This report is written from the perspective of informed observers at the Colorado Dialogue on Public Libraries. Unless attributed to a particular person, none of the comments, ideas or recommendations contained in this report should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement of any specific participant at the Dialogue or affiliated organizations at the Dialogue.

To learn what other communities are doing to transform their libraries, download the *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries* report or its companion, *Action Guide for Re-Envisioning Your Public Library*; or to share the work that you are doing around library and community transformation in your own community, please visit the Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries online at [LibraryVision.org](http://LibraryVision.org).

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# CONTENTS

**FOREWORD** .......................................................................................................................... 4

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** ........................................................................................................... 5

**THE REPORT: LIBRARIES: BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN COLORADO**

**INTRODUCTION** .......................................................................................................................... 7

**THE COLORADO CONTEXT** .......................................................................................................... 9

**ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES** .................................................................................................. 11

The Building Blocks of Resilient Communities ............................................................................. 11

The Strengths of Libraries .............................................................................................................. 12

The Governor’s Perspective ............................................................................................................ 13

**EMPOWERING LIBRARIES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES** .......................................................... 17

**A PATH FORWARD** ..................................................................................................................... 22

Project 1: Library in a Box ............................................................................................................... 22

Project 2: Youth Voices .................................................................................................................. 23

Project 3: Workforce Training Modules Pilot .................................................................................. 23

Project 4: Civic Umbrella ................................................................................................................ 24

**CONCLUSION** ............................................................................................................................. 25

**ACTIVITIES CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE AND HOW TO GET INVOLVED** ......................... 26

**NOTES & REFERENCES** .............................................................................................................. 27

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ............................................................................................................ 28

**DIALOGUE PARTICIPANTS** ....................................................................................................... 29

**APPENDIX**

1: COLORADO RISING TO THE CHALLENGE .............................................................................. 31

2: LIBRARIES & COMMUNITY RESILIENCE POSTER SERIES .................................................. 32
FOREWORD

It is a true honor for Colorado to have been selected by the Aspen Institute to host the statewide, multi-stakeholder Colorado Dialogue on Public Libraries forum.

Public libraries are especially effective in supporting learning and education across all ages, promoting traditional and new forms of literacy, and serving as critical institutions for individuals and families confronting the challenges of major work, health and life transitions.

In 2016, Governor Hickenlooper’s office did an in-depth project examining what it takes to create more resilient communities, whether urban, suburban or rural. The Colorado Dialogue built on this effort and allowed us to explore opportunities for working more closely and more intentionally to leverage Colorado’s public libraries to build smarter, healthier and more resilient communities.

Through a series of moderated discussions the attendees explored ideas about what needs to happen for libraries to align better with government, business, philanthropic and community organizations to achieve significant progress in these areas, and to consider the elements that contribute to successful collaborations between schools, public libraries, communities and other support organizations.

The Dialogue allowed thoughtful consideration of the interplay of statewide trends with new developments that are reshaping education, jobs and civic participation; and it began to identify how libraries can play a greater role in closing troubling gaps and building more sustainable communities.

Through the Aspen Institute’s stewardship, we were able to identify some themes and ways in which Colorado’s public libraries can be aware of and involved in building smarter, healthier and more resilient communities. This report provides the impetus for Colorado to activate these leverage points and grow Colorado in a responsible, resilient way.

I want to thank the Aspen Institute for its investment of time and energy in leading the Colorado Dialogue on Public Libraries. We now have additional ambassadors in our business, nonprofit and civic leaders to identify steps we can take to activate one of our most valuable statewide assets, our public libraries, for a more resilient Colorado.

Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Commissioner
Colorado Department of Education
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, under the leadership of the Governor John Hickenlooper administration, the state of Colorado developed the Colorado Resiliency Framework – a plan that represents Colorado’s long-term investment and commitment toward a more resilient future. The plan identifies strategies and strengths to increase resiliency and reduce risks and vulnerabilities throughout the state to ensure a more vibrant Colorado. In keeping with the state’s focus on community resiliency, The Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries, in partnership with the Colorado State Library, convened the first statewide, multi-stakeholder forum on public libraries in Colorado. This report adds to the considerable body of work conducted by state agencies and local partners to create a roadmap to resilience for Colorado communities and invest in a more resilient future.

The Colorado Dialogue highlighted the building blocks of community resilience and the strengths of libraries to enhance those building blocks. These included economic diversity, housing challenges, behavioral health, educational achievement, access to information and services, collaboration, citizenship, leadership development and funding. The discussion also laid out important principles of local control, empowerment, equity and engagement, and explored meaningful actions to advance these goals throughout the state.

In conversation with Governor John Hickenlooper, dialogue participants acknowledged that libraries are underrepresented on statewide commissions and task forces. Also, in Colorado, libraries and other community services and infrastructure are locally funded, leaving gaps in the degree to which libraries can function to improve the lives of community residents. The Dialogue uncovered several promising ideas to connect libraries to statewide initiatives and programs, some of which, in turn, surfaced opportunities that require new funding streams and models to support the state’s libraries.

These opportunities include:

- participation in new initiatives for youth empowerment, workforce readiness and libraries serving as civic hubs;
- recommending the Governor appoint a blue ribbon panel or commission to address inequities in library resources, specifically how libraries can fund gaps to serve as community catalysts; this would aim to strengthen libraries as well as Main Street;
- funding a forum or symposium for continuing to convene on strategies to increase statewide resiliency.

The Colorado Dialogue identified 10 opportunities for strengthening library-community partnerships and overall community resilience, and ways in which libraries and communities can work more effectively together. (Specific recommendations, suggestions for partnerships, and highlights of existing successful models are included in the full report.)
The opportunities include the following:

1. Build into the resiliency of communities the knowledge that people change career paths all the time.
2. Look at education and lifelong learning as one interrelated ecosystem.
3. Adopt whole approaches to children and families for closing achievement and other gaps.
5. Connect libraries with the creative community.
6. Build networks with the private sector.
7. Create a new office to facilitate public-private and public-public partnerships (“P3 czar”).
8. Reclaim the salon culture in libraries.
9. Attract, inspire and enable diverse talent in the library and the community.
10. Change the culture and policies that inhibit innovation.

Finally, the Colorado Dialogue proposed four projects for participants to undertake, largely led by the State Library, as a mean to create a path forward for continuing dialogue and action.

- **Project 1**: Library in a Box responds to the need for modeling innovative and effective library services and communicating these successes to other libraries, the community and the media.

- **Project 2**: Youth Voices addresses the challenges of getting youth into libraries to access the services available to them, giving youth a strong voice in the community and showing the impact of the library’s work to the community.

- **Project 3**: Workforce Training Modules Pilot uses the inherent connectivity of libraries to create a living database of professional training modules that would be accessible to all Colorado libraries.

- **Project 4**: Civic Umbrella uses the library’s reputation for being neutral and its capability as a convener and facilitator to foster the exchange of ideas, relationship building and civic literacy in ways that develop trust among community members. Such trust is needed for resiliency in times of crisis.
INTRODUCTION

The Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries, in partnership with the Colorado State Library, convened the first statewide, multi-stakeholder forum on public libraries in Colorado on May 25, 2017, at the History Colorado Center in Denver. Twenty-four library leaders, state and local policymakers, business and civic partners met for the day-long discussion to explore opportunities for working more closely and more intentionally to leverage Colorado’s public libraries to build smarter, healthier and more resilient communities.

The theme of community resilience provided the focal point for dialogue and recommendations for action to advance library-community partnerships that build community capacity and opportunities for individual and family success in Colorado. Within this theme, the discussion focused on two key issues: (1) how libraries contribute to building community resilience and (2) the changes needed to strengthen the role of libraries in building resilient communities.

