



## Fact Sheet:

# Libraries in Tough Economic Times

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In times of economic hardship, people turn to – and depend on – their libraries and librarians. When the economy is down, library use is up.

- As more and more people look for employment, libraries are helping level the playing field for job seekers. For example, only 44% of the top 100 US retailers accepted in-store paper applications in 2006 (down from 68% in 2004). Library staff report that many patrons are turning to library computers and Internet access to find work, apply for jobs online, type resumes and cover letters and open email accounts.
- Libraries are America's great information equalizers – the only place people of all ages and backgrounds can find and freely use such a diversity of resources, along with the expert guidance of librarians.
- During times of economic downturn, libraries see more users because people cut back on entertainment. Besides reading, people are able to borrow movies for free and check out CDs, use databases and download audio books.

At the same time, tight budgets are reducing access when it's needed most.

### Specific to Washington State:

- An 11.2% increase in the circulation of library materials in the second half of 2008 compared to the same period in 2007 is greater than the compounded average growth rate of the previous four years combined.
- The 9.74% increase in percentage of time public Internet computers were in use during the same 2007 to 2008 comparison period is double the compounded rate for the previous four years combined.
- The 7.50% library visitor increase is nearly twice that of any of the previous four years.

Recognition of this phenomenon isn't limited to the library community. As recently as January 2009 two major US newspapers wrote articles recognizing substantial increases in library use.

- Locally, the Seattle Times piece was titled, "Library use jumps in Seattle area; economy likely reason...At the King County Library System and the Seattle Public Library, circulation is up — way up."
- The Wall Street Journal's headline was, "Folks Are Flocking to the Library, a Cozy Place to Look for a Job: Books, Computers and Wi-Fi Are Free, But Staffs Are Stressed by Crowds, Cutbacks."

It's clear that libraries are part of the solution when a community is struggling economically. From free access to books and online resources for families to library business centers that help support entrepreneurship and retraining, libraries support lifelong learning. They're a community investment with strong and steady rate of return.