Birmingham Public Library,
Central Branch

In Birmingham, we learned how the public library
has evolved to become a digital community center,
and how it's continuing to grow.

America Has a Digital Skills Gap. Libraries Can Help Fix it.

As branches across the country invest in new technologies and digital services, patrons are increasingly seeing them as go-to hubs for personal and professional development.

Public libraries have always played a critical role in American communities, but as more aspects of American life and work require digital skills, that role is becoming more expansive than ever before. In Birmingham, for example, the public library provides free services many people can't find anywhere else: public computers, Wi-Fi, digital skills classes, and in-person help with finding and applying for jobs online.

The demand for these kinds of services will only grow as higher levels of digital skills become integral to all kinds of work. At a time when many libraries are contending with shrinking budgets, partnerships with nonprofits, schools, governments, and corporations can help them continue to rise to the occasion. "Libraries are fundamentally good at adapting to the needs of their communities," Marijke Visser, associate director and senior policy associate at the American Library Association. "As technology changes, so do libraries."

READ THE ARTICLE: TheAtlantic.com/IOMLibraries

What We Learned

Libraries are a vital resource for communities all around the country. Here's why.

They're digital community centers.
All public libraries offer Internet access, and 98% offer free Wi-Fi. 84% of libraries offer software training and 90% help patrons with basic internet skills.

They're educational spaces.
65% of Americans say public libraries "help them grow as people." 58% say public libraries advance education. 80% of Americans said libraries should "definitely" offer programs that teach people to use digital tools.

They're career hubs.
73% of libraries provide programs that help people applying for jobs, and 68% offer programs that help people use online job opportunity resources.

They're growing through partnerships.
Libraries are able to access digital skills curricula and other resources through Grow with Google's partner program.