The Aspen Institute Colorado Dialogue on Public Libraries (“the Colorado Dialogue”) drew from the extensive knowledge base of state initiatives on resilience including the Colorado Resiliency Working Group, which defines resiliency as:

*The ability of communities to rebound, positively adapt to, or thrive amidst changing conditions or challenges—including disasters and climate change—and maintain quality of life, healthy growth, durable systems, and conservation of resources for present and future generations.*

Dialogue participants examined the building blocks of resilient communities and their relationship to one another and to public libraries. They considered the work that Colorado libraries are already doing to close troubling gaps in literacy, academic achievement, job and life skills, health and civic participation. They also discussed opportunities for public libraries across the state to participate in statewide innovation networks and public-private initiatives designed to address some of these same gaps. Participants in the dialogue explored avenues to ensure sustainability for library-related initiatives, including potential sources of revenue to support transformations of and new roles for public libraries where needed. Finally, participants recommended specific projects to move the dialogue forward.

The Colorado Dialogue is the only statewide convening among four Aspen Institute dialogues in 2016-2017 designed to showcase models through which civic, government, business, education and other community leaders working together can leverage the strategic opportunities that public libraries offer as platforms for learning, innovation and community development. These dialogues are based on the framework for re-envisioning public libraries in the Aspen Institute report, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*. This report highlights the three key assets that public libraries bring to their communities—people, place and platform—and concludes that “the long-term health of libraries is essential to the long-term health of the communities they serve.”

*The Colorado Dialogue provides a model for convening similar conversations in other states and serves as a catalyst for a broader dialogue on the role of libraries across the nation.*
The format featured a set of moderated roundtable sessions in the morning that included a special session in conversation with Governor John Hickenlooper as well as remarks by Colorado Commissioner of Education Katy Anthes, who participated in all of the morning sessions. Small group break-out sessions in the afternoon were followed by a final plenary session that highlighted specific proposals for creating a path forward.

The full-day program was preceded by a reception and opening dinner for participants on May 24 featuring a panel presentation by library leaders from different regions of the state: Claudine Perrault, director of Estes Valley Library; Joseph Sanchez, director of Mesa County Libraries; and Pam Sandlian-Smith, director of Anythink Libraries (Front Range/Adams County). Each shared powerful stories about what is possible with local libraries. There were narratives of personal engagement and empowerment, of community dialogue, and of helping the local economy of the community. Video of these presentations may be viewed at: http://aspen.cvlsites.org.

This report summarizes the key insights, issues and themes discussed by participants. It concludes with a set of recommendations and action steps to move the ideas into action. This report is not intended to be prescriptive, but to encourage fresh thinking and further dialogue on the role of public libraries in ensuring that every Colorado community is vibrant, prosperous and resilient. The goal is to identify models of library innovation and partnerships in Colorado that are working well, recommendations to strengthen existing initiatives, and proposals to advance development of new partnerships that tap the knowledge and information expertise of public libraries and their networks.
THE COLORADO CONTEXT

Colorado is a state with a deep tradition of and respect for local governance; local control is highly valued. The Dialogue began with an understanding that the discussions and recommendations coming out of the deliberations would begin with resident stakeholders in local communities, counties and library districts. The goal would be to seek solutions that empower individuals, local communities and libraries. State and regional leaders, including staff at the State Library, would identify what roles they could play in supporting communities confronted by new demographic trends, technologies and economic realities. Thus, participants identified empowerment as an important value and goal.

There are both advantages and disadvantages to local control when it comes to libraries. Relying on models of local funding can create inequities in access to opportunities and services across the state, especially in rural areas where there is less wealth upon which to draw. The issue of equity was another key concern throughout the discussions on libraries’ roles in contributing to community resilience.

On the other hand, smaller communities can make it easier to build relationships and gain knowledge about the community; there is often greater trust among community stakeholders. Smaller communities can lead to quicker start-up times with new initiatives, and fewer distractions make it easier to get people’s attention. Disadvantages in rural communities include limited resources, funding and the ability to find and retain internal expertise. Many rural communities seek staff help with expertise and advocacy from associations such as Colorado Counties Inc. (CCI) and the Colorado Municipal League (CML). Good quality outcomes are often a function of available resources. For rural communities, participants suggested a need to look at the creation of platforms and regional approaches to mitigate these disadvantages.

Eugene Hainer, Deputy Commissioner for Education, likened Colorado’s many communities and their stories to a woven tapestry. The individual threads make a minimal impact by themselves, but once woven together, a beautiful picture emerges. The tapestry metaphor underscored a third core value articulated by participants: the importance of engagement and strengthening connections and communication among individuals, organizations and communities. Colorado communities are having to adapt to a global economy, population shifts, new technologies and new business models, changing environments for education, civic participation and civic discourse. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution to meeting the challenges of this new era, but there is much knowledge to be gained by engagement and communication.

Describing the vast tapestry that is Colorado, Joseph Sanchez observed: “There are a lot of variables economically, culturally, educationally, politically. It’s a microcosm of our country’s struggle right now. I think it’s worth respecting their [communities’] differences, but finding a way to have that communication.”
New narratives and opportunities are beginning to emerge across Colorado. These are fueled by several key trends. Demographic growth is reshaping many Colorado communities with approximately 100,000 new arrivals to the state annually, but growth is uneven on a county-by-county basis. While some communities are absorbing a large number of these new arrivals, others are losing residents. The state’s growing reputation as a hub for innovation is attracting new residents and driving new opportunities and the development of new industries.

Colorado is also being shaped by an influx of new residents drawn by Colorado’s unique and compelling brand, its image that conveys a good quality of life. “They come here because of the idea of Colorado,” said Irv Halter, Commissioner of the Colorado Department of Local Affairs. The appeal of the state’s mountains and the quality of life associated with them is an important part of the story of Colorado today, regardless of whether newcomers are settling in Aurora or Vail. The challenge is to preserve the idea of Colorado and the quality of life associated with it as stakeholders work to strengthen the drivers of and overcome the challenges to resilience.
THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

The Dialogue drew from research on rural economic resilience in Colorado to identify the building blocks of resilient communities. A 2016 study by the Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado and the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade examined factors impacting resiliency across the state and identified five core drivers of community economic resilience and four challenges to economic resilience in communities.3

The drivers of resilience are: Quality of Life, Education & Health Care, Community Leadership, Industry Diversity, and Transportation.

The challenges to resilience are: Housing Availability & Supply, Labor Market, Youth & Family Retention, and Smart Growth.

With the insights from this study and their own experiences, participants identified the following building blocks of community resilience and discussed some of the problems of resilience that they and their organizations encounter throughout the state. (See the Acknowledgements for a list of organizations represented at the Dialogue.)

Economic diversity. The state has been able to diversify beyond the energy industry, but small communities in the state have less economic flexibility. Topography and geography are strong determinants of economic and community success in Colorado. Participants cited examples of local economies driven predominately by mining in the northwestern part of the state, agriculture and commodities in the eastern plains, and seasonal tourism in mountain towns. “When the fortunes of that economic sector change, it really changes that community’s ability to thrive,” said Chip Taylor, executive director of Colorado Counties, Inc. “The ones who are more diverse are able to weather those storms more.” Workforce development is a significant aspect of ensuring economic diversity for resilient communities.

Housing. Workforce housing and homelessness are among the greatest concerns of community leaders statewide. Housing challenges lead to challenges in retaining a viable workforce. Additional housing-related concerns for keeping a viable workforce include sustainable daycare options, teacher shortages, and seeing the features that make a community livable start to decline or disappear altogether.

Behavioral health. This was especially noted as a particular concern in rural Colorado due to the lack of expertise and adequate infrastructure to deal with problems of considerable magnitude. Participants noted the need for an open and robust dialogue around the opioid crisis, as well as other mental health issues. Engaging youth in these conversations is vital.

