



ARL Bimonthly Report 221

April 2002

Core Elements of ARL Library Staff Development Programs

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The ARL Research Library Leadership and Management Committee has been investigating the question of how to define successful staff development programs and how to identify best practices in this area. The committee solicited volunteers from among ARL member institutions to provide examples of best practices and to identify key characteristics of these programs that make them successful. The committee found that organization of a staff development program is greatly influenced by local factors. Some libraries have extensive support from campus offices for staff development, others have access to corporate training in partnership with their institutions, while still others must develop and design their programs using only library resources.

Because the local environment influences the type of structure for the program as well as the type of offerings, the committee concluded that there is not a comprehensive one-size-fits-all model for staff development that will work in every ARL library. Given this conclusion, the committee decided the most useful approach was to identify core elements that are present in successful programs and highlight some examples of best practices.

Core elements

1. **Coherent curriculum.** A coherent set of courses or training sessions is provided. The curriculum is tied to the management philosophy of the organization and/or core competencies. A series of one-shot, unrelated programs is not as effective as a coherent set of courses that are regularly available.
2. **Staff dedicated to program coordination.** Providing a coherent program takes continuous coordination. Full-time staff assigned to this area are crucial for developing a successful program. Trainers can come from all areas of the libraries, the campus, or outside agencies and organizations. The coordinator needs to have the authority and responsibility to ensure that the curriculum is delivered as needed to the staff.
3. **Target groups identified for training.** Not all staff need the same training. Effective

programs identify the staff or groups of staff that are appropriate for any particular course. In successful programs, individual participation in training may be mandated and is never viewed as a break from work, but rather as an opportunity to improve skills needed for the job.

4. **Program assessment and evaluation.** An effective program includes an assessment component to measure the impact of the training and to provide feedback to the coordinator on how to improve and advance the program.
5. **Resources.** Funding for the program can come from endowments, operating funds, etc., but resources must be designated for the program. Resource allocation also illustrates administrative commitment.
6. **Partnerships.** Successful programs have developed partnerships with others on campus or in the community to leverage resources. Partnerships leverage interorganizational effort and avoid "re-inventing the wheel" by building on the expertise of others.
7. **Commitment from the Dean.** Administrative support and commitment is important. Staff should understand that participation in training is expected and desired by the organization, that training is viewed as a permanent part of workplace success, and that it is an essential feature in organizational culture. Supervisors need to know that they are to encourage staff to participate. For any of this to happen, the coordinator of the program needs to have the full support of the administration in order to schedule courses and ensure that staff participate in any mandatory training.

Next Steps

The Research Library Leadership and Management Committee will work with 12 ARL member institutions (University of Alberta, Auburn University, Brown University, University of Florida, Library of Congress, University of Maryland, Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, New York Public Library, University of Tennessee, and University of Washington) to identify some of the best practices in staff development in ARL libraries. The committee proposes to share information about best practices via the ARL Web site at http://www.arl.org/olms/staffdev/key_components.html, with links to specific program information. The Web site is seen as a central resource to provide information to ARL members and to encourage members to share information about best practices at their institutions.

In today's environment, staff development and training programs are necessary to ensure that staff have the skills they need to adapt to the changing environment. And given tight budgets, as managers, we must be sure that we are getting the most value for our training dollars. Sharing best practices and expertise among our members is one way to help us develop more effective programs for our own institutions.

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Giesecke, Joan, and Charles B. Lowry. "Core Elements of ARL Library Staff Development Programs." *ARL*, no. 221 (April 2002): 9. <<http://www.arl.org/newsltr/221/staffdev.html>>.

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