

A Plan of Action prepared by the  
Continuing Education Committee for the Executive Board  
of the Mountain Plains Library Association  
30 June 2003

Dear Members of the Executive Board:

Section I.A.3 of MPLA's *Long Range Plan, 2000-2004* as updated October 2002, directs the Continuing Education Committee to submit a "plan of action" to the Executive Board by 30 June 2003. This document is the Committee's response to that directive.

### LRP Continuing Education Provisions

The LRP makes clear the Association's strong commitment to the continuing education of its members. The entirety of Goal I focuses on the topic and includes 10 references (apart from Goal I) directly to the Continuing Education Committee-more than for any other committee of the Association. A brief review of the LRP's direction to the CE Committee is in order before proceeding further.

1. I.A.1 directs the Committee to conduct a survey of library personnel in member states in order to determine CE needs. The Executive Summary of the survey prepared in June 2002 is available at <http://www.usd.edu/mpla/documents/reports/committee/contined/execsummary.doc>
2. I.A.2 directs the Committee to develop a plan of action based upon the survey results.
3. II.D.4 directs the Committee to "identify and highlight all existing library education-training program specialties within each of the 12 states for MPLA program planner use."
4. V.A.3 directs the Committee to actively promote the availability of pre-conference grants to the member state associations.
5. V.A.8 directs the Committee to "maintain strong connections with multi-state organizations, such as AMIGOS and BCR . . . by communicating with each multi-state organization (at least twice annually)."
6. V.B.1 directs the Committee to work with ASCLA "to offer no less than one distance education activity in the MPLA states . . . as a test of potential cooperative efforts."
7. V.B.2 directs the Committee to "investigate" what ALA CE offerings might be presented via "video teleconference" to "multiple locations" in the region.
8. VI.A states "The Continuing Education and Professional Development Grants Committee will identify at least three offerings per year of continuing education, professional development, and/or training via other conferencing technologies within the MPLA states." Five specific activities related to this objective follow. They deal with identifying topics and presenters, advertising or publicizing the offerings, establishing costs for participation, and evaluation of each program.
9. VI.B.1 directs the Committee to "sponsor moderated discussions on relevant topics on its [the Association's] website" by identifying "experts . . . who will post topics, present short papers, answers questions, respond to comments and suggest resources in an online format." Further, this item states that "At least five moderated discussions will be hosted annually."

## MPLA Manual of Procedure Provisions

The *MPLA Manual of Procedure* includes the following list of projects for the Continuing Education Committee:

1. Continuing Education: One-to-one. (Stipends granted to participants to visit an outstanding library program in another state to observe and work for one week.)
2. Production of a continuing education learning package or product each year, proceeds from the sale of which should be made available for development of future packages or products.
3. Exploration of other avenues of continuing education in the region, such as establishment of regional clearinghouse, with recommendations to be made to the Board of Directors.

It is worth noting that, to the knowledge of the Committee members, MPLA has not offered a "learning package or product" for at least ten years.

## Committee Response to LRP Provisions

For several important reasons, the Continuing Education Committee feels that the agenda set out by the LRP is overly ambitious. These reasons include:

- The survey results in general, but specifically (quoting from the Executive Summary) the findings that:
  - "A majority of respondents judged that their training and skills needs were being met very well by their employers, state libraries, state library associations, regional systems, and MPLA."
  - "The most important role for MPLA is to serve as a clearinghouse for Continuing Education opportunities in the MPLA region."
- The voluntary nature of and regular rotation in membership of the CE Committee.
- No full-time staff in the Association.
- Insufficient funding.
- Technological difficulties.

In three virtual committee meetings held over the past few months, Committee members have expressed the view that, in light of the above, MPLA ought to concentrate primarily on the clearinghouse function. The Committee conceives that a clearinghouse would most likely take the form of a page on the Association's web site that would include links to listings of CE activities on related sites. Such sites would include those of the state libraries, state associations, cooperative organizations (e.g. BCR and AMIGOS), and other associations (e.g. ALA, ARL, etc.).

At the time the Electronic Communications Committee has identified appropriate "Web board technology" per LRP VI.E.3 the CE Committee would address the issue of content provision though on a smaller scale than contemplated by the LRP. Given (1) the widespread availability of the Internet to members throughout the region and (2) its relative simplicity when compared to

other technologies such as videoconferencing, the Committee feels that any future content provision efforts of the Association should be web-based.

In Committee discussions, the matter of dollars was raised. Programs such as those available through national organizations or regional cooperatives are high-budget initiatives. They also require a great deal of time to develop and maintain if they are to be done well. With no full-time staff, a regularly rotating committee membership (as opposed to the 9 staff employed by AMIGOS in its Continuing Education and Training Services division alone), and a relatively modest budget, MPLA cannot and should not try to duplicate what is available elsewhere. Some of the things that make MPLA great-its intimacy and its reasonable dues structure-would necessarily be sacrificed if major efforts were made to compete in the content provision arena.