Educational achievement. Participants noted the need to address early learning and literacy, provide wrap-around services to support students and their families, and create connections among entities in the education ecosystem so that individuals have multiple gateways to access learning no matter where they live and work. Many sectors or stakeholders lay claim to owning a segment of education—early learning and pre-K, for example, or informal and summer learning. There is a need to change the vernacular around who “owns” learning, and for libraries to create stronger linkages with schools and community colleges to better support learning anytime and anywhere. Education is foundational to a resilient community, and continuous learning has to go on throughout a lifetime.

Access to information and services. Many state services emanate from Denver, but people need to have access everywhere. Information is an important element in empowerment. It gives context and helps people to see pathways that are available to them. Having access and being able to engage with others leads to action. This underscores the need for better communication across jurisdictions, including between the Front Range and Western Slope. Feeling part of a larger group and also having physical connectivity to broadband are important to maintaining a healthy quality of life.

ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES
Greater communication and connectivity may help to prevent “brain drain,” the departure of educated and skilled individuals—often younger people starting families and careers—who contribute much to the vitality of communities.

**Collaboration.** Participants said that a lack of collaboration among organizations creates barriers to strengthening resilience. In some cases, organizations work in their own silos due to perceptions that others are competing for the same funding.

**Citizenship and leadership development.** The future of community is youth, and young people are not being adequately prepared to serve the role and functions of citizenship. Communities need to assess how well they are preparing youth to assume the service and leadership roles that keep communities safe and democracy flourishing. Public libraries can help.

**Funding.** Community resilience is dependent upon the ability of communities to secure funding streams that support the building blocks of resilience.

Participants cited examples of communities throughout the state that are struggling with multiple problems of resilience and, in too many small and rural communities, all of these problems apply. Irv Halter noted from his extensive travel around the state that there is a baseline of similarity of needs in communities, and that the question to ask is this: “When a community gets into a position of crisis, how do we stabilize them so that they don’t continue to [decline] faster?” Halter advised that his department tries to focus on the quality of life issue and connectivity with the rest of the state. This means convincing residents who live on the Front Range (85 percent of the state’s population) that it is in their best interest to have all communities thrive.

**THE STRENGTHS OF LIBRARIES**

Participants underscored the importance of the library as a transformative institution in communities and the role of librarians as leaders. Libraries are places of trusted knowledge that inspire learning in their communities. Libraries are a great equalizer for economic and educational disparity and a critical part of the bridging infrastructure that helps people on their personal and family learning journeys. Libraries provide vital digital access and foster digital literacy and inclusion. They also provide portals to other experiences; they incentivize discovery and allow for fun and experimentation outside of the formal structures of schools.

Libraries support community dialogue and are a place to gather and to take action. They are places where families bring their children and where people convene and exchange information that makes small communities viable. Libraries are becoming increasingly skilled in offering programs and services that address two-generation (“2-Gen”) solutions to seemingly intractable problems in the community. They are places where professionals can explore new opportunities and get help from trained librarians to start a new business.

Trained librarians are among the public library’s greatest assets. Librarians are polyglots—they speak many languages, both literally and figuratively (including tech-coding language) and help their communities to connect the past and the present to the future.

Libraries themselves are transitioning and many are experimenting to discover what works and how to align their programs and services with the priorities and goals of their communities. There are, however, situations that constrain the opportunities for libraries to take on new roles.

Where libraries sometimes fall short is that most programs are started internally based on the interests and skills of library staff. This can be limiting and is a missed opportunity to engage the community. Libraries need to do more to reach out to the community to bring the expertise and creative skills of residents and civic leaders into the library’s platform and its portfolio of programs. Moreover, as Claudine Perrault observed, “Libraries can be very nimble when something urgent occurs or when we have clarity on what priorities are for the community, but sometimes libraries need the network to lead.” Libraries need engagement with other stakeholders to determine priorities. Another concern is that, despite their overall reputation, libraries are not uniformly viewed as safe and trusted places, particularly in places where immigrants who may or may not have documentation fear engagement with the public library as a part of government.
Dialogue participants focused on how to leverage libraries’ strengths effectively and what changes are needed to do so. The conversation with Governor Hickenlooper identified several opportunities for working collaboratively and addressing barriers that impede progress. Later, participants identified additional opportunities and developed a set of solutions for fostering community stability and creating innovations that will enable communities to thrive.

**THE GOVERNOR’S PERSPECTIVE**

In his opening remarks, Governor John Hickenlooper shared his personal story of benefiting from public libraries at critical times in his life. He told of how his widowed mother would bring him and his three siblings to the library, where he would do his homework and see his mother avidly read through the library’s mystery collection. As an adult, John Hickenlooper found himself laid off from his job as a geologist and turned to the public library to research and develop a new career in the restaurant industry.

“I had never worked a day in my life in a restaurant, and certainly didn’t know anything about business. I had a master’s degree in geology. So I went down to the Denver Public Library,” said the governor. He continued by saying that a librarian walked him through a book on how to write a business plan and helped him find other books. He finished by saying, “Basically, we wrote our whole business plan based on that book.” He went on to open and run the successful Wynkoop Brewing Company in Denver before entering politics.

The governor was candid in his engagement with participants and conveyed a strong commitment to working with them to identify and implement actions to support public libraries and their communities. The following are highlights of the key issues and opportunities identified in conversation with Governor Hickenlooper.

**New initiatives for learning and career readiness.** “Two of the most important assets that any small town has are its library and its Main Street,” said Governor Hickenlooper. Supporting the health and vitality of the business community, as represented by Main Street, and investing in the institutions that support lifelong learning, as represented by libraries, thus become important activities in maintaining a strong local community. Increasingly, economic development and education come together in discussions surrounding career readiness and workforce development. Colorado is in the forefront of addressing these issues. This “blurring the lines” creates new opportunities for working with public libraries.

Participants, many of whom are key thought leaders and policymakers in education, emphasized that looking at K-12 education in isolation does a great disservice to meeting the learning needs of Coloradans. The governor agreed and suggested the need for stronger connections among libraries, community colleges, and all the different levels of higher education to strengthen the education ecosystem and close critical achievement gaps. He noted that many careers have been disrupted by innovation and technology and that policymakers have not put sufficient time and effort into training people, not just when they lose their job but when they have lost their profession. Working with corporations, private individuals and foundations, the state has launched two programs that address this need.

The CareerWise Colorado program places high school juniors and seniors into career apprenticeships in information technology, financial and professional services, advanced manufacturing, hospitality and other industries. These students attend community colleges or workforce training center programs two days a week where they learn things directly related to the industries in which they are working. An important aspect of this initiative is that it creates interrelationships between the traditional educational ecosystem and work ecosystems, so that individuals can be doing things and learning concurrently, rather than sequentially (formal learning followed by work).
Joe Garcia, president of Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education (WICHE), said, “There is a criticality to blurring the lines.”

Public libraries are well positioned to form partnerships with local industry and create more opportunities for concurrent learning and blurring the lines in productive ways.

Skillful.com is a skills-based platform where people can look at the skills they need to qualify for jobs posted on the website. It is a response to the need for better tracking and matching of skills. Governor Hickenlooper cited the potential for moving workers from the banking industry into the burgeoning cybersecurity industry in Colorado: “A bank teller is numerate, has a high sense of precision, has to have a sense of urgency, and has to be collaborative. Where are the places where we have lots of jobs? Well, a lot of technology jobs. Cybersecurity in Colorado is huge—there are 9,000 unfilled jobs right now in cybersecurity. In more than half of them you don’t need a college degree. What are the skills you need? Well, you need someone to be numerate, have a high sense of precision, a sense of urgency, and they’ve got to be able to collaborate.”

