

Washington State Library

Serving the Vulnerable

The Washington State Library (WSL) is providing vital resources and services to the state's most vulnerable residents during the economic downturn.

In response to severe economic times, the Washington State Library has created the **Hard Times Resource Guide** (www.sos.wa.gov/library/hardtimes). It is a publicly accessible, statewide resource targeted to a number of vulnerable populations. The web site brings together resources in one easy-to-use location to help Washington's citizens.

- The Hard Times Resource guide serves the unemployed by helping them locate jobs, gain new skills, and seek out educational opportunities so that they can find fulfilling work in Washington State.
- Users can find thoroughly researched and carefully chosen information on employment and job-seeking, housing and homelessness, health and sustenance, and finances and money management.
- The Guide focuses on meeting the information needs of users in an easy-to-navigate way.
- Customized searches in each category allow users to quickly access the specific information they need.
- Additional resources serve struggling families, people with disabilities, veterans and Spanish-speakers.

WSL created and manages the **Renew Washington** project to enable libraries throughout the state to respond to their patrons' employment needs. Individual grant projects focusing on specific community hardships allow residents to:

- Learn basic computer skills;
- Locate job opportunities, prepare resumes, and improve interview skills;
- Complete online job applications;
- File for unemployment benefits;
- Start and grow small businesses; and
- Retool for a new career with free training materials, educational opportunities and trainings.

Most of the Washington State Library's work in serving vulnerable populations is funded by the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA). In order to remain qualified to receive these funds, the Washington State Library must show a specified level of match and maintenance of effort from state resources. With significant cuts in general state funds to the State Library, the federal LSTA funds are in jeopardy.

The Washington State Library's ongoing products and services continue to support vulnerable populations throughout the state.

The **Washington Talking Book & Braille Library** provides a free public library service that includes easy access to the informational and recreational reading materials needed by individuals in Washington State who are unable to read standard print material.

Washington State Library Branches provide re-entry, educational, and recreational library services to people in adult correctional facilities as well as Eastern State Hospital and Western State Hospital.

Ask-WA enables residents to chat live with an information professional. Also available in Spanish, Ask-WA may be used as a tool for job-seeking, resume-building, continuing education, or to find resources and services particular to any user's needs.

The **Summer Reading** program saves public libraries thousands of hours in labor and makes quality materials, resources and programs affordable in every community. Expanding the opportunity for families to be engaged in literacy and enrichment activities all summer long helps prevent student summer setback, the loss of over two months of grade-level equivalency.

The statewide contract for **Downloadable Audiobooks** has slashed the cost of this very expensive material and made it possible for even the smallest and poorest library to begin offering this service, which was previously unaffordable to many.

The **Keepers of the Stories** listserv provides an online forum for tribal librarians to ask for help from their colleagues scattered throughout the state and establishes an essential community support for this otherwise isolated community.

Autism Awareness training and information for public library staff enhances services to children, teens and adults with autism and other disabilities.

The State Library supports **Early Learning** programs with projects and participation in the Early Learning Public Library Partnership.