

Library Worklife:

HR E-News for Today's Leaders

How the economy is affecting library recruiting

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A report from the 2009 ALA-APA Librarian Salary Survey

By Jenifer Grady

Each year, a set of timely questions are a feature of the *ALA-APA Salary Survey: Librarian—Public and Academic*. In 2009, the responding staff was asked about the direction and percentage of impact the economy has had on library recruiting. Of the 1,179 libraries (701 public and 478 academic) who responded to the salary survey overall, we thank the 507 (72.3 percent) public library and 356 (74.5 percent) academic library staff who took the time to answer at least one of the three questions. When this article refers to staff, it means the director or human resources staff member who responded to the survey and supplied salary data for librarians on behalf of the institution.

Has the current economic downturn affected your library's spending on recruitment?

It should be no surprise that the majority of libraries are reporting a decrease in spending on recruitment. Decreases were 1-3 percent for 209 public libraries and 124 academic libraries. Although the survey did not define the type of spending, this would include paying for advertising, travel expenses for interviews, moving expenses for candidates, booths and tables at conferences, attendance at local career fairs, technology, background investigations, and contracting with recruitment firms.

Surprisingly, some libraries are increasing spending. Eighty-eight (20.5 percent) or public libraries and 44 (14.6 percent) are spending one to more than ten percent more on recruiting. Due to anonymity, we cannot reveal which libraries are investing more in recruitment. Again, there are many factors that could lead to more spending.

	Public		Academic	
	% of Libraries	# of Libraries	% of Libraries	# of Libraries
Increased 1-3%	17.5%	75	11.3%	34
Increased 4-6%	1.2%	5	1.0%	3
Increased 7-10%	.9%	4	.7%	2
Increased more than 10%	.9%	4	1.7%	5
Decreased 1-3%	48.7%	209	41.2%	124
Decreased 4-6%	6.1%	26	9.3%	28
Decreased 7-10%	3.7%	16	6.3%	19
Decreased more than 10%	21.0%	90	28.6%	86
Total		429		301

Has the current economic downturn affected your library's recruitment efforts in any of the following ways?

The next question reveals that most spending and recruitment activity in both public and academic libraries are for filling existing positions. While more than 70 percent of both library types were seeking recruits for positions they had, a full 25 percent of recruitment effort was going to filling newly created positions. This counters a general sense across the profession that there are no new jobs or open jobs, although it also must be noted that only 55 percent of public and academic library staff (libraries) who responded to the *Salary Survey* answered this question. The magnitude of recruiting must be inferred and cannot be generalized.

	Public		Academic	
	% of	# of	% of	# of

	Libraries	Libraries	Libraries	Libraries
Recruiting for vacant existing positions	70.7%	273	74.8%	196
Recruiting for newly created positions	25.4%	98	25.2%	66
Recruiting in all departments	25.6%	99	25.2%	66
Recruiting in some departments, but not all departments	21.2%	82	17.9%	47
Total		386		262

Has the current economic downturn affected your library's spending on professional development for staff?

Investing in staff to increase their skill sets might be a useful strategy during difficult times, when many libraries are offering the same or more services with fewer staff. Yet, there is generally a cost involved unless libraries have access to skilled staff and trainers, and free resources in the city or on campus. Eight-five percent of academic and 72.4 percent of public libraries are reducing professional development spending. It may be encouraging to note that 140 (27.6 percent) public and 55 (15.4 percent) academic are increasing professional development dollars by at least one to more than ten percent.

The survey cannot illuminate whether these increases or decreases were planned or unplanned.

Has the current economic downturn affected your library's spending on professional development for staff?				
	Public		Academic	
	% of Libraries	# of Libraries	% of Libraries	# of Libraries
Increased 1-3%	20.9%	106	10.4%	37
Increased 4-6%	3.7%	19	3.7%	13
Increased 7-10%	1.2%	6	.0%	0
Increased more than 10%	1.8%	9	1.4%	5
Decreased 1-3%	28.4%	144	33.4%	119
Decreased 4-6%	12.2%	62	9.6%	34
Decreased 7-10%	8.3%	42	7.6%	27
Decreased more than 10%	23.5%	119	34.0%	121
Total		507		356

Libraries are recruiting, though they are spending less to attract candidates. And libraries are spending less on the internally beneficial professional development. The short-term impact of these decisions to invest or divest in staff are immediately felt. The longer-term (long-term is probably being reinterpreted as one year or three years, rather than five or ten) implications of morale changes, turnover, skills gaps or atrophy and quality of hires are not within the purview of this national survey, but should be monitored by individual libraries.

Ten Interview Questions

Looking to identify change agents and innovators during a job interview? Ten questions, compiled by Michele Martin (of The Bamboo Project) and Meredith Levinson (of CIO.com) may help you focus your own attempts to attract—and hire—effective leaders.

How would you answer these ten questions?

1. What do you do to build, manage and maintain your network?
2. If I Google you, what will I find?
3. What do you do to stay focused?
4. What do you do to stay relevant?
5. What innovative solutions have you created?
6. Walk (me) through a time when you administered change.
7. What important problems or questions do you see facing our industry? Your occupation?
8. What do you do to expose yourself to new ideas and new thinking on a regular basis?
9. What big mistake have you made recently and what did you learn from it?
10. What matters to you? What are you passionate about? What gets you up in the morning or keeps you awake at night?

We would love to have your feedback on this article(s)!

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