Katherine Correll, executive director of Downtown Colorado, Inc., asked whether there were similar efforts to track the needs of individual communities and to think about skill development based on those needs. The governor suggested that there could be opportunities for identifying people whose work is seasonal in one region and providing services to train and match them with labor needs in other communities, such as construction and carpentry work in communities that want to revitalize their Main Streets but do not have the necessary workforce locally.

Margaret Hunt, director of Colorado Creative Industries, pointed out the growing body of research showing a connection between creative industries, particularly music, and successful economic development. “Music is a leading indicator of economic vibrancy and emerging creativity and innovation centers,” said Hunt.

Citing the additional educational benefits for students who study music, the governor highlighted the Take Note initiative, a collaboration with the Bohemian Foundation in Ft. Collins and the Anschutz Foundation based in Denver. He said that Colorado aims to be “the first state in America where any kid who wants to learn how to play music will have an instrument and a teacher.” The program will provide the instruments and seeks to engage the 1,800 students at Colorado State University who are majoring in a specific instrument in work study jobs as music teachers for younger students.

State networks for information sharing and collaboration. With so many innovative collaborations taking place in the state, participants explored how libraries can connect with some of these initiatives. Governor Hickenlooper said that one way would be for libraries to be a part of the Colorado Innovation Network, or COIN. Currently, COIN brings together the 30 federal research labs in the state plus Colorado State University, the University of Colorado, Colorado School of Mines, and the University of Denver. Initially a technology-oriented effort, COIN ensures that research and good ideas reach the people who need to know about them across the state. COIN members use their own networks to make sure that this information gets out to an even wider audience. He noted that state government is looking at the potential to create a separate network specifically for government services, but concluded that all libraries should be included in COIN because of potential application to jobs and other work by libraries.

Library access and funding. Anthony E. Graves, director of Regional Affairs for the City and County of Denver, highlighted the need to address barriers that inhibit access to libraries by the people who need them most. “It’s clear to me that libraries are an equalizer for economic and educational disparity, so I wanted to ask, from your perspective, what more can we do across the state to lower barriers for access to libraries for underserved communities?” asked Graves.

The governor responded that access is often a function of available resources, particularly funding. “You have to have the data, you have to have assessments so you know where people don’t have access to libraries, and
then once you get that information, you’ve got to do the hard work of working with the legislature. But I think it’s doable,” said the governor. He envisioned a scenario in which this group identified 14 communities in the state that would benefit most from a strong library because they are lacking in other venues that perform similar roles. If the group developed a plan that identified buildings that could be renovated for this purpose and brought it to the legislature, the governor called this “an intriguing idea.”

Participants pushed the funding issue further, noting some of the inherent barriers to innovation by the ways in which libraries are funded. Dan Cordova, Librarian of the Colorado Supreme Court, works with schools and libraries across the state and he posed the question to the governor this way: “We know that there is a funding deficit for schools, and if libraries are going to be places of lifelong learning and tethered to that, then how do we…not fund libraries in the same way moving forward?”

Cordova’s question is one that defies easy answers. The governor said he foresees that basic funding in the state will evolve to be much more local funding which will disadvantage rural and low-income communities significantly. However, “on a local level, libraries have an appeal and an attraction that is almost higher than anything else that their communities can do,” said Governor Hickenlooper. A statewide initiative could be brought forward, “with each vote occurring locally and letting the money go to local entities to be controlled on a local basis,” said the governor. Subsequent discussion on this funding ideaelicited comments that this approach is similar to current law allowing local votes to create library districts that are self-taxation jurisdictions.

Culture and policy also create barriers to innovation. Connie Rule, executive director of Boys and Girls Club of Colorado, observed that success and collaboration are built on relationships. She cited the example of a collaboration between the Boys & Girls Clubs in Fairplay and Bailey with the library that has filled a need for high-quality labor in the community—someone who is smart, experienced and great working with kids.

The partners figured out how to share an employee, someone who neither organization had the financial sustainability to hire full time at a livable wage. “How do we change the culture and policies that are in place that restrict funding, that don’t allow us to blend and braid funding from a nonprofit organization and a local government agency so that we can be creative and collaborative?” asked Rule.

At the legislative level, such blending and braiding is difficult because it would mean giving up oversight, said the governor, who noted the tremendous pressure for accountability at both the state and local levels. However, he cited examples of collaboration at the local level. When he served as mayor of Denver, the city approached some of its smaller neighboring communities that maintained their own fire departments and struck deals to merge those with the city’s fire department. This regional approach reduced the expenditures on fire services for the smaller communities and enabled them to use the land for other public benefits like parks. “That’s one example,” said the governor. “There are lots of them.”

Leveraging the library’s trusted brand for civic engagement. Integral to its brand identity is that the library is a trusted, neutral place of knowledge in the community. The public library is part of the continuum of resources that help individuals make sound decisions about their future. There is great opportunity for public libraries in leveraging this brand identification as one of the most trusted institutions in local communities. Governor Hickenlooper highlighted this opportunity, saying:

“I also think it’s just very powerful to have a place that the brand is a citadel of knowledge, a place of wisdom, and have that as one of the main meeting places in a local community. Having a library that is that symbol of the gathered intelligence and wisdom of the centuries, you can’t replace it.”
Extending the idea of the library as a trusted and neutral place to meet, participants discussed the role that Colorado’s public libraries could play in fostering greater collegiality, harmony, and productive civic engagement. The governor lamented the divisive political climate that exists across the country and the impact that it has on young people in particular. “We are depressing the product category of democracy and we’re turning young people off and they’re not getting the information that they need to know,” said the governor. There are positive benefits to always keeping a civil discussion, he continued, saying that libraries have a valuable role to be a place where people leave their weapons at the door and agree that when they come in, there is a higher level of civility there.

Pam Sandlian-Smith, director of Anythink Libraries, agreed, saying, “We’re doing it right now. We did it earlier with Laura Frank and Rocky Mountain PBS with another division of the Aspen Institute, What Every American Should Know.”
Building on the discussion of library’s strengths, there was broad agreement that public libraries are a critical part of community infrastructure that give concrete meaning to the principles of engagement, equity and empowerment. As participants began to develop the outline of an action plan for strengthening library-community partnerships and overall community resilience, they explored what these principles look like in the context of the library discussion.

Katherine Correll offered the following framework for thinking about libraries in this way, referencing the three core assets of people, place and platform that public libraries bring to their communities:

- **People** – In order to build resiliency for the future, communities need to make sure they are getting full engagement from the community. They cannot plan for diverse populations if those people are not coming to the table. In what ways can public libraries be a catalyst for full engagement from all parts of the community?

- **Place** – Think about the places where interaction happens in communities. Interaction happens in libraries and schools, downtowns, city hall and recreation centers. Think of these places as equitable places. How do we build equity and engagement into these places where we are asking people to come as a part of their community?

- **Platform** – With full engagement of the community taking place in equitable spaces throughout the community, we then need to give people the platform to lead. What are the opportunities to form partnerships and alliances that can strengthen community platforms for learning and leading?

The library is not the only local institution with people, place and platform assets that benefit the community; many organizations have these. “The library role changes depending on the situation,” said Michelle Jeske, City Librarian and head of the Denver Public Library system. “We’ve been trying to work more and more with public housing. Sometimes we need to go to them. Public housing is a place. We’ve got people and the platform, and we can take what we do well in libraries to where the people are. There’s a huge move in that direction of public libraries.” Jeske’s observation is a point well taken, especially noting that libraries can do more to break down barriers by bringing their work outside of the walls of the library building.

The following section explores 10 opportunities for libraries and communities to work more effectively together. Each opportunity contains suggestions for ways to specifically take advantage of these opportunities.

