

Chapter 17

Free or Externally Funded Professional Development for Frugal Librarians

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ABSTRACT

Librarians need professional development opportunities even during difficult economic times with limited library budgets. Fortunately, creative and frugal librarians are finding external funding for professional development, and benefiting from free or low-cost professional development tools and opportunities. Many of these frugal solutions are online. Social media, bookmarking services, e-learning platforms like WebJunction and Lyrasis, listservs, and webinars are all explored as such online solutions. Conference scholarships, interdepartmental cooperation, and community partnerships are also ways to provide free or externally funded professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Professional development means investing in the people who work in our libraries. It means believing in the people who work for you and with you enough to spend the resources to enable them to learn new skills and update the skills they already have. Professional development means that you do not stop learning once you have been hired and have accepted a job. There is no question as to the importance of professional development. However, with the economy and library budgets the way they are, library managers and human resources professionals increasingly seek external funding sources to help make it possible. As the

Beatles' song says, "I get by with a little help from my friends." The objectives of this chapter are to explore how librarians can overcome budget limitations to reap the benefits of professional development with help from friendly external funders and free online resources.

BACKGROUND

A review of the literature on this topic demonstrates that professional development commonly falls into two categories: conference attendance and online training. First, I looked at the literature on conference attendance for librarians. Rachel

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Harrison (2010) describes a survey of librarians which “found ‘professional rejuvenation’ and ‘networking’ as the top two reasons given for attending a conference” (p. 264). Additional benefits of conference identified by Harrison (2010) include “the unique value-added experience of asking questions and engaging in discussion with peers about current trends” as well as “the opportunity to discover and view demonstrations of new products and resources” (p. 265). Conferences are the most obvious example of face-to-face training. In her article, “Online Workplace Training in Libraries,” Haley (2008) discusses the pros and cons of conference attendance and other face-to-face opportunities versus online training. Haley published the results of research and surveys she conducted: “library staff preferred traditional face-to-face-training as opposed to online training...on the other hand, the majority (80 percent) preferred online training when the training was held out of state” (p. 37). My literature review indicates that librarians are using both conferences and online tools to develop themselves professionally, and the online tools continue to expand and be the trend.

Online sources of professional development include blogs social media, listservs, webinars/virtual conferences/webcasts, and online e-learning online resources, particularly WebJunction. Melissa Laning, Catherine Lavalley-Welch, and Margo Smith (2005) define “blog” and describe how creative and resourceful librarians can use them along with reviews of some blogs of particular interest to librarians. Anne Marie Gruber (2007) states that, “monitoring blogs is a great way to stay up-to-date on happenings and trends in the library world. For the uninitiated, *blog* is short for *Weblog*, and is similar to an online diary or journal—professional, personal, or a combination of the two” (p. 97). The idea of using social media as a source of frugal professional development is often repeated in the literature I reviewed, especially in Kevin Stranack’s (2012) article, “The Connected Librarian: Using Social Media for ‘Do It Yourself’

Professional Development,” in which he writes, “Emerging technologies have opened an entirely new set of professional development options, often at little or no cost to your organization. Blogs, wikis, Twitter, LinkedIn, forums, open access journals, open courses, webinars, and a wide variety of social media tools” are available to librarians. Gruber (2007) writes about the benefits of e-mail listservs: “in addition to traditional publications, keeping up with professional e-mail listservs is an easy way to connect in the profession” (p. 96). Marilyn Gell Mason (2009) presents WebJunction as an e-learning system: “WebJunction” (WJ) is a Web-based service that provides online learning and community support for library staff. Using Web 2.0 technologies, WJ enables library staff, libraries, and organizations to form communities, implement learning programs, and share content on topics of specific interest to the library community” (p. 701). I can say from personal experience what a powerful tool WebJunction is, and I do recommend it. For example, one of the courses my staff and I looked at on WebJunction is about “Keeping Your Library Looking Good.” This course offered some practical ideas and advice, such as placing a trash can outside the restroom door. Some people have the habit of using a paper towel to avoid touching the door handle or door knob when exiting the restroom, and that gives these people a place to throw away their paper towels. I also found many of the written comments left by librarians who had previously taken the course to be helpful.

The concept of a “Personal Learning Network,” or PLN, also appears consistently in the literature on this topic. In his article, “The Connected Librarian: Using Social Media for ‘Do It Yourself’ Professional Development,” Stranack (2012) defines a PLN as “your very own online community of practice: a group of people from anywhere in the world that you choose to connect with, interact with, and learn from” (p. 1). Stranack seems to make the assumption that the people in a PLN are

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