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Southeastern Institute for Collaborative Library Leadership

by Cal Shepard

SOLINET conducted a two-year project to plan, develop, present, and evaluate two leadership institutes for staff working in library multi-type and consortial environments. The Institutes were conducted in February 2000 and May 2001. Thirty library staff members from ten southeastern states and the Caribbean ... attended each weeklong program.

The goal of both Institutes was to develop and enhance leadership among library staff engaged in consortial or collaborative activities, teaching them skills they need to lead their organizations into the future. Specific learning outcomes were:

- To prepare participants to facilitate collaboration, partnerships, and networking
- To heighten awareness of the potential and benefits of cooperation, enabling participants to extend the reach of consortial activities to non-traditional partners, underserved populations, and rural libraries
- To foster creative problem-solving and collaborative decision-making
- To stimulate enthusiasm for collaboration on and coordination of the provision of information services in a constantly changing, often tumultuous environment

The project was a collaborative effort involving several agencies: the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), the Institute of Museum and Library Services, SOLINET, and each of the ten Southeastern state libraries (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.) CLIR provided \$15,000 in funding; the Institute of Museum and Library Services provided \$152,034 to support the project. Staff development expertise from the ten participating state libraries substantially enhanced the planning, development, presentation, and evaluation of the Institutes.

A Planning Committee comprised of representatives from each of the ten Southeastern states, the Council on Library and Information Resources, SOLINET and the Project Consultant, carried out the design phase of this project, laying the groundwork for its overall success. A two-day planning meeting focused on two goals:

- The development of an agenda specifically crafted to balance both theoretical and “real world” applications of leadership, management and personal development
- The development of an application and selection process that required potential participants to assess their own views of leadership, collaboration, and the library's role in the future

A wide range of distinguished, accomplished, and dedicated instructors, presenters, and speakers from across the country contributed to the success of what several participants noted as “the best and most effective Institute I have ever participated in.” Aspects that were pivotal to the Institute's success were:

- The planned events—welcome reception, participant introductions, organizational

profile presentations—that allowed the participants to become familiar with each other and each other's institutions. This set the highly collegial tone of each Institute for the remainder of the week.

- The intensity, both intellectual and emotional, of the experience for the participants, who spent five days removed from their work environment, living in the same hotel, sitting in the same training room, focusing on similar issues and sharing different perspectives.
- The use of “learning partners” and allotted time for unstructured networking among the participants.
- The motivation, enthusiasm and dedication of the Institute participants.
- The expertise, skill and genuine commitment of the lead trainer and Project Consultant, Maureen Sullivan.

The curriculum of the Institute focused particularly on the leadership skills necessary to be effective in a collaborative environment. Part of the weeklong training was devoted to traditional leadership training such as what makes a leader, different leadership styles, leadership vs. management, and individual leadership development. Elements specific to leading in collaborative and cooperative activities included:

- Collaboration (what it is, what it takes, implications, and trends)
- Strategies for fostering collaboration
- Practice in working together (learning about group dynamics, problem solving in groups, different methods for decision making and getting to consensus, facilitating group work, conducting effective meetings, facilitation tools and techniques, communicating in groups, and how to deal with problems including problem behavior)
- Improving personal effectiveness (influencing others, using the negotiation process and skills necessary for negotiation, making a commitment to change)
- Learning about building trust and risk-taking / experimentation The Institutes were conducted in a highly participatory style. Throughout the five days of each Institute participants were given time to discuss the concepts being introduced and to practice applying the new skills they were learning. During the Institute attendees identified a project to be carried out in their own institutions after the training was concluded. All of these projects were of a collaborative nature and several had a multi-state focus. Sample projects included:
 - To develop a plan to approach the local Museum of Art about joining a cooperative and eventually making their holdings available to any citizen of the county via the cooperative's online catalog.
 - To work with two other Institute participants on a project to re-activate and formally organize the Southern DRA Users Group and to provide regional training in planning for DRA users to migrate to Taos.
 - To work with two other Institute participants to develop a Web-based statewide training calendar to allow all to see and communicate about training activities and opportunities for librarians throughout the state.
 - To work with a number of people (including five other participants) to investigate the possibility of a shared information literacy tutorial.

The impact of the Institute on the participants' personal effectiveness was significant. “I am more willing to take risks,” commented one participant. Another participant reported that he started thinking in bigger picture terms: “I have a broadened personal scope of possibilities.” Yet another participant reported that he has changed

the way he communicates: “I am a more aggressive communicator.” One participant learned to “pick my battles.” Numerous participants stated that they feel (and act) more like leaders now and most are trying to share their expertise by looking to mentor others. One stated, “I realize I can be a mentor even though I've only been in the profession for three years!” Another added, “I realize that leadership is not what you do, but what you inspire others to do.”

The Institute also positively impacted the participants' environments. For example, one participant re-directed her budget to allow her to create a new position and hire someone to fill it. Another changed the identity of her consortium allowing public libraries to join for the first time ever. One participant initiated statewide planning with two other Institute participants from the same state and they have begun strategic planning for their statewide effort. An attention-getting anniversary celebration for one statewide database access project grew directly out of the original Institute. One participant confessed that her elected position as president of an organization was largely a figurehead until she attended the Institute. She is now using that position to make a real impact.

Clearly the Southeastern Institute for Collaborative Library Leadership has had a great impact on both the attendees and their institutions. More information about the Institute can be found by calling Cal Shepard at 1-800-999-8558.

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