Growing Our Own: PNLA Leads Library Leadership Institute

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Picture it: You have been selected, along with thirty-one other library staff, from a pool of applicants from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, and Washington and the Canadian provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. You arrive at a retreat location away from family, friends, and colleagues. You will be joined by eight seasoned mentors, library leaders who have also been selected for this experience, as well as by two institute leaders with a long commitment to developing strong libraries. For the next five days, you will learn, listen, discuss, and experience, with one purpose: to develop your potential.

PNLA Leads is a biennial library leadership institute intended to develop talented staff within all types of libraries and to build a network of library leadership in the Pacific Northwest. Participants develop and enhance skills and aptitudes such as visioning, conflict resolution, commitment to community, personal introspection and growth, mentoring, team building and risk taking.

PNLA created this unique opportunity to serve the following objectives:

- participants examine their personal leadership style and clarify personal and professional goals;
- participants working together assess the environment, think of a vision for the future of the library community as a whole and publicly express their thoughts;
- participants feel confident in taking leadership action in one form or another (e.g., publishing, other association membership, board/committee work, or mentoring);
- a network of peers feels empowered to work together to build collaborative relationships and address common issues within the profession, and urban and rural library employees will feel connected to one another and to their state/provincial and regional peers via a support network.

Becky Schreiber and Jon Shannon of Schreiber Shannon Associates lead the institute based on the model they developed for the Snowbird Library Leadership Institute in 1991. Schreiber and Shannon are organizational development consultants with over thirty years of experience, and they have held several leadership institutes for library organizations in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. They believe in the important role that libraries play in their communities, and they are committed to helping to build strong library organizations. (For more information about Schreiber Shannon Associates, visit www.schreibershannon.com.)

Each of the three previous PNLA Leads institutes has been held at a lovely location conducive to intensive work, ranging from Dumas Bay (2004), the retreat center where WLA also holds its annual board meeting, to the Tamarack Resort in Donnelly, ID (2006), to the Schweitzer Mountain Resort in Sandpoint, ID (2008), which will also be the location of the 2010 institute. Although the institute leaves little free time, participants enjoy good food, laughs, and camaraderie between work sessions. PNLA Leads Coordinator Mary Dewalt and former Leads mentor Jan Zauha (2004, 2006) are on hand to make sure participants have everything they need.

Participants are drawn from each state and province in the region served by PNLA. Applications are evaluated by the leadership institute committee consisting of the institute coordinator and the PNLA board, which includes state/provincial representatives to PNLA. Qualified applicants meet the following criteria:

- they are employed in a library organization within PNLA’s state/provincial region*;
- they have worked at least five years work in a library setting;
- they are a current member of PNLA or one of the affiliated state/provincial library associations;
- they are recommended, based upon leadership potential and abilities, by a sponsoring library, which also indicates level of support;
- they complete an application form.

*At press time, Oregon Library Association members are voting on whether to continue affiliation with PNLA.
A select number of qualified individuals from each state/province are recommended for priority invitation. Remaining qualified applicants are ranked and evaluated for selection to fill at-large positions. The total number of invited applicants is 32. Two alternates are also selected to fill potential vacancies due to illness, other personal emergencies, or changes in circumstance.

You may be wondering exactly what happens at PNLA Leads. We can’t tell you that—what happens at the institute stays at the institute. Instead, we have invited alumni from the previous institutes to answer the following question: What impact has participation in PNLA Leads had on you? In his e-mail response to this question, John Fossett (PNLA Leads class of 2008) wrote, “I looked around the table at one of our library’s manager meetings last month, and there were four of us who’d attended the program (none of us was a manager prior to our PNLA Leads experience).” We hope these stories from PNLA Leads participants will inspire you.

Can you picture yourself at the next PNLA Leads? PNLA Leads 2010 will be held Sunday, Oct. 17-Friday, Oct. 22, at Schweitzer Mountain Resort. The application is available at the PNLA Web site www.pnla.org. The deadline for applying is April 1, 2010.

Sponsors of PNLA Leads

The PNLA Leads Library Leadership Institute has been made possible through a federal grant from the Institute for Library and Museum Services (IMLS) and from sponsors such as BCR and SirsiDynix. If you are interested in helping to sponsor the institute, please contact PNLA Leads Coordinator Mary Dewalt at mdewalt@adalib.org for more information.