

*Strategic Issue:*

## Support the role of libraries in economic and employment development

Supporting the role of libraries in economic and employment development is a relatively new area of focus for the Commission and one that ties into our support of Idaho's education system. While Idaho's unemployment rate is relatively low right now, many Idahoans struggle to find employment and often turn to their local library staff to help apply for jobs online, get help preparing resumes, and locate job postings.

In the long-term, if we don't have more students pursue post-secondary education options, Idaho will have an under-supply of educated workers. Studies show at least 60 percent of jobs nationwide will require a post-secondary credential in the years ahead. The lack of qualified workers in Idaho may cause businesses to stagnate or leave the state in search of a better educated workforce and keep a downward pressure on wages. Additional data to support work in this area includes:

- Through 2024, the Idaho Department of Labor forecasts total employment growth to be on track to exceed labor force growth by 49,000 people. Idaho's rural counties tend to be hit hardest.
- Total employment in Idaho's urban counties grew more than twice as fast as the population of the state's rural counties. According to the Idaho Department of Labor, from January 2006 to December 2016, total employment in rural counties grew by 10,824 – just under five percent, while urban counties increased their total employment by 49,943, or 10.6 percent.
- In 2016, Idaho had 21,000 people making minimum wage or less, representing about 4.6 percent of all hourly wage earners in the state. The nationwide average is 3.3 percent and Idaho ranks the ninth highest in the nation. Of those Idahoans making the minimum wage or less in 2015, 61 percent were women.

## Trustee Connections, 2017

- Idaho Business for Education (IBE) conducted a survey of 466 employers in 2015. The survey showed Idaho's business leaders say about 43 percent of workers will need to have bachelor's degrees or advanced degrees by 2018.
- The top three emerging degree areas for Idaho employers are computer science/technology, business and economics, and engineering.
- Idaho's access to broadband Internet is not keeping up with demand, especially in rural communities. According to content delivery network Akamai's latest State of the Internet Report, Idaho had the slowest Internet connection speeds in the nation with an average speed of 12.0 Mbps, less than half that of the fastest state of Delaware with an average speed of 25.2 Mbps.

*(Sources for Goal 4: Idaho State Board of Education, 2014; Idaho Department of Labor presentation, 2017; Idaho Education Field Guide, 2015)*

The work ICfL staff have done partnering with the Idaho Department of Labor in recent years, has laid the groundwork for libraries to identify opportunities in their community to support economic and employment development.

### Action Steps for Trustees

1. Support your director's membership in local Chamber of Commerce and other economic and employment development groups. Ask how your library is reaching out to businesses to let them know about library resources.
2. Update your library's technology plan often and maximize the library's broadband access when possible. Find out if your library is eligible for broadband support through the E-rate program, along with Idaho's Education Opportunity Resources Act (EOR), which cover nearly all broadband costs for eligible entities.

## **Trustee Connections, 2017**

3. Consider hosting a meeting at the library to share what your library is doing to support economic and employment opportunities. Invite local business leaders and other policymakers. After you have shared what you are doing, discuss ways you can work more closely together to advance economic and employment opportunities in your community.
  
4. Share information with service clubs, policymakers, and others about what your library is doing to help with this statewide goal.