1. **Build into the resiliency of communities the knowledge that people change career paths all the time.** Libraries and other community stakeholders all have roles to play in helping individuals and communities adapt to new economic realities. “We should all be in the business of lifelong learning. We know in our economic development that folks change career paths all the time. We need to build that into the resiliency of our communities,” said Katy Anthes. Participants recommended the establishment of mechanisms to track the evolution of industry in the community and to identify skills that currently exist among residents as well as those that will be needed in emerging industries and jobs of the future. Communities and their
Libraries need to think about programs and services for skills development based on those needs. Participants noted that there is a strong network of small business centers across the state and that it is worth exploring what connections exist between these centers and libraries and forging stronger partnerships. Additionally, libraries can bring small business development consultants into their branches to offer consulting services.

2. **Look at education and lifelong learning as one interrelated ecosystem.** As the conversation with the governor about the school-work apprenticeship model highlighted, there is a need to view the learning ecosystem in more holistic, systemic ways. This involves seeing the connections between different parts of the ecosystem, letting go of old mental models, and being more intentional in developing partnerships for collective impact. Echoing back to the tapestry imagery, it means taking the individual strands of learning in the community and weaving them together into a stronger and more vibrant whole. Developing relationships and connections between different participants in the ecosystem can lead to new methods for successfully preparing young people for jobs and the future.

Libraries can help students connect to apprenticeship programs and, as a knowledge hub, be a part of that apprenticeship ecosystem. CareerWise Colorado is the nonprofit organization that is working on bridging industry and K-12 schools. The Colorado Workforce Development Council is where a lot of these conversations take place. Libraries should be involved in those conversations. Networking libraries more closely with this and other state initiatives in education is an important step toward becoming more intentional about partnerships and showing how libraries and others are supporting learning and strengthening communities.

New models and initiatives that provide concurrent rather than sequential learning experiences are needed. This need exists not only for students on the cusp of launching into the adult workforce and their own careers, but also in thinking about the ways in which libraries and other organizations support learning in the context of families. Children and their parents should have multiple gateways for accessing information and services and ample opportunities for learning at the same time. Libraries have trained staff, comfortable learning spaces, programs and resources to respond to these needs. Partnerships with other stakeholders in the community (especially those that lead to collective impact models) can develop this capacity on a broader scale.

Another key area is school libraries’ need for stronger support. The decline of school libraries affects library-using and information-seeking behavior, and society is at risk of turning out a generation of students without the benefit of a good school library and the experience using it. Communities should explore ways in which public libraries can develop stronger relationships with school libraries so that both can use the unique strengths of school and public librarians to benefit the community’s education ecosystem.

3. **Adopt whole approaches to children and families for closing achievement and other gaps.** Programs and services that employ two-generation (2-Gen) solutions are vital, as are wrap-around services that address physical health, behavioral health, food security, job loss and other social and economic challenges that negatively impact learning. Summit County Commissioner Dan Gibbs cited a new initiative in Breckenridge that is putting a children’s advocacy center in the new library there. Co-locating these services in the library will help the county to address critical health issues in a safe and welcoming environment. Many libraries and community-based organizations already offer wrap-around services and partnerships with outside programs. The Colorado State Library has a wealth of information for libraries and communities that want to learn and do more.
4. Develop partnerships for collective impact. In her remarks on education goals in Colorado, Katy Anthes reflected on the need to identify where in the ecosystem to strengthen existing bridges and where to build new bridges. “We need bridges between school and home, home and community, school and workforce, school and post-secondary, community and school, and to have more of a seamless system for the families we are serving,” said Anthes. She cited the example of communities where there are now healthcare services in the schools, so kids that do not have access to healthcare at home can get those services and not be absent from school. Anthes said, “I’m sure it’s already happening in libraries. What role do we all play in fostering those foundations and being able to break it [the focus on core goals] down into these small steps? How do we have a common strategic plan around that, and then where do we all plug into that strategic plan? What very specific activities can we all do to partner together and bridge together to do that?” Anthes’ call for specific, tactical, collaborative activities was addressed in the specific recommendations for action in “A Path Forward” section below.

Laura Frank, president and general manager for news at Rocky Mountain PBS, suggested that public media could form effective partnerships with public libraries and serve as a statewide platform to promote the programs and services available through libraries and partnerships. Rocky Mountain PBS has experience as a partner with public libraries, as a catalyst and a convener, and it is a statewide organization with a mission that is very closely aligned with the mission of public libraries.

Through its partner programs, the public media network distributes community enriching content through its various channels, including on air, online and via text. Bright By Three, a program for parents and caregivers of children under five that sends free activities and resources to cell phones via text messaging, saw higher levels of enrollments after partnering with Rocky Mountain PBS. Rocky Mountain Public Media has launched Regional Innovation Centers at locations around the state (in Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Grand Junction, and soon in Durango) that will enable easier collaborating with libraries, universities, and other media to bring more stories to the public and share important work and educational resources.

Summit County Commissioner Dan Gibbs noted that local government has certain strengths to foster the development of partnerships and collective impact models. Local government has the power of the purse and, importantly, this means that local government has the ability to conduct surveys and poll the community on its appetite to fund new initiatives. He cited successful results of resident survey that have led to the creation of new initiatives, funded through a property tax, to support childhood education by supporting the housing and continuous education needs of teachers.

5. Connect libraries with the creative community. With arts and creative districts assuming a greater role in community and economic development, participants asked what roles libraries might play as part of these districts. Libraries are already identified as a place of creativity, fun and discovery, so the connection with arts and creative districts is a natural one. Many libraries currently offer makerspaces as part of the broader maker movement, but often library makerspaces are too small to accommodate creative engagement and experimentation on a broader scale. Libraries should reach out to the creative community and explore what new partnerships can be developed.

6. Build networks with the private sector. Some of the greatest opportunities for building community resilience will come through forging stronger partnerships between the public and private sectors, including between libraries and the business community.
Dialogue participants emphasized the need for libraries to be networked in the community, not just technologically but in terms of the networks of people that drive social, economic and political decision-making and change in the community. Librarians should focus on building their networks and enlist their board members to help. “Having the right people in the right seats on your board can help you with that outreach to the community,” said Clarke Becker, director of the Colorado Rural Workforce Consortium. And if they can’t help with that outreach, Becker advised: “then maybe you need to change the makeup of your board.”

Libraries need to look for venues to bring librarians and the private sector together. Library leaders can attend Chamber of Commerce meetings—this is where the business community gathers on a regular basis to discuss issues of concern. Librarians can join local civic organizations, like the Rotary Club. The Rotary Club of Summit County has partnered with the library to create Summit Reads, a literacy program that has helped county residents deal with several crisis situations in the community, including drought, wildfires and suicides. The library has been the facilitator teaming up with the business community to bring experts to the community. Based on these discussions, the mayor and commissioners learn what the gaps are and figure out policy to move forward. Dan Gibbs said, “We’re not waiting for the state or Feds to jump in. Our local community is really looking at where these gaps are.”

Ann Terry, executive director of the Special District Association, said that preventive health care would be a fascinating and important way to develop these networks given the need to strengthen behavioral health in the state. Jesse Henning, library director for Garfield County Libraries, added that libraries can collect health information and partner with hospitals and other healthcare providers to provide accurate information to patients. People could access information in the library, or the library or locality working with the library could provide information to healthcare recipients at the point of service.

Engaging with the business community can develop the leadership capacity of the library. Conversely, engaging with the library can also develop leadership in the community and create new library champions. Randy Pye, managing principal of FulcrumOne and former mayor of Centennial, told of how Arapahoe Library District leaders reached out to him after he was elected to drive awareness of the rich community asset that Centennial has in the library. The library director took Pye to a national library conference to learn more about what libraries were doing.

“When I came back, my entire presentation at the State of the City that year was about how we were going to engage the library. I’m sure that the 300 people that were sitting there in the audience were going, ‘What the heck is he talking about? He’s supposed to be giving us a vision of where the city is going.’ Well, the city needed to go where the library was going to take us,” said Pye.

