward: Why It's Important to Pennsylvania

PA Forward | Pennsylvania Libraries is a new initiative of the Pennsylvania Library Association. It was created to give voice to what the library community already knows, and what other states throughout the nation are also recognizing: With the right support, libraries are ideally positioned to become the community centers of information, technology, and learning that will fuel educational and economic opportunity for all citizens.

Libraries are no longer just buildings that house books. Today's libraries are agile institutions serving real-life needs. They hold the key to powering progress and elevating the quality of life in Pennsylvania by fueling the types of knowledge essential to success: *Basic Literacy, Information Literacy, Civic and Social Literacy, Health Literacy, and Financial Literacy.*

PA Forward and the Commonwealth's Libraries

PA Forward will make library services available for all Pennsylvania citizens; strengthen state-supported library services and leverage greater local and private support; have an integrated library system that will not only lower local costs, but improve resource-sharing for citizens; provide more databases at a lower cost and through a better statewide delivery system; bolster the recognized link between library service and workforce development; and raise the profile and importance of libraries and librarians.

For *academic libraries*, PA Forward will strengthen the public's perception that academic institutions provide great benefits to their local communities by sharing resources and services with the community as well as students and faculty.

For *school libraries*, PA Forward will reinforce what experience tells us: Students in schools with strong libraries learn more, get better grades, and achieve higher test scores than their peers who attend schools without libraries.

For *public libraries*, PA Forward will position them as essential to a growing customer base of private and municipal organizations and individuals and as high-quality early learning providers that ultimately save taxpayer dollars otherwise needed for remedial programs.

PA Forward will help Pennsylvanians succeed.

PA Forward is built upon the belief that libraries are uniquely positioned to help citizens improve their command of five types of literacy essential to greater success in all vital roles of life: as students, as parents, as employees, as consumers, as citizens. These literacies are basic, information, civic and social, health, and financial.

PA Forward will ensure that libraries have the resources they need to keep Pennsylvania moving forward – on reading and learning early in life, which correlates directly to academic performance and graduation rates; on excelling in the 21st Century, where command of new information technologies will help drive job creation and retention – with libraries serving as community hubs for job information and career reinvention; and as a Commonwealth, promoting learning and access to information as keystones to our continued progress.

Libraries are ideally positioned as community centers of information technology that, with the right support, can fuel educational and economic opportunity. Throughout the Commonwealth there is tangible evidence of libraries assuming a leadership role in advancing five key literacies – basic, information, civic and social, health, and financial – and making a real difference in peoples’ lives.

The value of Pennsylvania’s libraries is far-reaching.

As our state and nation struggle with economic shifts, some permanent, we all ask, “How will Pennsylvania build a better future, one of job growth, opportunity, and community vitality?”

Those who work at or with Pennsylvania’s academic, public, school, and special libraries already know that an educated public with better access to information is fundamental. Libraries are at the center of Pennsylvania’s communities, providing those critical connections.

Pennsylvania’s libraries are in great demand and provide valuable resources to the communities they serve. Based on the most recent statewide data, Pennsylvania’s libraries:

- Served more than 47 million visitors;
- Conducted 179,546 programs for children, parents, entrepreneurs, senior citizens, and students;
- Aided more than 302,000 jobseekers through:
 - online access to jobs databases at 82% of the locations;
 - assistance with online job applications at 70% of the locations;
 - software and other job resources to help customers create resumes and employment materials at 60% of the locations.

Libraries deliver a substantial return on investment for the Commonwealth.

PA Forward will position public libraries as an essential resource to a growing customer base of private and municipal organizations and individuals. It will also position libraries as high-quality early learning providers that ultimately save taxpayer dollars otherwise needed for remedial programs.

A 2006 statewide survey conducted by the University of North Carolina in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh concluded that for every \$10 invested in public libraries, \$55 is returned to Pennsylvania taxpayers.

If public libraries didn't exist, the study said, the economic loss to our communities across the Commonwealth would total nearly \$1.34 billion. That's 5.5 times what is dedicated annually in local, state, and federal taxes for public libraries.

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