

Mountain Plains Library Association

Summary - MPLA Leadership Institute 2010

Participant and Mentor Evaluations

The MPLA 2010 Leadership Institute was held April 25-30 at YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado. Thirty participants, four mentors, and one facilitator attended. The Institute Coordinator also served as a mentor.

Approximately five weeks after the 2010 Leadership Institute, online surveys were sent to participants and mentors to gauge the success of the Institute. This survey timing was to give participants some time to reflect on the experience, rather than having an evaluation at the end of the Institute when exhausted and getting ready to leave.

The results give the Institute strong positive evaluations. Suggestions for improvement will offer direction for future institutes. Dan Stanton, Chair of MPLA's Leadership Committee, designed the surveys with the assistance of Judy Zelenski, 2010 Leadership Institute Coordinator.

----- Participant Evaluations -----

Twenty-six of the 30 participants for the Leadership Institute responded to a 19 question online poll. The respondents represented a variety of experiences, ages, degrees, and type of libraries. The 2010 Institute, differing from previous institutes, did not require an MLS degree of participants. Many of the participants heard about the Institute from colleagues who had previously attended and recommended it highly. Others heard about it from the MPLA Newsletter, e-mails to MPLA members, or state listservs. Many agreed the participant cost (registration and travel) was "about right" with over half saying it was "A bargain (I'd pay more!)."

Responses indicated participants were overwhelmingly pleased with the Institute, including application requirements, facilitator, mentors, coordinator, curriculum, materials and value of the experience. All 26 of the respondents gave the highest rating for "the value of the Institute for personal and/or professional development "

Finally, every respondent reported that the institute was of great significance to them, using words such as "life-changing," "increased awareness," "rejuvenated," and "confidence." While most comments below are excerpted, all respondents' complete comments in this part are listed.

Areas of positive assessment and some representative comments:

Application process

- Appreciated the online process, allow me to compose and then post the application information.
- It gave me plenty of time to gather my thoughts and make arrangements to attend.

Application requirements

- As someone who does not have an MLIS I was really happy to be included as a candidate. I loved writing the application. It was a great preparation for the Institute. It helped me think through the elements of leadership, and how they applied to my situation.
- The introspective questions were a good lead in to the sort of work we did at LI
- One of the main reasons that our Institute was so successful was because he had people from all kinds of libraries and had worked in the profession for various lengths of time

Accommodations

- Estes was beautiful.
- Free, good wi-fi
- I loved the set up. Everything was taken care of so I could focus on learning and participating in the institute. I thought the meals were mighty fine and of course loved the YMCA accommodations and scenery. Even though we worked hard - it was a relaxing experience due to the setting
- Meals were excellent although eating with 250 children was distracting and did not allow for relaxed conversation. Loved the variety of foods offered, including vegetarian. Room was very nice for this purpose, double bed was a plus!
- The accommodations and arrangements were great and it is beautiful there
- I thought all the accommodations and food was good. The kids attending another event were well behaved and I thought it was unreasonable for the people were not happy that there were children at the YMCA

Communication

- All communication was very timely and informative. Judy did a phenomenal job!
- Judy did a great job keeping us informed!
- Judy was very helpful and organized

Maureen Sullivan, Facilitator

- Fantastic!
- She was outstanding!
- Maureen Sullivan rocks

- The things Maureen knew off the cuff was mind-boggling. She was adaptable to the needs of every participant.
- Maureen is a powerhouse! She had more energy than all of us put together! Maureen was also skilled at keeping us on time and agenda
- Maureen Sullivan was fabulous and filled with great information and insight.
- Maureen was awesome!
- Maureen was excellent and accessible

Mentors

- I liked the range of experience and they treated everyone equally. I came into the experience feeling a tad inadequate and that went away quickly. The acceptance of everyone was very noticeable and appreciated.
- The diversity of the group of mentors lent the right diversity of experience to provide relevance to all the interests of the group.
- I very much enjoyed the mentor-driven days.
- All the mentors were excellent. Each gave a different perspective, which was very valuable.
- The mentors helped to bring the experience into the active field of day-to-day library experience. Kept it real
- They were fun, helpful, and hilarious.