Another way for libraries to engage with the business community is to ask them to sponsor a forum at the library. Businesses are frequently asked to sponsor cultural events, like concerts, but developing a forum on the changes in local economies or the impact of automation and artificial intelligence on the workforce could lead to deeper partnerships. In rural communities and where library districts serve multiple communities, it may make sense to explore regional models for building networks with the private sector. If libraries start with the business community, they can enlist business leaders’ help to bring government leaders into the conversation.
7. Create a new office to facilitate public-private and public-public partnerships (“P3 czar”). Participants identified a need for more effectively working together to “connect the dots” to help identify resources and solve challenges in communities around the state. The P3 czar would work with communities to help identify where there are resources available, locally, regionally, at the state or national levels, and facilitate the process of bringing those resources into communities to create or strengthen public-private and public-public partnerships. The Colorado Department of Local Affairs has various grant programs to support partnership activity and might be an appropriate home for a P3 czar. “Every county in my world is so dramatically different in what resources they have to bring to the table. The state could really help,” said Dan Gibbs.

8. Reclaim the salon culture in libraries. Participants recommended that Colorado communities reclaim a salon culture in public libraries to strengthen citizenship and take advantage of the library’s reputation as a neutral space. The recommendation to partner with the business community to create forums of interest to the community could be included under the umbrella of this proposal. The State Library could help to foster a salon movement in libraries across the state. The library was identified as “the perfect place” for fostering dialogue and an exchange of ideas, and specifically for the private sector to bring subject matter experts from various disciplines and industries to the community to inform and educate civic leaders and other community members including children about different things happening in the world—whether it is in aerospace, the opioid crisis, or any number of issues. Libraries have an opportunity to spread this new renaissance of thought exchange, collaboration and robust dialogue around a number of issues in their communities and across the state.

9. Attract, inspire and enable diverse talent in the library and the community. Libraries can help their communities find new ways to attract, inspire and enable the talent needed to attract, inspire and foster innovation. This includes attracting subject matter experts who have experience, knowledge and skills in strengthening the building blocks of resilience, e.g., working with youth, mental health, technical skills, etc. As Connie Rule noted earlier, collaborations between public and nonprofit organizations with similar needs have found success. Furthermore, librarians need to reflect the diversity of the communities that they serve and the diversity of the state as its demographic profile changes. The state’s libraries need to develop ways of engaging kids early in thinking about the possibility of a career in library sciences and to work with education and other partners to design pathways to librarianship, possibly through the development of new apprenticeship models.

10. Change the culture and policies that inhibit innovation. Building on the earlier conversation about library funding, participants emphasized the need to change the culture and policies that guide funding decisions and determine who and what projects get funded. There is a strong desire to shed old funding rules without shedding mechanisms for accountability and oversight. This will take some effort to figure out, but will be worth the effort.
A PATH FORWARD
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

In order to make the day’s work actionable, participants focused on what libraries could do immediately in partnership with one another and local and state partners to strengthen communities.

“There is a need to take problems and reshape them into projects. The library is a good place to invite that innovation and the community, and to empower the community to resolve issues,” said Katy Anthes

The projects that work best are those that are concrete, tactical, incorporate meaningful ways to collaborate, start small then build and show value. Working in small break-out groups, participants recommended the following projects that provide a path forward.

PROJECT 1: LIBRARY IN A BOX

Library in a Box responds to the need for modeling innovative and effective library services and communicating these successes to other libraries, the community, and the media in ways that are easily discoverable and drive change in library service models. The project would gather stories of great library work in communities and share them through a statewide system. The collection of stories, innovative ideas and best practices can lead to the creation of a library data center and story bank, and provide a template for communities that are under-resourced. For example, the project could identify libraries doing wrap-around services or mental health and indicate who should be at the table with youth and learning. Library in a Box can shine a light on small communities that are successful but would not otherwise get recognition for their success.

The State Library would gather and distribute the stories and best practices, which would be disseminated through State library or Colorado Library Consortium (CLiC) listservs, or other communication channels operated by government (e.g., the Department of Local Affairs) or nonprofits (e.g., Colorado Counties Inc., Colorado Municipal League, Special District Association). Another suggestion for dissemination is for Supreme Court Library staff traveling the state with the 22 Court of Appeals judges to reach out to local colleagues on professional opportunities like this.

The proposal speaks to the library branding conversation. Outcomes would include encouraging libraries and their communities to think about libraries differently, as a place to find services, get information on how to feed your family, and access mental health services. The State Library could create toolkits from the information and bring them out regionally to explore how communities might develop public-private and public-public partnerships. If a community wanted to use a toolkit, they could learn how to come together and fund that particular initiative, bringing other agencies along with the library to make it happen in their community.

Sharon Morris, director of library development at the State Library, commented: “The State Library can do the collection and some of the logistics, but locally it would be great to leverage this as an opportunity to really build some infrastructure around replication of some of these models.”
PROJECT 2: YOUTH VOICES

Youth voices addresses the challenge of getting youth into libraries to access the rich and varied services available to them there, including food, safe places, and mental health services. The project recognizes that youth yearn to have a stronger voice in their communities, to participate in community discussions in meaningful ways, and to be seen and heard. Some libraries are already working with youth to create music videos, documentaries, art and other creative content.

In the spirit of starting small and building, the project would collect content and stories that are already being created and inject them into the PBS regional innovation centers. This project would help to change the internal culture of libraries to be more open to engaging youth on their terms, as well as the external perception of the library as a cool place.

The State Library would initiate a survey on what public libraries are doing with youth video production and ask if they are aware of others in their communities who are producing youth content if the library is not. The State Library already sponsors a teen video contest and could leverage that to roll out the Youth Voices project to regional networks. The project’s mantra is “start small, keep it manageable, have results, then grow.” Libraries would use their youth advisory committees to select the videos that would make it onto the PBS platform. Working with Rocky Mountain PBS, libraries could seek underwriting sponsorships for the production equipment they may need.

As it grows, the project could include content from makerspaces that are transferrable around the state, with youth and adult training implications. Libraries might consider outreach to the Colorado 9to25 network, a regional framework with youth advisors at the local level with a primary focus to engage youth in owning and directing their future. Another opportunity involves collaborations between libraries and healthcare providers that could engage youth in healthy behaviors.

Having the ability to collect stories is an important method for gauging impact, said Dustin Hodge, principal at Hodge Productions (formerly Hodge Media) in Pueblo. “Whenever you’re able to systematically gather these stories and somebody is able to see this on PBS, they see it—they read it in the newspaper, they have physical evidence of a video that a kid made—then that’s impactful. That shows value to an institution. That shows value to a community and to individuals,” said Hodge.

PROJECT 3: WORKFORCE TRAINING MODULES PILOT

The Workforce Training Modules Pilot uses the inherent connectivity of libraries to create a living database of professional training modules that would be accessible to all Colorado libraries. This proposal responds to the need for tracking workforce skills that are needed in a community and developing locally customized resources to develop the capacity and skills of residents to meet the needs of local industry. Customized modules are preferred to off-the-shelf training programs because they would be consistent with Colorado law and meet the unique cultural and sociological needs of Colorado’s communities, although if there is off-the-shelf that meets the need, then libraries would use and share that.

The pilot project would begin with three to five libraries or counties working together to identify the workforce needs of those counties and develop training modules (video or hybrid models that could be used synchronously or asynchronously), certifications and training programs that could take place at the library. Mesa County Libraries, a public library district, that has the skill set to do this work, would take the lead in developing and running the pilot. Participating counties and their libraries, working with their boards, would gather information from local businesses, meeting with business partners or convening them to quantify and qualify what type of labor they need. The surveys would ask not only what existing businesses are looking for, but what the future trends for jobs are that the library-business partners can cultivate and develop. The project would look for trends, areas of overlap and themes that the library training modules could then begin serving up.