It is worth noting that, according to the web sites of the three other Regional Chapters of ALA-the New England Library Association (NELA), the Southeastern Library Association (SELA), and the Pacific Northwest Library Association (PNLA)-none of these associations engage in content provision. NELA is offering a leadership institute similar to MPLA. PNLA's site contains information indicating that they intended to engage in content provision but there is no evidence that they have even a functioning Continuing Education Committee. SELA's site includes a link on the main page to a "CE Clearinghouse."

### Recommendations

So what can and should be done by the Association to support the Continuing Education endeavors of its members? The Committee recommends the following:

1. Continue to have the Association's sections provide programming for the annual bi- or tri-conferences.
2. Continue support of the excellent Ghost Ranch Leadership Institute.
3. With respect both to grants to state associations for pre-conference programming and to professional development grants:
  - o Continue to appropriate monies for these programs in the Association's annual budget.
  - o Promote the availability of these grant monies regularly and widely.
  - o Consider increasing the appropriations for these programs when the already appropriated funds are being wisely expended on a regular basis.
4. At such time as the Association has adopted a "web board technology" do a carefully evaluated experiment with web-based CE content provision. This content provision experiment could address issues of regional interest as well as subject areas identified in the CE survey.

One example of a topic of regional interest is the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial and how libraries might get involved. One of MPLA's own, Cheryl Heser, might lead a web discussion on the topic given her involvement with the Corps of Discovery II project. While the Lewis and Clark expedition passed directly through only 5 of the MPLA states, it affected the entire nation and such a topic would have interest beyond those five states. **[Please note:** Cheryl has not volunteered to do something like this nor has she been

approached about doing so. Her name is used here simply for illustrative purposes of what *might* be possible.]

The CE survey indicated that collection development and management is the subject area of greatest interest. Development of collections for certain populations (e.g. children, young adults) and electronic collections were the specific topics with the broadest appeal. Undoubtedly there is expertise among the MPLA population or within the region that could be drawn upon by the Association to provide CE content in this area.

5. Create and regularly update a page on the MPLA web site that includes links to listings of educational opportunities on other sites as discussed above. The Committee discussed the possibility of the Distance Education Coordinator (an ex-officio member of the Committee who will most likely not rotate as frequently as regular committee members) being the appropriate individual to do this.

With input from the incumbent of that position (Jane Hatch), the Committee recommends instead that the Association seek a volunteer without other Association responsibilities for an unspecified term of service to coordinate the creation and updating of this page. A member having responsibilities in the human resources or professional development arenas would make a likely prospect. A volunteer would be the best judge of her or his ability to really address such an undertaking and not specifying any term of service would avoid the problems inherent in the continuous rotation of Committee members. State Representatives could be an invaluable aid to such a volunteer.

#### Effect of the Recommendations on the *LRP*

The LRP provisions mentioned in the first section would be affected as follows:

1. I.A.1 Completed. No effect.
2. I.A.2 Completed. No effect.
3. II.D.4 Remove. Information from the survey that may have helped with this is already dated and no provision is made for its updating. The updating problem is aggravated by the voluntary nature of Association work and the regular turnover in Committee membership. The provision of program content by MPLA sections per recommendation 1 above should continue in lieu of this.
4. V.A.3 Retain. The Committee has addressed this. A web application form for pre-conference grants is now available on the Association's web site. The Committee chair sent e-mails to all state representatives making them aware of the availability of and deadlines for the grant. This should happen regularly and the Committee should consider other efforts to more widely publicize the availability of the grants.
5. V.A.8 Remove. The influence of the kind contemplated by this provision depends upon a good working relationship. Such a relationship cannot reasonably be expected to develop with the regular rotation of Committee members.
6. V.B.1 Remove. This is a "content provision" effort beyond the bounds of the above recommendations.

7. V.B.2 Remove. ASCLA may well be one of the organizations linked from a continuing education "clearinghouse" page on the Association's web page.
8. VI.A Remove. This is a "content provision" effort beyond the bounds of the above recommendations.
9. VI.B.1 Modify. This provision should be made contingent upon the adoption of web board technology by the Association and should be further modified to call for a carefully evaluated, but hopefully successful, experiment of the technology for CE purposes. Should that hope of success be realized, the evaluation should provide some guidance as to the number of moderated discussions to be held annually.

### Conclusion

When web board technology has been adopted by the Association, the Committee can experiment with this technology to create a "learning package or product." In the meantime, the Committee believes that CE efforts should focus on making MPLA an effective clearinghouse of CE opportunities available from a variety of sources by means of a page on the Association's web site. These recommendations are entirely consistent with the *MPLA Manual of Procedure* and with the realities that obtain relative to available funding and personnel.

Respectfully submitted,  
The MPLA Continuing Education Committee  
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