Coordinator

- Judy was perfect. She constantly anticipated our needs and worked to help us feel at home, challenged and well taken care of.
- Judy was terrific and deserves a big thank-you from all of us. She really is the heart of the institute and it wouldn't have been so successful without her.

Participants

- I really appreciated having people from all of the states as well as having people from different types of libraries.
- So interesting and diverse
- Great bunch of people!

Agenda

- Although tired at the time, you really need the post-Maureen day with the Mentors just to start processing everything.

Curriculum

- It got me started on a lifelong pursuit of bettering my leadership and management skills.
- The curriculum was great!

Learning Materials

- The binder is so valuable and interesting
- Great resources
- Love the notebook! I will refer back to it frequently in the future
- I carry my book with me everyday. It is like my security blanket now.

Leadership Institute Professional Development Value

- Next to getting my MLS, this is the single most important experience of my career thus far.
- I learned about myself, increased my leadership skills, and met great people that will be part of my network for many years to come.
- I will carry the many concepts and ideas learned from the institute with me for years to come.

What does the Leadership Experience mean to you? Complete Comments

(Because these comments tell the most about the value of the MPLA Leadership Institute they are included below in their entirety)

- It was a great experience. I left motivated, learned a lot and had many new ideas to take back to my institution.
- It affirmed my decision to work in a leadership role in a library. It energized me.
- For me it was a call to arms. Time to quit standing around waiting for others to take charge. Now it is my time. I feel more empowered and not like a newbie who doesn't know anything.
- Yes, all of those things spurred me to pursue my PhD
- It did truly change the way I view myself and my attitude and perspective on the possibilities for my future.
- It has changed my attitude about my work. I'm no longer questioning what I'm doing. I learned to trust my gut and go with it. I'm much more calm about work in general. Stuff that would have stressed me out before doesn't affect me the same way now.
- It's been the single most valuable professional development activity I've had. I really value the connections I made and the lessons I've learned. I'm a little slow about following up with my goals and reading the rest of the material, but I think it was a fantastic experience. Thanks!
- The first thing I noticed was it gave me confidence. I realized by visiting with and listening to the others, that I am not off base, but right on track. Sometimes when you are the only one in town there is no one to bounce things around with and find out if you are heading in the right direction.
- It gave me confidence to come back to the job and hit some issues head on, with good results! The statement that if no one seems to be picking up the ball - then it must be mine to pick up... Personally, it helped me to take action on a goal that I was letting float out there somewhere...made me ask myself "just when are you going to do this"?
- Helped solidify my career goals. Again I was on track and Institute put the final touch on my goals. Bottom line, it was a confidence building experience.

- The Leadership Institute opportunity was a great experience where I learned how to be a better librarian, leader and friend to my colleagues. Maureen Sullivan was an excellent facilitator for our institute and the four mentors quietly lead with wisdom and life experience.
- All of the above! Additionally, it filled me with a new found confidence in my professional capabilities and the personal skills and assets I bring to my work at hand. I think if LI participants work together we can move mountains.
- I realize what leadership skills I had and was already implementing. also learned new skills which was the exciting part of bringing these skills into my job.
- It solidified many of the ideas I had regarding leadership and brought to light many other questions and concerns associated with the wide-ranging responsibilities of a library leader. Most situations don't have a well-defined right or wrong answer and this institute helped me to come to terms with operating in this type of environment.
- It gave me new ideas on networking in the community, and dealing with different types of people at work.
- The Institute experience has bolstered my confidence and provided me with the tools and understanding to much more effectively perceive and function in leadership role here within my institution. Particularly techniques such as "frame flipping," a positive attitude, and transparency in decision making.
- It was a great experience, meeting the people was the most valuable experience in my opinion, the library network is very strong. I learned I was not alone in my library problems and frustration, and learned many new ways to handle these problems. Will definitely recommend to others.
- It gave me a better global view of my position as branch manager, and my influence and power that I have. It made me realize the high responsibility to work to the best of my ability. It taught me about my personal style and how to work with it.
- It was even better than I expected. Yes, it immediately affected my day-to-day approach to work, taught me a lot about myself/librarianship, and allowed me to view my current situation with a new perspective. After I returned home and started processing all the information, one of the things that happened was I started taking a long hard look at my library organization. I started to identify some areas that need improvement that I never would have thought about. I've had a brief discussion with my director about some of the observations I have made and expect to have more in-depth discussions in the next couple of months. Our library, like so many, is undergoing some major changes. In the fall we will start asking for community input and begin making some of the major changes. I am glad to have participated in the Institute before this process started because have a very different perspective.
- It recharged my batteries. In the last few years, I have had some demoralizing professional experience. The Institute helped me reaffirm my love of the profession and inspired me to continue.
- I renewed my design to be a librarian. I was considering leaving the field for higher pay but am now rejuvenated and a new passion for my job

- Increased awareness of networking; the importance of being a strong and organized leader to bring the library and staff forward. I also learned the importance of getting buy in from staff by having them be a part of decisions.
- The experience gave me a different perspective on my work and my library, allowing me to make some decisions that will directly affect how library services are provided to our service area. The relationship with my roommate will be ongoing, as we'll keep each other accountable for our Institute goals.
- It taught me a lot about myself and my leadership style, challenged me to set new goals for myself and increase my effectiveness, and provided me with a whole new network of library experts to lean on.
- I realized after attending the institute that I am on the right career path, and can move forward being more confident in my work.
- It has transformed my approach to leadership. I feel more trusting of my instincts and less concerned about controlling all outcomes. I have come to appreciate my staff team and enjoy my work. The institute has given me the tools to tap into the creativity of the group over feeling I should provide all the answers
- When I asked co-workers who had attended the Institute in previous years what it was like, what they learned, what they did, etc., they always had vague answers. After having attended myself, I completely understand why. It is a life altering experience that is very hard to quantify and explain. It changed my confidence in myself as a leader, it taught me what my strengths and weaknesses are and what I can work on. It inspired a new sense of vitality in my day to day work and changed my pessimistic mindset about my current work situation to an optimistic one. I now know I have a great group of librarians that I can go to with questions or concerns that are also great friends. Even these descriptions of what it means to me aren't adequate to describe how truly valuable my experience was.
- It enabled me to think in a broader scope about my career goals and was a great way to assess my leadership skills and learn some new ones. It was excellent to have a variety of participants so we could share various perspectives on similar issues.

Areas for improvement, with some representative suggestions

Application Process

- Perhaps a phone interview would have given me the opportunity ask more questions
- Possibly shorten the time between the application deadline and acceptance
- I think more marketing would help you get a larger application pool if that's something MPLA is interested in. Possibly sending out information to various listservs that aren't directly tied to MPLA in order to reach a larger audience

Communication

- The technical problems with the group listserv should have been worked out prior to getting the participants involved. It was a poor initial/introductory experience.
- I think it might be best if the participants are told upfront that they are responsible for their own transportation, what the options are (shuttle, rent-a-car, etc) rather than waiting to see if there are enough people to get a discount on the shuttle service.
- Better maps and directions to and from the location of the institute.
- An itinerary or schedule of the event prior to the institute by at least a week. Even just a basic outline of what to expect and when would have been helpful.

Participants

- Some dominators of conversations made it hard
- Felt that there were a lot of public librarians, would prefer more academic librarians, and was puzzled by the lack of any school librarians. Don't get me wrong. I appreciated the exposure to the variety of experiences. I just felt at times the public librarian issues became dominant.

Curriculum

- More hands-on and group learning. The material covered was almost too much to absorb.
- Don't have any evening learning sessions. Instead keep that time for meals and informal gathering. Maybe offer optional activities that people can participate in - group walks, sightseeing jaunts, shopping runs, etc. That would allow valuable networking time.
- I wish we have been given specific (and reasonable) reading assignments prior to the institute. Maybe on book that would be discussed in depth?
- Maybe a little too much theory and not enough practice

Agenda

- I think we all would have liked Maureen to have been able to have stayed with us longer, but given the situation I don't think anyone was really disappointed, and a vast amount of material was covered.
- The curriculum was great! I just have an objection to the 12 hour days. It was pretty grueling.
- After Maureen left seemed like we were just filling time until it was time to leave. Some good stuff happened but maybe have more down time through the days instead of burning everyone out in the first two so when it came to making individual goals everyone kind of checked out and went shopping. I think this took away from the experience and reflection time.
- With Maureen leaving early it felt like what we did after her departure was a time filler. Everyone was getting tired and ready to wrap it up. Three long days is sufficient and more cost effective.
- On the extremely long days I felt as though I could no longer absorb the value information being provided. So I would suggest a long institute with shorter days. Definitely do not take away the valuable material!!
- It is difficult to be gone that long.

- What about an organized "night out" midway through the experience off site?
- Outdoor activities, more down-time for contemplation
- Maureen left us with a high note. It would have been good to stop there. Everything else was anticlimactic

Accommodations

- The cafeteria better suited the many campers than our group. I would have preferred a quieter, closer, eating arrangement
- The large volume of youth sharing our dining hall was annoying at times.
- Meals were excellent although eating with 250 children was distracting and did not allow for relaxed conversation
- While the accommodations and meals were good the seasonal timing could have been better. The combinations of late winter weather and the altitude may have unduly stressed some participants on the long trek to the dining hall
- The trail to the food hall was challenging especially to the flatlanders. I was seriously out of breath

Rooming

- It would be nice for participants to have had the option of upgrading to single rooms. Networking is important but it need not be done in one's pajamas.
- I prefer to have my own room. That part was not comfortable for me.
- I had a wonderful roommate but I don't think we should have to share a room. A person never gets to truly relax that way. I would prefer having my own room and paying more for it if I had to.

Evaluations

- Do the evaluation closer to the event, I'm sure there were things I wanted to say that I've now forgotten

Miscellaneous

- Please help us plan a reunion at future ALA conferences.
- How about a second level. Intermediate level?
- A wall map of the states involved. We'd talk about where we were from, and if we had a map to mark our name/face on our location.
- A selection of microbrews in each room would have been nice
- Just keep doing them (the institutes). Keep them in Estes Park if you can. Such a beautiful place.

----- Mentor Evaluations -----

Three of the four mentors for the LI 2010 responded to a 25 question online poll. Respondents had either been on the MPLA board when the LI began or were prior institute participants or mentors.

Responses indicated mentors were pleased with the Institute, including the invitation process, meals, accommodations, facilitator, mentoring, curriculum, materials, and value of the experience.

Areas of positive assessment and some representative comments:

Maureen Sullivan, Facilitator

- She was amazing and a great role model.
- Maureen is fabulous!
- Maureen is the BEST!
- Maureen is an amazingly valuable resource! I can't imagine a better facilitator.

Participants

- This group was very committed, lively, and seemed to bond very quickly. I really liked the mix of MLS, non-MLS, varying ages, types and sizes of libraries, and experience. I liked it better than the previous institute I attended where participants were more similar. A lot of learning happened among the very diverse participants.

Mentoring

- We were encouraged to participate but hold back from dominating. I think we achieved that goal.
- I really enjoyed hearing the other mentors' presentations
- I enjoyed talking with the wide variety of librarians and was surprised at those who sought my advice in some cases. I learned as much as they did.
- As a mentor I benefited from the discussions as well. The benefit wasn't just one way.

Personal value of Institute

- Really got me thinking about a lot of things and moving toward some meaningful goals.
- Gave me renewed hope for the profession and helped me see that I am a leader as well.
- This was a most meaningful experience for me. Participants were really inspiring and getting to know everyone gave me a renewed perspective on the profession - and on life.

Areas for improvement, with some representative suggestions

Advance information

- Send out Institute schedule earlier

- I would have like to have more details nailed down much further in advance of the Institute.
- I would have liked a little more information about expectations up front...
- Have a conference call with mentors early in the process - to talk about expectation, answer questions, pick topics, etc.

Accommodations

- In advance of the Institute there was a lot of angst expressed about having to share rooms. If single rooms were offered at the different in price to MPLA (significant) I think it would make many people more comfortable.
- There were many opportunities to get to know each other and I'm not sure requiring roommates is critical to the Institute

Participants

- Wish we'd had a school librarian.
- I'd like to see more effort made to draw out the quieter folks. As usual, a few dominated most of the discussions

Agenda/Curriculum

- I wished that there had been more time to cover the materials in the manual.
- I'm unsure of the value of the last day's agenda that was patched together by mentors. After Maureen leaves, the mentors provide some content, but the final day is mostly for reflection. Participants seemed really ready to get away, go out to lunch, go shopping on this day - and they did. On the other hand, it may be a good day for just decompressing before heading back to work.