

You are at: [ALA.org](#) » [ASCLA](#) » [Volume 24, Number 1, 2002](#)

Volume 24, Number 1, 2002

Library Leadership in the Twenty-first Century: Five Cooperative Leaders Speak

by Karen Brown

Library cooperatives and systems are well positioned to take a leadership role in the 21st Century, according to five directors who discussed the potential of that role in an ASCLA/ICAN panel presentation, *Leading Library Cooperation in the 21st Century*, at ALA's 2001 Annual Conference. The directors provided insights into how library cooperatives might define leadership, how it can be fostered, and what it looks like when transformed into services and programs. Panel members included Linda Crowe, Executive Director of the Bay Area Library and Information System (BALIS), the Peninsula Library System (PLS), and the Silicon Valley Library System (SVLS) in the San Francisco Bay Area; Dottie Hiebing, Executive Director of the Metropolitan New York Library Council (METRO); Karen Hyman, Executive Director of the South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative (SJRLC); Sarah Long, Director of the North Suburban Library System (NSLS) in Illinois; and Tom Sloan, Executive Director of the Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN).

All of the panelists emphasized that leadership at its best is not represented by one person and does not arise out of or function in a vacuum. It emerges from the creation and promotion of a shared vision. Within an organization, for example, the entire staff needs to feel that it is contributing in a meaningful way to a shared sense of direction. At NSLS, the staff embarked on a successful journey to transform the organization into a learning organization, one that embraces change as an opportunity for growth and recognizes the interrelatedness of each staff member's contributions. SJRLC also acknowledged its shared vision at a fifteen-anniversary celebration. As Karen Hyman explained, "We took the time to reflect on our achievements with member librarians, State Library staff, key figures from our past, and several state legislators! Seeing the mix of people tells me how far we've come."

Effective leadership also requires continuous scanning of the external environment in which cooperatives and libraries operate to identify influential trends. Collaborative initiatives that respond to these trends can result in powerful partnerships. Linda Crowe (BALIS, PLS, and SVLS) discussed the leadership role that has emerged for the Golden Gateway Library Network, a collaboration of over 400 libraries that incorporates the award-winning Q and A Cafe's interactive digital reference service, an e-book consortium, training, and resource sharing. Tom Sloan (SEFLIN) also noted the importance of collaborative efforts that take into account the social, political, economic, and cultural context in which libraries function, "The new ways that people find and use information require libraries to cooperate and change in order to meet the needs of their

communities.” He described SEFLIN's role in initiating an international summit of library cooperation that will bring together librarians from Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States in April 2002.

To foster these types of innovative initiatives, library cooperatives need to take a proactive stance. Key words that emerged throughout the discussion included: risk, action, movement, learning, change, and vision. As Karen Hyman explained, “You need to acknowledge the challenges and have a willingness and desire to take calculated risks.” Dottie Hiebing (METRO) emphasized the importance of focusing on the “big picture” while providing tangible programs and services that respond directly to the needs of the member libraries. METRO, for example, is developing a web-based portal infrastructure for members that supports online communication, collaboration, learning, and business transactions.

Learning also played a central role in these leadership efforts and reinforced the notion that change and learning often go hand in hand. Each of the five library cooperatives has an innovative and extensive continuing education program for its member libraries. The directors noted that a commitment to keeping libraries vital and viable is increasingly a commitment to the value of continuous learning.

Positioning for a leadership role may require re-thinking and re-configuring the traditional structures and functions of library cooperatives. In recent years, Florida has developed an entrepreneurial, member-driven structure for its library cooperatives. This approach encouraged SEFLIN to examine the rapidly changing information environment and to look for opportunities to create responsive information resources. MyLibraryService.org, a library portal that utilizes new technology to search the resources of the member libraries and the Web at the same time, is one outcome of this endeavor. NSLS initiated NorthStarNet, a community information network that encourages libraries to forge new types of partnerships with government agencies and community organizations. These projects, and the other initiatives highlighted by the panelists, moved the cooperatives and their member libraries into uncharted waters and prompted the search for new ways of operating and working with stakeholders in the information environment. The new structures and patterns that emerged have resulted in more responsive and effective services and programs.

For more information about the panelists' cooperatives, visit their Web sites:

- [Bay Area Library and Information System](#)
- [Metropolitan New York Library Council](#)
- [North Suburban Library System](#)
- [Peninsula Library System](#)
- [Silicon Valley Library System](#)
- [South Jersey Regional Library Cooperative](#)
- [Southeast Florida Library Information Network](#)

Karen Brown, Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Dominican University, served as moderator for the ASCLA/ICAN program.

[Copyright Statement](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Site Help](#) | [Site Index](#)

© 1996–2017 American Library Association

ALAAmericanLibraryAssociation

50 E Huron St., Chicago IL 60611 | 1.800.545.2433