ALA/SSIRT
TASK FORCE ON ACCESS TO
CONTINUING EDUCATION & TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

FINAL REPORT
MARCH, 2000

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Final Report
Submitted by Holly Blosser

CHARGE

The charge of the Task Force on Access to Continuing Education and Training Opportunities was to determine how the SSIRT Executive Board could address this issue and determine the most effective solutions that could be implemented. The Executive Board of the Support Staff Interests Round Table asked that the Task Force develop a *Statement of Needs*, develop an *Action Plan of Implementable Solutions* to meet those needs, and a *Timetable for Implementation* of the solutions identified by the Task Force.

BACKGROUND

The issue of Access to Continuing Education and Training Opportunities was ranked number three by library support staff in a survey which was send out in 1997 by the SSIRT Strategic Planning Process Committee.

The issue of Continuing Education includes, but is not limited to, basic training programs, education, career development, classification, job duties, and responsibilities.

Included, as background information is Attachment A, an issue paper on Continuing Education for Support Staff, which was the result from a World Book-ALA Goal Award Project on Library Support Staff in 1990.

COMPOSITION

The Task Force on Access to Continuing Education and Training Opportunities was composed of seven individuals, including a liaison from the SSIRT Executive Board. The Chair of the task force was recommended by the Chair of the Strategic Planning Process Committee, with final approval by the SSIRT Executive Board. The Chair of the Task Force appointed one member, and the SSIRT Executive Board appointed the remaining members.

SCHEDULE

The Task Force on Access to Continuing Education and Training Opportunities will deliver the following reports to the SSIRT Executive Board:

➢ A written interim report at the membership meeting of SSIRT at the 1999 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, LA (June, 1999).
➢ A written progress report at the business meeting of SSIRT at the 2000 ALA Midwinter Conference in San Antonio, TX (January 2000).
➢ A written final report at the membership meeting of SSIRT at the 2000 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago, IL (June 2000).

PROCESS

The Task Force decided, given the variety of locations and times that members were available, that most of the work would be conducted through e-mail and fax. We spent the first few weeks in December 1998 and January 1999 getting to know each other and setting up ground rules for the work we would be doing. We came up with some starting points and divided the work amongst the group.

The starting point for our research began with e-mail postings to various library-related discussion groups. Mail was sent to LIBSUP-L, a discussion group for library support staff. The messages asked three questions: 1) What are your continuing education needs as library support staff? 2) What kinds of training opportunities would you like to have? 3) What needs to happen for you to be able to attend continuing education activities? We also invited any other input that people might have. These same questions were also asked in articles that were published in various library-related journals (Associates, Library Mosaics, the Washington Association of Library Employees newsletter, School Library Journal.) These responses gave us many leads on what areas staff want and need training in, as well as what some of the existing barriers to continuing education are.

Using the information collected from the discussion groups, we created a survey for support staff. A copy of the survey is included as Attachment B. We received nearly 300 responses to this survey. It was handed out at the 1999 Washington Association of Library Employees conference, the 1999 Fort Vancouver Regional Library All Staff Day, and various other regional activities around the country during Fall 1999.

A literature search was also conducted to see what had been published on this topic. A few good suggestions were found in these sources and incorporated into this report.

Based on the information gathered, the Task Force has assembled this final report.

SUMMARY

As was stated in the final report from the Career Ladders Task Force, the issues of access to continuing education and training opportunities, career ladders, and compensation not appropriate to level of education are all interdependent. It is very difficult for support staff to talk about one without discussing issues dealing with one of the others.

Overwhelmingly, the technological changes and advancements in today's libraries are of the highest concern to support staff. Although there has been rapid deployment of electronic databases, the Internet, and other resources, there has not been nearly enough training for the staff who use these resources. Every person who returned our survey rated training in new technologies, Internet, or other computer skills as one (or all) of their top three choices. Related to that, staff need to have adequate time to practice and learn these new technologies, before they are available to patrons who will want their assistance with them (Jones, 1999, p.720).

In the past, professional staff have been given priority when training has been offered. Because support staff are now doing some of the work that used to be done solely by librarians, staff at all levels need to be given the same training, even if the training will be put to different uses (Wilson & Hermanson, 1998, p.491). Funding is critical to the success of any staff training program, and support staff need to be given the same opportunities to succeed in their jobs as professionals are given (Payne, 1999, p.12).

Certification is also an issue that is related to continuing education and training for support staff. It is currently being discussed at many different levels—local, state, national, voluntary and involuntary. As more and more support staff begin to ask for certification programs, everyone in the library community needs to become involved and supportive of this issue, so that it will strengthen and benefit the community as a whole (Wilson & Hermanson, 1998, p.491). The American Bar Association has a very successful education program for legal assistants. The Standing Committee on Legal Assistants (SCOLA) has developed standards for accreditation of formal educational programs for legal assistants (Stein, 1998, p.101). The legal assistant profession is also debating the issue of certification and whether it should be mandatory. When students graduate from an ABA-approved school, they receive a "certificate." In addition to this certificate, the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) has offered certification through its Certified Legal Assistant (CLA) examination since 1976; it has become a well-accepted standard of paralegal competency. Another exam, the Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam (PACE), was instituted by the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA) in 1996 (Gladwell, 1997, p.61). Although legal assistants have regulatory situations that do not cross over to the library profession, the library support staff profession could benefit from looking into a program of certification with a similar format.

STATEMENT OF NEEDS

➢ Library administrators need to be supportive of and willing to give support staff the continuing education and training they need to succeed on the job.

➢ Support staff need opportunities to attend continuing education and training functions as part of the job.

➢ Libraries need to set aside funding for support staff to attend events.

➢ Libraries should also provide reimbursement for tuition related to continuing education.

➢ ALA/SSIRT should provide more scholarships and grants for support staff to attend activities in addition to the annual conferences.

➢ Staff need an avenue for notification of these activities far enough in advance to make arrangements to attend.

➢ Continuing education and training programs need to be held in rural areas or be available through teleconferences, videos, or online so that staff in rural areas, or staff that cannot attend for any reason, have access.

➢ There should be standard core competencies for all levels of support staff.

➢ Support staff should have a certification program available.

➢ Salary increases should be tied to completed continuing education/training programs. Merit increases should also be available for staff that have taken related independent education (Internet classes, research workshops, etc.)

➢ More training is needed for new technologies that support staff are expected to be able to use, such as training for databases, the Internet, and other advanced computer software programs. More training is also needed in basic troubleshooting for the hardware used in these new technologies—computers and printers, for example.

➢ Training in providing better customer service is also a high priority for support staff.

ACTION PLAN

Without the cooperation of regional, state, and local organizations, many of these needs cannot be met. ALA/SSIRT needs to make an active effort to involve organizations to take an active role in providing continuing education and training to library support staff.

Goals for 2000-2001

- ❑ Form a committee to discuss the feasibility of a certification program. If it cannot be accomplished on a national level, discuss other local options, such as at the state level.
- ❑ Educate state and regional associations, as well as individual libraries, on the value of continuing education and training for support staff. Encourage associations to provide continuing education programs. Encourage library administrators (possibly through a cooperative effort with LAMA) to give staff the opportunity to attend training and to provide funding for it as well.
- ❑ Create a network of groups and individuals that are available to provide continuing education and training to staff on specific topics.
- ❑ Encourage more teleconferences, video seminars, and online activities so that staff in rural libraries, and those who do not have access for whatever reason, can learn and benefit from training.
- ❑ Re-evaluate core competencies for all levels of support staff, including competencies for staff in specific fields, such as cataloging or interlibrary loan. Ascertain that the core competencies are realistic and accurate.

Goals for 2001-2002

- ❑ Sponsor free or low-cost training activities designed for support staff. These should be held outside of annual conferences.
- ❑ Provide financial assistance for support staff to attend continuing education and training events. These could be scholarships or grants for undergraduate courses in library science or a related topic or for a one-time only event. These scholarships and grants should be for any activities, whether sponsored by ALA/SSIRT or not.
- ❑ Establish a network for the dissemination of information about available training for support staff. This could be an e-mail discussion group, a web site, a newsletter (or all of these modes), as long as it would effectively get this information out to support staff in a timely fashion. When notices have to trickle down through various administrative levels, the information is often not received in time. Therefore, this also entails educating library administrators of the importance of getting this information to staff in a reasonable amount of time.

CONCLUSION

In completing this report, we hope that we have given the SSIRT Executive Board of ALA constructive information and suggestions on providing solutions to this problem. We anticipate that SSIRT will continue to examine this issue and implement some of the proposals offered.

Thank you to the members of the task force for their valuable input and work on this project.

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