

Expect More Profile

Title: In-Service Days: Keeping Librarians Informed

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Expect More Chapter Link: Chapter 7. Librarians: Expect Brilliance; Librarian by Hire

Tweetable Profile Description (140 characters): La Grange Park Library hosts annual in-service days to keep staff informed and inspire new program ideas in a safe space for open dialogues.

Institutional Profile: La Grange Park Library employs a staff suitable for serving 13,579 community residents. The staff includes, but is not limited to, an Executive Director, a Business Manager, a Director of Operations, an Adult Services Director, a Children's Services Director, a Young Adult Librarian, and a Circulation/Technical Services Director. These positions oversee the remainder of the staff. The staff's exact size is not documented.

Service Description:

La Grange Park Library is a sunny, high-ceilinged building serving 13,579 patrons and they believe strongly in a continuous effort to train and educate staff whether they have an MLIS or not. Knowing how vital continuous education is, it's hard to conjure up reasons a library would not want to keep their staff up-to-date on national library and local dialogues. Doing so ensures the programs and services at La Grange Park Library remain relevant to its patrons, removing the common fear of becoming outdated from the equation. But training staff annually doesn't just benefit the library; it also benefits the patrons. A librarian by hire, as previously mentioned, doesn't always enter the workforce with the same missions and core values as librarians by degree and that factor can negatively affect how they serve patrons. By taking initiatives to fill in those educational differences, La Grange Park Library ensures they can properly meet the needs of their community.

There are several ways a library can commit to continuous education. The La Grange Park Library, for instance, plans and organizes two or more private in-service days a year in which staff dedicates hours to learning about potential community needs from a local organization or speaker. This annual education is followed by open discussion between staff during which new program ideas are fostered and library adjustments are considered. Attendance by staff isn't strictly necessary, but La Grange Park Library has managed to foster a positive culture around attending; nearly the entire staff participates if they can.

These in-service days were started by La Grange Park Library's former director Dixie Conkis sometime before 2006, staff is unclear of the exact year. The in-service days vary in terms of content, but according to communications and marketing coordinator Susan Fagan, their most recent ones focused on: CPR and AED defibrillator certification, emotional quotient testing through the community's Employee Assistance Program company, and diversity training. Fagan also references past strategic plan brainstorming, website redesign discussions, and meetings with architects to consider possible building changes. While the in-service days can only happen twice a year due to time constraints, the staff supplements those long days with learning lunches. Learning lunches are shorter and occur more often than in-service days and only focus

on one or two resources at a time. For instance, La Grange Park Library's reference librarian has utilized learning lunches to re-train staff on some of their online resources in order to better serve the library's patrons.

Previously, La Grange Park Library would have to close for a day to host the in-service days. Recently, though, they've split the in-service days into two shifts to maintain normal business hours. The way this works is half of the staff will attend in the morning while the other staff cover the service points and then the two will switch after lunch. Fagan explains that in the past, when the in-service events would occupy the entire staff all day, they used to attend the service, or educational, aspect first and then participate in a staff outing for the rest of the day. But as budgets shrank and management changed, that system has gone to the wayside.

Staff at the La Grange Park Library express positive feelings towards the success and effect in-service days have on the library. These staff-wide educational events make everyone from pages to the director feel as if they have a say in the workings of the library, especially on days focused on the library's strategic plan, website, and space usage. Coming together to determine how staff on every level feels about the library and its resources lends a broad perspective to how the library functions and refuses to benefit one department over another. Learning how to serve patrons better, whether that be through customer service training or learning how to use some of the library's resources, helps build confidence in staff which, in turn, makes their patrons happier.

The continual training and educating of staff, whether they have an MLIS or not, benefits the library as a whole by first benefiting the staff as individuals. That success is shared by the community La Grange Park Library serves.

Usage Data (if applicable): While attendance isn't mandatory, nearly all staff attend these annual, on-sight educational events if they can. So much of the staff attends, in fact, that La Grange Park Library has organized in-service days into two shifts to keep the library open during normal business hours.

Related Resources:

Aspen Institute Dialogue on Public Libraries, *Rising to the Challenge: Re-Envisioning Public Libraries*, Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, October 2014.

Mi, M. (2014). Expanding Librarian Roles Through a Librarian Initiated and Facilitated Faculty Learning Community. *Journal of Library Administration*, 55(1), 24-40.
doi:10.1080/01930826.2014.978683