The project would collect baseline data about business assets in the community and develop tracking methodologies for business data capture. Success would be measured by business partners coming to the library for help filling these needs. Participants cautioned that it is important to be strategic in reaching out to business partners, who may experience survey fatigue, and to consider making this a community crowdsourcing effort. Laura Frank of Rocky Mountain PBS noted that PBS Learning Media has the ability to put pre-roll
underwriting sponsorship messages on content so there is the possibility of monetizing content on that platform to pay for the development of the modules.

**PROJECT 4: CIVIC UMBRELLA**

The Library as Civic Umbrella proposal addresses the library as a central place for exchanging ideas, networking, and developing citizenship and civic identity. It takes advantage of the library’s reputation for being neutral in terms of politics, its abilities as a convener and facilitator (although if appropriate, someone else from the community might facilitate), and a place where community ideas can be brought and discussed. The project would develop important civic muscles that would strengthen community relationships for whenever crisis strikes. Like the earlier recommendation to reclaim the salon tradition in libraries, the project would bring together people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives and create rules for people to be safe in dialogue. The Civic Umbrella message is, “Here diversity and civility are embraced. Check your guns at the door.”

In communities that embrace the Civic Umbrella concept, the library would start with nonpolitical issues. For example, if a community faces the potential of one of its major industries going away, how is the community going to retrain the folks in its community to adapt to that? An ongoing series of community conversations would start to build a set of norms for civil discourse. There are tools for conducting community dialogues that are available through professional associations, including library associations (the Denver Public Library uses the Harwood Institute model); libraries should take advantage of these tools. The library would facilitate greater community participation in decision-making by hosting conversations where the public can play a role in bringing about change, for instance, weighing-in through the library forum on whether to build a community pool or permit the Special District Association to build a firehouse.

Civics education is not a priority in many schools, and foreign-born residents often have limited experience in local democracy as practiced in the United States. (Many foreign-born residents do use libraries extensively as they prepare to become U.S. citizens.) Libraries would pull together materials for teaching civics and develop two-generation approaches to engaging children and their families, such as hosting fun competitions between kids and their parents or adult caregivers. The Colorado Judicial Branch, the Colorado Municipal League, and the Special District Association have all worked with curriculum developers to create civics curriculum with a focus on lessons in local government. This project recommends taking these high quality civics courses and dropping them into public libraries. Dan Cordova, Librarian of the Colorado Supreme Court, volunteered to take the lead on pulling together curriculum materials and working with public libraries to implement programs.

Many of Colorado’s communities have citizen academies that are used to educate and funnel people into planning commissions or to run for city council or other elected offices. The citizen academies could tie into the library-led Civic Umbrella which would aid in leadership development as well as basic education and increasing civility.

The Civic Umbrella convening and civics education components combine both access to civic dialogue and knowledge. These two elements could be woven together into one project or function as stand-alone projects. Ann Terry eloquently summarized the Civic Umbrella project and its contributions to community resilience: “We believed that this would put together educated communities on civil literacy and trust and connect all different, diverse populations within the community which would result in building a community that is going to be resilient in time of crisis or in time of tragedy. We thought that by having the library be the convener and also bringing in educational pieces around civics, that the ultimate result would be trust. People would trust each other. They’d turn to each other, especially in times of tragedy. So we can train, and we should train on tragedy, and we should train on any sort of natural disasters or shooting.”

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To further develop the community’s knowledge and experience, the Civic Umbrella project includes a component to develop the library as a hub for civics education.
CONCLUSION

The Aspen Institute Colorado Dialogue on Public Libraries brought together stakeholders from many professions and many regions of the state to explore how to leverage the expertise and assets of public libraries to build more resilient communities. The Colorado Dialogue is a model for demonstrating the library’s power to convene people and to serve as a catalyst for fresh thinking and creative, collaborative problem solving.

The Colorado Dialogue highlighted the building blocks of community resilience and the strengths of libraries to enhance those building blocks. Principles of empowerment, equity and engagement are vital to community resilience.

The conversation with Governor Hickenlooper uncovered several promising ideas to connect libraries to statewide initiatives and programs. New opportunities may require new funding streams and models to support the state’s libraries.

The Colorado Dialogue identified opportunities for forging partnerships and connecting libraries to business, creative community, government and education partners. Participants recommended actions to advance library engagement in collective impact models as well as the creation of a “P3 czar” to develop stronger public-private and public-public partnerships at the local level. They recommended reclaiming a salon culture in libraries. They emphasized the need to attract, inspire and enable diverse talent in public libraries and in the community, and to actively seek ways to change culture and policies that create barriers to innovation.

Finally, the Colorado Dialogue proposed four new projects, largely led by the State Library, as a mean to create a path forward for continuing dialogue and action. The State Library is well positioned to lead this work forward with the network of public libraries, communities and stakeholders that are supporting local and state efforts to build resiliency.

The success of conferences such as the Colorado Dialogue can be measured by the new ideas gained that participants can act on and the development of partnerships and collaborations that grow from the shared exchange and experience. It seems fitting that the Colorado Dialogue generated so many excellent ideas. Afterall, this is the state that is itself defined by, as a great idea, the idea of Colorado.
ACTIVITIES CONTINUING THE DIALOGUE AND HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Since the adjournment of the Aspen Institute Colorado Dialogue on Public Libraries, the Colorado State Library has begun to advance several of the recommendations in this report. The following are some of the activities underway.

**Project 1: Library in a Box** responds to the need for modeling innovative and effective library services and communicating these successes to other libraries, the community and the media.

The State Library, across units, responds to the need for modeling innovative and effective library services and communicating these successes to other libraries, the community and the media. Specifically relative to public libraries, the State Library recently updated the Colorado public library standards which serve as models for services, resources and information that are available in libraries across the state: http://www.colibrarystandards.org/

**Lead:** Sharon Morris, Director, Library Development: morris_s@cde.state.co.us

**Project 2: Youth Voices** addresses the challenges of getting youth into libraries to access the services available to them, giving youth a strong voice in the community, and showing the impact of the library’s work to the community.

Beth Crist, Youth and Family Services Consultant is conducting a webinar with Boys & Girls Club and has connected with the Take Note Colorado program, particularly because the 2018 summer learning theme is music. In 2017, the State Library shared the Governor’s Take Note Colorado promotional video and also hosted a mini job fair for middle schoolers to explore careers for which there are experiential programs in library makerspaces and otherwise.

**Lead:** Beth Crist, Youth and Family Services Consultant: crist_b@cde.state.co.us

**Project 3: Workforce Training Modules Pilot** uses the inherent connectivity of libraries to create a living database of professional training modules that would be accessible to all Colorado libraries.

While the recommendation here was specific to a training module(s), some of the activities that have taken place since the Dialogue include: meeting with representatives of CareerWise to raise awareness of public libraries’ capacity to promote the statewide program; considering placement of an intern in CDE; and touring the IdeaLab at Denver Public Library to showcase an aspect of a modern library. As referenced above, the State Library hosted a mini job fair for middle school students that draws on library resources.

**Leads:** Jacqueline Murphy, Public Libraries and Community Development Consultant: murphy_j@cde.state.co.us and Eugene Hainer, State Librarian: hainer_g@cde.state.co.us
Project 4: Civic Umbrella uses the library’s reputation for being neutral and its ability as a convener and facilitator to foster the exchange of ideas, relationship building and civic literacy in ways that develop trust among community members. Such trust is needed for resiliency in times of crisis.

Plans are underway for facilitator training for librarians in 2018 to foster community conversations in the library on a range of topics (e.g., immigration, healthcare, etc.). To that point, the State Library is hosting a webinar on civic engagement, showcasing a new self-help website for the state judicial system.

