

Chapter 51

Shifting to a Needs-Based Continuing Education Model

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ABSTRACT

This chapter details how the South Central Kansas Library System (SCKLS) moved from a traditional continuing education model toward a needs-based model. The needs assessment process is detailed, as well as the process for implementing and managing this major change in professional development delivery. Analysis and assessment of the change in model will be presented. Practicalities and future directions will be discussed in order to provide direction to other interested institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The recession hit south central Kansas in late 2008. Property tax estimations were bleak. Public, school, academic and regional libraries in Kansas are almost exclusively funded from property taxes. In 2009, attendance at South Central Kansas Library System (SCKLS) library continuing education events dropped noticeably. SCKLS members reported having reduced travel and training budgets. In order to address reductions in its own funding and in its members continuing education budgets, SCKLS set about transforming its continuing education program

from a traditional model to a needs-based model. Needs-based continuing education better met its members' training needs and better accommodated their reduced budgets. This chapter will show how this transition was managed and illustrate how it might be managed at another institution.

BACKGROUND

The South Central Kansas Library System is a regional system of cooperating libraries serving and governed by local libraries in the South Central part of Kansas. The mission of SCKLS is to assist member libraries to provide excellent service to their communities. SCKLS provides grants, con-

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sulting, continuing education and cost-effective support services to its member libraries. SCKLS serves twelve counties and has a service population of approximately 762,058. There are 147 members participating and eligible for system services and programs. Among these are 73 public libraries, 55 school districts, 14 academic libraries and 5 special libraries. Membership and participation are voluntary, and each member library retains its local self-government and independence. SCKLS is funded by a tax on property within the boundaries of the system in areas that are not taxed for the support of a public library. For more information, visit www.sckls.info.

SCKLS member libraries are autonomous institutions. SCKLS as a regional library serves its member libraries and not their constituents. As such, SCKLS trainings are designed for librarians, library support staff, library trustees and friends of the library groups. Continuing education programs are not for the general public. Moreover, SCKLS trainings are elective and are not tied to any grant programs.

In the recent past the SCKLS continuing education program often offered three keynote presentations, often with nationally recognized library leaders and practitioners who were chosen by SCKLS staff. Attendance was healthy (estimate of 70-80 at each event) and there were few issues related to travel, outside of weather concerns. These keynotes were held at facilities that also had rental costs associated with them. Besides the three keynote presentations, SCKLS offered workshops throughout the year on a variety of library related topics including technology, youth services, library finance and library governance. Many of the trainings were coordinated by the SCKLS staff based on their perception of member library needs. This was a traditional approach to library training, at least in regard to library cooperatives or library systems like SCKLS.

Many of the SCKLS events were held at the system headquarters in South Hutchinson, KS. The system offices were fully renovated, resulting in

good training spaces which included videoconferencing capabilities and a computer lab. This location, however, is not the geographical center of the SCKLS service area, which makes travel and attendance more difficult for some SCKLS members.

Issues, Controversies and Problems

By the end of 2008 it became apparent that changes needed to take place in the SCKLS continuing education plan. In part, the changes needed to occur because the national economic recession had reached south central Kansas. Libraries, including those served by SCKLS, were anticipating decreased property tax revenues. This meant decreased library budgets for continuing education. The decrease in property taxes also meant that SCKLS would have less money to spend in its continuing education budget.

In 2009, attendance at SCKLS continuing education events dropped noticeably from 2008 numbers. Discussions with SCKLS members revealed that many libraries had reduced or eliminated continuing education and travel budgets. School librarians in particular reported travel restrictions. Many school libraries were unable to travel, or were only allowed to travel if they could fund their substitute's cost. Some libraries had to reduce their numbers of staff due to the recession. This reduction in staff meant that there were fewer staff to cover public services while other staff were away at trainings.

Basis for the Solution

I, as SCKLS Member Library Services Coordinator, in conjunction with SCKLS Director Paul Hawkins, proposed a shift in the SCKS continuing education plan. SCKLS utilized surveys of members to determine what their library's greatest training needs were, how much lead time they needed between workshop announcements and the event, what the strengths of SCKLS trainings

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