

Chapter 60

Leveling the Professional Development Playing Field: Opportunities and Challenges in Providing Knowledge, Skill Building and Targeted Programming for Tribal College Librarians and Other Underserved Library Professionals

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ABSTRACT

Tribal college librarians comprise a unique group of library professionals who typically serve in a dual role as both academic librarians and public librarians. Most tribal college libraries are the only library in their respective tribal community, and thus they serve the information needs of both their academic clientele and those of the general public. Additionally, their location in tribal communities necessitates that these library professionals have a deep cultural understanding and appreciation in order to work effectively with their largely Native clientele, whether they themselves are Native or not. This chapter describes the unique professional development needs of tribal college librarians and successful efforts to meet these needs. Advice on grant writing, tips and information on grant seeking with a look towards future trends is also provided.

INTRODUCTION

The field of librarianship has a plethora of professional development opportunities available for a wide variety of needs, but those library personnel who work at institutions serving underserved populations from unique cultural backgrounds may not be best-served by many of these efforts, in particular, by larger conferences. The necessity of providing professional development opportunities to underserved librarian communities such as tribal college librarians is clear. These librarians typically serve patrons who have the greatest need for library services and who stand to benefit the most from what librarians and libraries can offer them. In the United States, underserved communities typically fall well below average national income and education levels and are often located in rural and tribal communities (Wimberley, 2003). Tribal college librarians, on average, have lower operating budgets, serve a wider geographic area and have fewer opportunities to network with colleagues than their librarian counterparts nationwide. Additionally, most tribal college libraries also serve as the only public library in their communities so they have the added challenge of serving the needs of both academic library users and members of the general public. This dual role means that tribal college librarians must have the knowledge and skills to meet the information and research needs of the students, faculty and staff on their campuses, while also being adept at serving the information and programming needs of the general public. It is not unusual for tribal college librarians to run after-school and summer reading programs, as well as providing continuing cultural programming for the public during their quieter times in serving academic information needs on their campuses.

Providing professional development opportunities to tribal college library staff present several challenges. The largest hurdle to overcome is making professional development opportunities affordable. Oftentimes, the librarians most in need of professional development have few funding

resources available to them, coupled with the issue of having their travel costs to attend national events being greater due to their geographically isolated locations. A flight from a rural community to a major U.S. city can cost as much and take as long as a flight from Los Angeles or Chicago, or even to a major international destination. Another challenge lies in making the event relevant to this unique audience; targeted programming is vital and the key to providing a useful and sustainable professional development opportunity and ensuring that they want to return year after year. The needs of librarians serving a few thousand patrons in an area the size of Connecticut or those serving primarily Native American communities differ significantly from those serving in more populated areas where patrons have greater access to other libraries and information resources.

The primary objective of this chapter is to clearly demonstrate the need to provide unique and targeted professional development opportunities to tribal college librarians and librarians who directly service tribal college students. The results of providing these opportunities through organizations such as the Tribal College Librarians Institute (TCLI) will be discussed, as will the methods and strategies used to coordinate, fund and facilitate an international institute aimed at meeting the professional development needs of tribal college librarians.

BACKGROUND

Native American Reservations are often some of the least populated and most underserved and geographically isolated communities in the United States. While reservations vary in terms of economic success, size and population density in general, current US Census Bureau reports show that they fall well below the economic and educational levels of the general population (US Census, 2013a). The reasons for this are varied, including the movement from a communal culture

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