

LSTA Project Evaluation: Multnomah County Library
Project Name: D.I.Y. Intern Program – Toolkit for Success
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Summary of Evaluation

Multnomah County Library's "D.I.Y. Intern Program – Toolkit for Success" is a project designed to help develop a consistent internship program at Multnomah County Library (MCL) and other public libraries.

With Emporia State University's Portland-based library school, University of Washington's Information School MLIS program, and other online library science programs attracting students throughout the Portland Metro area, MCL found that students were approaching the Library for internships and practicums but were not being handled in a consistent manner. This led to the library "stuggl[ing] to find the time and resources needed to develop and implement a consistent internship or practicum program for college students," as noted in MCL's grant application. Discussions with volunteer coordinators at Portland-metro area libraries found that many libraries also find it difficult to support library students' internship needs, especially during times of budget stagnation and reduction.

What was discovered in the discussions with volunteer coordinators, library administrators, and library school staff was that libraries are handling interns on a one-by-one basis as the student approaches the library. The students are generally given a set of parameters of what the internship experience could entail from their academic base, and some library schools had made arrangements with libraries to rotate their students through a standing internship program.

From the library perspective, students were approaching the library for internships with a desire to have experiences in a variety of areas, and the libraries scrambled to assemble a set of experiences. At Multnomah County Library, there was no identified starting point for interns, so the students tended to have their experiences based at whichever branch or department they had made their inquiries. There was no tracking of how many students were serving as interns; at any given time, there were likely four or five interns in the library system.

In discussions with volunteer coordinators from other large nonprofit organizations, a different model of recruiting interns for specific tasks and roles came to light. Defining the tasks and experiences of the internship in advance and recruiting for interns puts the organization in a proactive, rather than reactive, stance. This allows the Library to offer a consistent experience, to better access the talent of library school students to the benefit of the Library and its patrons, and to

track the progress and the number of interns currently serving the Library. It also minimizes the amount of time that staff expends on developing, training, and evaluating unique internship experiences.

The D.I.Y. Intern Program Toolkit is designed to help libraries and library systems find a sustainable and consistent method of managing, supporting, training, utilizing and evaluating student interns.

Project Objectives:

The main objectives of the program are to create a comprehensive and consistent internship program for Multnomah County Library that could be shared with and implemented by other libraries, to design at least five interactive online training modules for interns on topics of relevance to public libraries, to create materials for 30 Toolkits, and to share the Toolkit and implementation tips with other Oregon Libraries via NW Central, other online continuing education resources, or other venues.

Project Method:

Information was gathered from volunteer coordinators and administrators of area libraries about the process by which interns are currently managed in their institutions. Additionally, leaders at library science schools including Emporia State University, University of Washington's Information School, and San Jose State School of Library & Information Science were interviewed about their internship and practicum processes and experiences.

A project consultant was recruited and hired to write the Toolkit. Erin Barnhart, who has experience in volunteer engagement, was selected. Erin's background is in volunteer management and she has experience in developing trainings and resources for volunteers and volunteer resource managers with organizations across the world.

A survey was conducted of Multnomah County Library staff and staff from other Oregon libraries about their work with interns. The responses helped shape the Toolkit, which was developed to provide a step-by-step guide to creating a proactive internship program. The Toolkit was also reviewed by MCL's Human Resources Action Team and by MCL's Executive Management Team.

Project Results:

The Toolkit was developed with a focus on communicating with library administrators and other staff about the value of recruiting volunteers for defined roles and tasks. Chapters of the Toolkit define internships and clarify the roles of interns compared to volunteers, provide a step-by-step guide to the internal study a

library needs to undertake when considering its ability to support interns, advise on methods of recruiting and screening interns, offer training checklists and evaluation methods. The Toolkit does not assume prior experience with interns, and is thus equally helpful to libraries that are beginning an internship program for the first time and to libraries that are revamping their internship offerings.

Five training tutorials for interns were created as part of the toolkit: Customer Service, Intellectual Freedom, Project Management, Reference: Real World Interviews, and Youth Services. There are guidelines to customizing the trainings to fit the particular circumstances of individual libraries.

Project Impact:

At this time, the Toolkit is awaiting implementation at Multnomah County Library as they undergo staffing and scheduling changes. Workshops based on the Toolkit are planned for future Oregon Library Association conferences, as well as a planned online presence on OCLC's WebJunction and its own website. Workshops at additional library and non-profit organization conferences, including the American Library Association conference, are also a possibility.

Suggestions for improvement:

The Toolkit has not been made available through an online presence yet. A discussion area that allowed libraries to share and compare their internship experiences, while keeping the students' anonymity intact, would likely prove beneficial to the library community. It would also allow feedback and input from academic partners; again, this is not expected to be a place to discuss individual students, but to continue to enhance the internship experience for libraries and library schools.

Conclusion:

The DIY Internship Toolkit changes the order in which most libraries have been handling internships. Rather than reacting to a student's internship request and scrambling to assemble a suitable library experience, the Toolkit advises planning the internship activities in terms of institutional needs and then recruiting for students to fill defined internship roles. This benefits not just the library by better use of both student talent and of staff administration time, but offers the library school students more consistent and ultimately more engaging practical experience. Training, managing, and evaluating the interns becomes a more consistent and sustainable process. Utilizing this Toolkit would benefit libraries of any size, especially when staff time must be used judiciously.