Lead: Jacqueline Murphy, Public Libraries and Community Development Consultant: murphy_j@cde.state.co.us

To learn more about these and other activities in Colorado, to access resources or to get involved, please consult the Aspen Institute Colorado Dialogue on Public Libraries website or contact the Colorado State Library:

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NOTES AND REFERENCES


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Titles reflect positions held on May 24, 2017.
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APPENDIX 1:  
COLORADO RISING TO THE CHALLENGE  
BY PAM SANDLIAN-SMITH, DIRECTOR, ANYTHINK LIBRARIES

The Colorado State Library initiated a statewide engagement of public libraries to research and discuss the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, *Rising to the Challenge: Re: Envisioning Public Libraries* in 2016-17. All public library directors were invited to convene Aspen Institute Dialogues on the importance of public libraries within their communities. Since the release of the Action Guide for Re-Envisioning Your Library (Action Guide), at least 22 dialogues were hosted throughout Colorado. These conversations ranged from large urban and suburban libraries to small rural communities. The library directors utilized the *Strategies for Success and Action Steps* document as a guideline for convening these conversations as well as guidance and support from the Colorado State Library team.

The outcomes of these conversations are varied; however, library directors noted that this community engagement has been a powerful experience. One library director in a rural community noted that this conversation has been the best opportunity to convene stakeholders, to help them understand the value and power of the library. The community is now utilizing the library as a catalyst to convene its members to work on solving community issues and problems.

The Anythink library, a suburban and rural library district, utilized key components of the dialogue as a basis for its strategic planning effort. Community members, key policy makers and stakeholders alike contributed valued insights that informed the Anythink Strategic Plan 2018-2022: [http://online.fliphtml5.com/mnwo/kbuy](http://online.fliphtml5.com/mnwo/kbuy)

Adams County stakeholders viewed the library as a catalyst for innovation in their community. Key strategies focus on culture, community and career. Results that the library is working toward: people are happy, healthy and safe; people are enriched by learning and culture; and people are prosperous and creative.

Pine River Library District used the Action Guide to facilitate a community meeting to institute a library/community change for improved youth services.

Mesa County Library District used the Action Guide for its strategic planning framework.

Boulder Public Library has used the Action Guide for developing its library master plan.

These are just a few examples of how the Aspen Dialogue model has resulted in engaging conversations in Colorado communities. The results are rewarding as communities continue to understand the evolving nature of public libraries. Communities value the shifting roles of libraries as connectors and conveners. Communities look to public libraries as safe spaces as well as cultural and educational places.
APPENDIX 2:
LIBRARIES & COMMUNITY RESILIENCE POSTER SERIES

COMMUNITY RESILIENCY IN COLORADO

In November 2016, the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade released the report, *Rural Economic Resiliency in Colorado: Study of Factors Impacting Resiliency*, prepared in partnership with researchers at the University of Colorado, Leeds School of Business. The report presented a comprehensive analysis of factors that affect economic resiliency in Colorado communities with a particular emphasis on rural communities. It identified a series of drivers of, and challenges to, resiliency based on the research and focus groups with community leaders conducted in select counties across the state. The insights from these focus groups help to understand other factors promoting or inhibiting resiliency that may not be apparent in the numerical data. These drivers and challenges include:

**DRIVERS OF RESILIENCY**
- Quality of Life
- Education & Healthcare
- Community Leadership
- Industry Diversity
- Transportation Access

**CHALLENGES TO RESILIENCY**
- Housing Availability & Supply
- Labor Market
- Youth & Family Retention
- Smart Growth

Libraries have long been drivers of resiliency, even if those terms typically have not been applied to describe what libraries do. Public libraries have a history of supporting and strengthening their communities at times of significant change, including periods of rapid expansion and innovation in the economy (first with the rise of the industrial economy and now in response to the evolving needs of the digital, knowledge and creative economies), greater mobility among the population and new waves of immigration.

The metamorphosis from book repository to learning platform, civic hub and community beacon showcases the vast knowledge and skill set of librarians across Colorado and across the country. The creative and innovative activities taking place at Colorado libraries connect well to the identified drivers of resiliency and address the challenges of resiliency that communities are facing as depicted in this poster presentation.

Even those drivers and challenges that do not seem to have an obvious connection to current library programs and services (Transportation Access, Housing Availability & Supply, Smart Growth) present opportunities for libraries that seize upon key trends in technology, such as advances in broadband connectivity that enable people to live and work in small and rural communities while participating in markets across the state, nation and even around the world.

As Colorado libraries turn outward and engage more intentionally with partners in the community, they and their partners will continue to reimagine their respective roles in supporting efforts at the state and local levels to make their communities more resilient. The statewide focus on resiliency and the information presented in these posters about the ways in which Colorado libraries are currently using their assets of people, place and platform to address these drivers and challenges will be the starting point for our discussions at the Aspen Institute Colorado Dialogue on Public Libraries.
COMMUNITY RESILIENCY IN COLORADO

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#ResilientCO
At least one library in the county provides programs for:

- Jobs (e.g., rural workforce center)
- Creation (e.g., crafting or 3D printer)
- Civic engagement (e.g., community meeting convenor)
- Literacy (e.g., English classes for immigrants)

No program reported

Based on a survey of library directors and/or review of library websites, March 2017.

2015 county populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>683,096</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand</td>
<td>14,615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Juan</td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Colorado State Demography Office
https://demography.colorado.gov/population/data/profile-county/
drivers of resiliency

QUALITY OF LIFE

Summit On-the-Go library materials in bus/transit centers for resort workers who rely on public transportation
– Summit County Public Library

CO-HOST DOCUMENTARY WITH LOCAL THEATER
– Cortez Public Library

“HOW TO ADULT” SERIES ON FIRST APARTMENT, CAR MAINTENANCE
– West Custer County Library District

Block parties in parks, fire stations and new neighborhoods; ballet/symphony performances
– Anythink

PREPARING TAXES FOR LOW-INCOME SENIORS
– Fowler Public Library and Hugo Public Library

#ResilientCO
drivers of resiliency

EDUCATION & HEALTH CARE

HOME SCHOOL GROUP LEARNING PROGRAM
– Canon City Public Library

Health nurse via Skype™ for appointments and screenings
– Nucla Public Library

Host Science Fridays to account for four-day school week
– Meeker Public Library

GIRLS EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM
– Pueblo City-County Library District

ROBOTICS FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
– Fort Lupton Public Library

#ResilientCO
drivers of resiliency

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

“Coffee with the Community,” hosting local officials
– Gunnison Public Library

LIBRARY IS THE OFFICE OF THE LOCAL CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
– Limon Public Library
– Berthoud Community Library District

Working with Fort Lyon Supportive Residential Community Entrepreneurs
– Las Animas-Bent County Library

#ResilientCO
challenges of resiliency

LABOR MARKET

RESUME WORKSHOPS TAUGHT BY COUNTY WORKFORCE CENTER
– Loveland Public Library

Bizboost for entrepreneurs to get resources and critical data for market plan success
– Denver Public Library

Public computers for workforce account and resume creation – library waives time limits for job seekers
– Akron Public Library

BETA TESTING FOR SPACE SCIENCE INSTITUTE EXHIBITS
– Louisville Public Library

#ResilientCO
challenges of resiliency

**YOUTH & FAMILY RETENTION**

Nutritious food pantry (Take one, leave one) – Carnegie Library of Trinidad

Virtual legal clinic – Pines and Plains Libraries

Medicare/Medicaid experts – Durango Public Library

BILINGUAL STORY TIME – Eagle Valley Library District

READING TO DOGS IN LIBRARY, FOR RELUCTANT READERS – Jefferson County Public Library

#ResilientCO
LIBRARIES:
BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN COLORADO

A REPORT OF THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
COLORADO DIALOGUE ON PUBLIC LIBRARIES

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

www.LibraryVision.org