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Bringing Synergy to Leadership

by Patricia Norris

Why do we care about leadership? Because we have to. Anyone who cares about our nation's libraries and about our profession has to be concerned about the future of both. With the number of pending retirements and the shrinking number of recruits to the profession, the future viability and growth of the profession will be determined by the leadership being encouraged, developed, and nurtured right now.

The Illinois library community has been blessed with great leadership throughout the state's history of offering quality library service to its citizens. Leadership has been strong within the Illinois library network, as well as in advocating and effecting positive change on the national library leadership level. Currently Illinois can boast that three Presidents of the American Library Association (one past President, the Immediate Past President, and the current President) are active Illinois librarians, and fortunately for our state, are actively working within the library community guiding, inspiring, and challenging our librarians to take on leadership roles. The library community is additionally blessed by having a librarian serving in the Cabinet of the current Governor. That's leadership!

For the past two years, the Illinois State Library has partnered with the Illinois Library Association in charting a course of action to identify, recruit, and develop future Illinois library leaders. A group of twenty-five librarians from all across the state have been working with the state association and with the State Library to design an aggressive and comprehensive approach to library leadership development. Planning committee members are all strong library leaders in their own right, having served in leadership positions within the state and on national levels as well, and are representative of every type of library within our strong multi-type state.

The first formal leadership event will be rolled out in late March 2002. Synergy: The Illinois Library Leadership Initiative is the statewide library community's proactive movement to recruit and nurture future Illinois library leaders. A maximum of 30 MLS degreed librarians will be selected to participate in a year-long process focusing on self-assessment; discovering and developing personal values; identifying the local, state, and global environment; fostering and expanding skills and tools for personal, professional, and positional leadership; creating a cohort group; establishing mentoring relationships; and developing a vision of the future of Illinois librarianship. The selected cohort will attend three two-and-half-day sessions throughout the year, traveling to three distinctly different areas in Illinois. In addition, they will work through a variety of between-session activities.

While development continues on Synergy by the State Library, the Illinois Library Association, and the planning team, everyone seems to agree that it will be important to

honor our rich Illinois leadership history, to identify current values, and to use the expertise of the wealth of library leadership currently residing in our state as we work with participants at Synergy. Although it would be foolish not to employ some of the “best practices” of other states’ leadership activities, an Illinois specific stamp will be put on this program, and as the word synergy implies, we will be working together, cooperating, and enabling interaction among groups that creates an enhanced combined effect. SYNERGY!

For more information, contact Patricia Norris, Associate Director, Library Development Group, Illinois State Library at (217) 524-5867 or email [Patricia Norris](#).

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50 E Huron St., Chicago IL 60611 | 1.800.545.2433