

American Library Association Library Support Staff Certification Program (LSSCP) Abstract

Abstract

The majority (69%) of staff working in academic and public libraries do not have a master's degree in library and information studies. Further, it is estimated that at least half of all of the nation's 16,000 public library outlets, and particularly those in rural areas and urban branches, are operated by individuals without a master's degree. These staff play a crucial role in the quality of library and information services in virtually every community and every college and university in this country, but the training available to them varies considerably. In the case of smaller public libraries, the individual states have each developed "home grown" training programs, but in the majority of instances, little or no training is available to these staff. What is available varies considerably in content, and is not transferable from one situation – or state – to another.

Needs assessments completed as far back as 1991 have called for a national, standardized certification program for these library support staff. The American Library Association (ALA) and the Western Council of State Librarians are requesting \$407,111 for a three-year project to develop a Library Support Staff Certification Program (LSSCP) to meet this need.

The goal of the project is that users of academic and public libraries will have improved services because of a national certification program for library support staff, provided by the American Library Association. The project's objectives are to:

- Develop a set of national core competencies for library support staff that are applicable in academic and public libraries in Year One;
- Develop and implement the policies and procedures for the LSSCP in Year Two;
- Provide alternative options for assessment of current knowledge and experience and new learning in Year Two;
- Thoroughly test the model at five demonstration sites in Year Three and establish a certification program at ALA.

Mary Ghikas, at ALA, will serve as the Grant Administrator. The project will be co-directed by Dr. Karen Strege and Ms. Nancy Bolt, both former state librarians with extensive experience in project management and staff development. Jenifer Grady, Director of the ALA-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA), will serve as the Chief ALA Liaison. Other ALA staff, and an Advisory Committee composed of representatives from ALA Divisions, Round Tables, Committees, and particularly, library support staff, will assist the project directors. Ms. Grady will also supervise a part-time project assistant.

The intended outcomes of the project include:

- Competencies for library support staff, identified and validated for use by ALA or by any state or other library organization;
- Policies and procedures to administer the certification program;
- A comprehensive assessment schema;
- Adoption by the American Library Association and commitment to continue the certification program after the grant.

Results of the project will be disseminated widely to all state libraries, library associations, library cooperatives and networks, and community and junior colleges. A website will be created that will track the progress of LSSCP and evolve into a tool for use by LSSCP participants.

The project will have many positive impacts on the nation's libraries and their users. Library users will be served by well-trained LSS, who have positive proof of their mastery of vocational competencies. Libraries can hire workers who have participated in the LSSCP, certain that they possess a specific body of knowledge and skills. The employer may also use the LSSCP as part of a career ladder within its organization. Finally, the profession will have identified the competencies of LSS and by doing so, recognize the differences between support staff and librarians with an MLS. In addition, comprehensive areas and skills that support staff should master for their careers will be defined.