



**Request for Consultant on Assessment
 American Library Association
 Western Council of State Libraries
 Library Support Staff Certification Program**

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SECTION ONE - GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1 The purpose of this Request for Proposals (RFP) is to engage a Consultant to assist the American Library Association and the Western Council of State Libraries (WCSL) (hereafter referred to as the “Contractor”) in identifying and selecting assessment methodologies for validating learning of competencies by library support staff who will be certified in the Library Support Staff Certification Program (LSSCP). The competencies are statements of proficiency (skills, knowledge and abilities) in eleven competency areas related to librarianship for support staff (e.g., Technical Services, Marketing). At this point, a selection will be core and the remainder will be elective competency areas. The American Library Association is the contractor’s signee. The Contractor, by means of this RFP, invites all qualified Proposers to submit Proposals in accordance with the requirements outlined in this RFP. The Contractor anticipates that, based on its review and evaluation of the Proposals received pursuant to this RFP, it will select a Proposer and execute a contract whereby the Proposer renders Services to the Contractor, in accordance with terms and conditions set forth in the contract.

1.2 In general, LSSCP is seeking an expert consultant in assessment to advise LSSCP Project Staff. The consultant is **not** expected to design assessments for the entire program but to advise the staff and review their work. LSSCP Project Staff would like expert advice on the following (further defined later in the RFP):

- A. Should the program adopt individual assessment procedure(s) or approve education providers to offer approved coursework to certificate applications?
- B. The various strengths and weakness of individual assessment methodologies, including, but not limited to portfolio assessment and testing.
- C. The challenges of establishing a national individual assessment methodology.
- D. Are LSSCP competency statements sufficient for assessment purposes?
- E. How to assess prior learning.

1.3 Assessment does **not** refer to assessing the progress or impact of the overall project. A separate expert has been contracted with for that evaluation. The project evaluator will work on the Project Staff team with the Assessment Consultant.

SECTION TWO: BUDGET

2.1 The LSSCP has a budget of \$10,000 for consultation on the development of assessments including all travel and expenses. The Project Staff expect most of the work to be done electronically via email or by phone, and with one or two face-to-face meetings. Project headquarters are in Chicago at the offices of the American Library Association. Project co-directors are based on Seattle, Washington and Denver, Colorado. Face-to-face meetings will take place at a location convenient to all participants.

SECTION THREE: SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

3.1 The Contractor will make a good faith effort to follow the timeline below for evaluating, negotiating and issuing an award:

Event	Dates
RFP released	Thursday, January 31, 2008
Deadline for questions	Thursday, February 14, 2008
Proposals due	Monday, February 26, 2008 5pm Standard Mountain Time
Proposal review	Tuesday/Wednesday, February 27-28, 2008
Contract negotiations	March 1-15, 2008
Contract signed	March 15, 2008
Work begins	April 1, 2008
Work ends	June, 2009

SECTION FOUR: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

4.1 Over two-thirds (69%, 160,150 nationally) of workers in U.S. academic and public libraries are support staff (LSS) holding jobs not requiring a Master's Degree in Library Science (MLS). The MLS is typically held by librarians. This project addresses LSS needs for a national certification program to help the profession standardize expectations for LSS; help the large number of LSS master critical job competencies; provide educators with guidance for training curriculums; and help employers articulate job requirements.

4.2 In 2005, the ALA Office for Human Resource Development and Recruitment (HRDR) and members of the Library Support Staff Interest Round Table (LSSIRT) received responses from 3,318 LSS to a survey about professional development and certification. Eighty-six percent of respondents thought that a certification program would be beneficial. Seventy-six percent said that nationally recognized professional standards were important and 66% support a national certification program to help them provide better service and grow in their chosen profession.

4.3 This project will design, test, and implement the first national, competency-based, LSS Certification Program (LSSCP) for LSS in public and academic libraries. The LSSCP will include staff that are known as or may call themselves paraprofessionals, library technicians, library assistants and

associates, para-librarians, etc. The project does not include school LSS because many states have training and licensing requirements that differ from the potential requirements of the LSSCP.

4.4 In June, 2007, the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) awarded a grant from the Laura Bush 21st Century Library Program to the Contractor to support the “Library Support Staff Certification Project.” This project seeks to develop a national voluntary certification program for library support staff to be administered by ALA.

4.5 The original grant application and other information about LSSCP are available at: <http://www.ala-apa.org/certification/supportstaffdocs.html>

4.6 The following is a summary of the project’s objectives, schedule, and activities.

Objective One. Develop a set of national core competencies for library support staff that are applicable in academic and public libraries.

Activities and schedule. A draft set of competencies will be completed by January 2008 and the final set will be reviewed by the project’s Advisory Committee in June 2008.

Objective Two: Develop and implement certification program policies and procedures.

Activities and schedule. The Advisory Committee will review a final set of policies and procedures by June 2009.

Objective Three: Provide options for assessment of current knowledge, experience and new learning.

Activities and schedule. The project will hire an assessment expert to provide guidance on how best to incorporate assessment methodology into the program. The assessment methodology will be finalized by June 2009.

Objective Four: Thorough test the model at five demonstration sites and officially establish a certification program at ALA.

Activities and schedule: From July 2009 to May 2010, five sites will use the competencies and implementation model with LSS in their service areas to test and make needed modifications in the final model. The five sites will include a regional library cooperative, a state library, a library association, a community college, and a division of the American Library Association. The parameters of the models will be developed in 2008. Each of the sites will implement the demonstration differently based on the roles and responsibilities of each organization. ALA Council (the governing body of the American Library Association) will be asked to adopt the program in June 2010.

4.7 The detailed information about Objective Three on Assessment can be found on page 6 of the full Project Narrative. **However, since the beginning of the project, our thoughts on assessment are less definite than indicated in the proposal. We would like a thorough examination of multiple assessment options.** Given this caveat, the detailed information on Objective Three is repeated below.:

Objective Three: Provide alternative options for assessment of current knowledge, experience and new learning.

Assessment will be a major component of this project. Three major issues are involved. First, ALA and WCSL are committed to designing a certification program that does not rely on the number of courses taken as evidence of the applicant’s mastery of the competencies.

Second, ALA and WCSL will investigate the issue of recognizing the knowledge of experienced applicants. This assessment is necessary because job longevity is not a proxy for competency. Conversely, longevity may bring competency. Only a fair assessment can determine this.

Third, ALA and WCSL do not want to develop a test-based assessment method. Project directors will investigate what other methods are appropriate to assess knowledge.

Project directors will use the following principles to select an assessment method. It will be 1) tied to the competencies; 2) include a method to assess current knowledge and experience; 3) practical, cost-effective, and accessible in its implementation; 4) applicable across geographic and library type; and 5) inclusive of evidence of understanding and performance.

In Year Two, project directors will work with a consultant, an expert in psychometrics or education assessment, who will provide advice and assist in developing a valid and reliable assessment. Project staff, the Committee, WCSL, and ALA will decide the final assessment strategy.

Result of Objective Three: Methods of assessment developed and ready for field-testing.

4.8 In general, LSSCP is seeking an expert consultant in assessment to advise LSSCP Project Staff. The consultant is **not** expected to design the entire assessment but to advise the staff and review their work. LSSCP Project Staff would like expert advice on the following, which includes a mix of models that have been introduced and are under consideration since the project's inception:

- A. Should the program adopt individual assessment procedure(s) or approve education providers to offer approved coursework to certificate applications?
- Assessing the work of each individual participant in the LSSCP – Current expectations are that applicants must demonstrate that they have met all the competencies in the core competency areas.
 - Assessing individuals' work through the proxy of approved educational providers – One potential way of assessing individuals would be to approve educational providers in the competency areas and accept their assessment of individuals. We consider this a proxy for LSSCP assessment of each individual.
 - Assessing providers to deliver content specified in the competencies – If LSSCP approves providers, how should these providers' educational offerings be assessed to ensure that they are teaching the competencies and assessing the LSSCP participants in a reliable and valid way?
 - Methods of assessment other than a written test – There may be methods other than testing that are suitable for LSSCP competency areas. How do we determine whether an LSSCP participant has met the competencies? What other methods are valid and reliable?

The Certified Public Library Administrator Program administered by ALA-ALA (www.ala-apa.org) and the Western Council's Library Practitioner Certificate (<http://certificate.westernco.org/>) approves providers and accepts their evaluation of student work.

- B. The various strengths and weakness of individual assessment methodologies, including, but not limited to portfolio assessment and testing.
- If the project chooses to recommend an assessment of individual applicants, which assessment type would 1) achieve the certification project's goals and 2) what resources are generally needed to implement that assessment type?

- Development and implementation of a national test. Most national certification programs use one. How are such tests developed? What does such development typically cost? What are the ongoing costs? Why is this method popular?
 - C. The challenges of establishing a national individual assessment methodology.
 - Except for New Mexico and civil service exams in New York State, the library profession does not require state or national tests for either library support staff or librarians. Instead state certificate programs are based on applicants completing certain number of courses. If Project Staff recommends an individual assessment method, the consultant will provide assistance in developing rationale for this approach.
 - A small number of ALA staff will administer this program.. What would be necessary to use volunteers as part of an individual assessment method?
 - Advising on the feasibility of assessment alternatives for individuals, providers, and the LSSCP program. How can the tension between authentic assessment and national “do-ability” be resolved?
 - D. Are LSSCP competency statements sufficient for assessment purposes?
 - Reviewing competency statements and advising on what changes should be made for assessment purposes. The LSSCP Advisory Committee has developed competencies in 11 areas of typical library work. Depending on the chosen assessment method, what changes are needed so that the competencies are clearly understandable for both educational providers or individual participants?
 - E. How to assess prior learning.
 - Some LSS have been performing their jobs for many years. How can LSSCP assess their prior learning in relation to the competencies? What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing this?
- 4.9 The LSSCP will make a final determination of the method(s) to be used to assess new and prior learning. Appendix A outlines some of the issues that are being considered. A critique of the information in Appendix A is welcomed. The final assessment method(s) needs to have the following characteristics as outlined in the proposal narrative:
- 1) Appropriate for the competencies;

The LSSCP staff and Advisory Committee have created competencies in 11 competency areas that relate to the work of library support staff
 - 2) Include a method to assess prior experiential learning;

Many library support staff have been working in libraries for many years. In the survey, they requested a component to assess their prior learning as validation of their possession of the competencies. The Advisory Committee asked that we investigate if this can be done. If it is, the assessment of prior learning experience must be rigorous and valid.
 - 3) Practical, cost-effective, and accessible in its implementation;

LSSCP is conceived as national program with potential participants spread around the country. Implementation of the program and assessment must be practical and cost-effective on a national basis. Because some assessment methodologies may be evaluated by volunteers (committee members), the program must be objective and clear.
 - 4) Applicable across geographic and library type;

The audience for LSSCP includes library support staff who work in academic and public libraries, serving all population sizes, rural to large urban. The program will not be designed to meet the needs of school media or special library support staff.
 - 5) Inclusive of evidence of understanding and performance.

The method(s) should allow participants to understand and demonstrate that the competencies have been met.

4.10 Final Report

A. A final report will be required and should include at a minimum:

- * An executive summary that provides a brief overview of the assessment issues
- * Recommendations for different types of assessment to be used, including pros and cons of each type of assessment recommended
- * A discussion section which explains the pros and cons of each assessment method and why one or more were chosen over others.
- * A methodology section that includes recommendations on managing assessment in a national program in an efficient yet valid and reliable manner.

4.11 Short interim reports will be required every three that summarize the discussions and preliminary recommendations.

4.12 Timeline

A draft report will be submitted for review to the Directors by January 1, 2009. The final report will be submitted by March 1, 2009.

4.13 Meetings and Travel.

The Directors will meet by phone with the Proposer in March 2008 and will communicate by phone and email on a regular basis. Project Directors anticipate that at least two face-to-face meetings will be necessary to achieve a full understanding of assessment options and implementation. Dates and locations of these meetings will be determined by mutual agreement.

SECTION FIVE - PROPOSAL CONTENT REQUIREMENTS

5.1 Provision of Information. Each Proposer must provide current, accurate, and complete information about all of the following in support of its Proposal (please coordinate numbers with responses).

5.2 Contact and Information

- A. Name, address, telephone number, and title of the person(s) whom the Contractor can contact about the Proposal
- B. Names, titles, and resumes of Proposer officials who will serve as primary Proposer contacts.
- C. Length of time and years during which the Proposer has provided the Services specified in this RFP.
- D. Three (3) references for whom the Proposer provides or has provided similar evaluation Services; and

5.3 Relevant Experience

- A. Length of time and experience in assessment with certification projects
- B. Experience with different methods of assessment including:
 - Assessments related to competencies
 - Assessments using providers as proxies
 - Assessment of prior experiential learning
 - Development of national or local written certification tests
- C. Demonstration that the Proposer has experience choosing a variety of assessment methods in the past there were appropriate for different situations.
- D. Examples and explanations of assessments that have been designed.

- E. Experience with a practical approach to a national certification program. What implementation issues arose that LSSCP should consider?

5.4 Description of Services

Provide a workplan describing the process you propose in order to meet the needs of the LSSCP for assessment consulting. Be specific about how your experience and expertise are applicable to this situation. We are particularly interested in how Proposer will assist in answer the questions in Section 4.8 (A-E)

5.5 Budget

A detailed budget and schedule of expenditures, indicating specific consulting fees for all products and services, travel expenses, and billing procedures and processes used by the Proposer.

SECTION SIX: ADMINISTRATION OF THE RFP

6.1 Right to Modify, Rescind, or Revoke RFP. The Contractor reserves the rights to modify, rescind, or revoke this RFP, completely or in part, at any time prior to the date on which the authorized representative of the Contractor executes a Contract with the Selected Proposer.

6.2 Compliance with RFP Requirements. By submission of a Proposal, a Proposer agrees to be bound by the requirements set forth in this RFP. The Contractor, at its sole discretion, may disqualify a Proposal from consideration, if the Contractor determines a Proposal is non-responsive and/or non-compliant, in whole or in part, with the requirements set forth in this RFP.

6.3 Binding Effect of Proposal. Unless otherwise agreed in writing signed by authorized representatives of the Contractor, each Proposer agrees to and shall be bound by the information and documentation provided with the Proposal, including prices quoted for Services.

6.4 Requirements for Submission. Each Proposer shall submit one (1) digital copy via e-mail to nancybolt@earthlink.net.

6.5 Signature, Certification of Proposer. Each proposal will be considered to be signed by a representative of the Proposer who is authorized to bind the Proposer to the terms and conditions contained in this RFP and to compliance with the information submitted in the Proposal. Each Proposer submitting a Proposal certifies to both (a) the completeness, veracity, and accuracy of the information provided in the Proposal and (b) the authority of the individual whose name appears on the Proposal to bind the Proposer to the terms and conditions set forth in this RFP

6.6 Deadline for Proposals. The proposal must be received at the address, nancybolt@earthlink.net no later than 5:00 p.m., Mountain Standard Time on Monday, February 26, 2008. Any Proposal received after EXPIRATION OF the DEADLINE will be immediately disqualified FROM CONSIDERATION, and the Proposer will be so notified.

6.7 Risk of Loss, Damage, Delay. Proposer acknowledges and agrees to release and hold harmless the Contractor from and against all claims, liability, damages, and costs, including court costs and attorneys' fees, arising out of or pursuant to delivery of the Proposal or failure to deliver the Proposal.

6.8 Ownership of Proposals. All Proposals become the physical property of the Contractor upon receipt.

6.9 Costs of Participation. The Contractor specifically disclaims responsibility and/or liability for all costs, expenses, or claims related to or arising out of the Proposers participation in this RFP process, including but not limited to costs incurred because of preparing, copying, shipping, presenting, and/or clarifying the Proposal and the information relevant to the Proposal.

6.10 Compliance with Applicable Laws, Regulations, Ordinances, Contractor Policies and Procedures. By submitting a Proposal, the Proposer agrees to and shall comply with all applicable local, state and federal laws and regulations.

6.11 Contractor's Right to Reject. This RFP does not commit the Contractor to select a Proposer or to award a Contract to any Proposer. The Contractor reserves the right to accept or reject, in whole or in part, any Proposal it receives pursuant to this RFP.

6.12 Rescission of Proposal. A Proposal can be withdrawn from consideration at any time after contacting Nancy Bolt at (303)642-0338 OR sending a message to nancybolt@earthlink.net

6.13 Requests for Clarification. The Contractor reserves the right to request clarification of any information contained in a Proposal.

6.14 Questions by Proposers. The deadline for questions submitted by Proposers is February 19, 2008. The Contractor will accept no questions after this date. Questions must be submitted by email and sent to nancybolt@earthlink.net. Proposers considering submitting a response to this RFP who would like to receive answers to any questions asked should send an email to Nancy Bolt asking to receive these answers. Questions will be answered as soon as they arrive and sent to all who asked to be notified.

6.15 Addenda to the RFP. Each Proposer will be provided with copies of Contractor-approved addenda, including amendments to the RFP, if and as necessary, as determined by the Contractor. Proposers will, in turn, be allowed time to revise or supply additional information in response to such addenda.

6.16 Communications with Contractor Personnel. Except as provided in this RFP and as is otherwise necessary for the conduct of ongoing Contractor business operations, Proposers are expressly and absolutely prohibited from engaging in communications with Contractor personnel who are involved in any manner in the review and/or evaluation of the Proposals; selection of an Proposer; and/or negotiations or formalization of a Contract.

6.17 Evaluation of Proposals. The Project Directors shall serve as the Selection Committee and will review Proposals in accordance with the procedures and criteria set forth in this RFP. