

Chapter 54

Assessing a Statewide Professional Development Effort

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ABSTRACT

State library associations across the country spend a considerable amount of time and effort providing professional development events and activities for library staffs within their realm of influence. Most of the activities are assessed as to attendee satisfaction, venue attributes or speaker(s) effectiveness. Assessment activities related to these types of outcomes are typically aimed at providing satisfaction of effort for a very diverse set of employees with a wide range of interests. Making programming decisions based on these assessments is critical to receiving ongoing support for future and potential events and activities. This chapter covers techniques for assessing a range of professional development activities on a statewide level in order to plan effectively for future development opportunities and needs.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last couple of years, the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA) has conducted a deeper assessment of professional development activities, primarily related to the programming options or needs for the biennial conference and the Leadership Institute, also conducted every other year, in the odd years from the conference. Traditional assessment activities focused on aesthetics of the venue and personal satisfaction with the speakers or program. These assessments are deeper because the goal is to identify professional development needs and then establish learning objectives for programming that can be measured in terms of effective learning.

For the 2011 NCLA biennial conference a proactive assessment was conducted prior to the planning process to determine the broad range of professional development expectations that all library types across the state needed to be considered for this conference. Previous conference assessments focused on logistics and venue factors that change with each conference due to rotating locations each time. Program assessment was not centralized but only conducted if individual sections or roundtables desired to do so. Post-conference assessment activities determined the effectiveness of these planning activities and are currently being used to influence enhancements to conference considerations for 2013.

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The North Carolina Library Association has for many years presented a Leadership Institute during the off biennial year. Budgetary factors caused several years of not being able to present a statewide leadership institute, but with the support of the state library, the state's library association was able to plan, develop and present a new cohort for emerging leaders in late 2012. This process also involved conducting pre-assessment activities with participants of past leadership institutes in order to determine content and facilitation criteria that was most effective. The planning committee also developed a new mission statement, learning objectives and branding to perpetuate a culture of professional development activities as it relates to leadership. Currently the same planning committee is conducting post-institute assessment activities and coordinating the leadership program extension that will last up to the 2013 biennial conference, in which the Leadership Institute participants will connect to the conference with a sharing of experiences and knowledge gained by their experiences at the leadership institute. This also provided programming opportunities at the conference which further enhances the experience for participants and creates interest within the association.

A key consideration that impacts both the leadership institute activities and conference programming is succession planning, for turnover in library leadership expected in the years to come. This influences content and programming selection in others areas as well, but has become a top priority for association officers and section chairs in recent years. Succession planning is important for the association generally due to its importance to state and county funded libraries and institutions and a model has been adopted to match experienced planners, organizers and people executing events and activities with new members or less experienced people getting involved so as to share that knowledge. This informal mentoring

can be assessed at some future date to determine its effectiveness in sustaining leadership within the association.

This chapter is not meant to be a case study, but instead is a review of the assessment methods and processes followed to move professional development activities into a learning opportunity. These activities are assessed in order to influence future decision making on the content for future event planning and efforts, related to training and development within the scope of libraries across the state. The chapter will have two parts; first a background of program content planning for the past several conferences and a recap of what types of content were successful and which ones were not.

The value of this chapter will be to share how activities on a statewide level are used to support and encourage the professional development of librarians within the state, across all levels of education and experience as well as with differing library types. This is a major effort that requires ongoing assessment to ensure that the effort made, will produce effective results in terms of making professional development opportunities available for library workers across the state. The impact that this has on succession planning is also considered and discussed as a primary benefit for both individual library needs but also in maintaining the strength of the association.

In today's economic environment, having the data and information related to professional development needs, that is formative and meaningful, is important for advocating for resources needed to develop a sustainable program of leadership and knowledge expansion. The efforts made by the assessment activities in this chapter will provide a stronger foundation for statewide efforts to provide association member meaningful professional development opportunities as well as ensure future library and association leaders have the skills needed for the future.

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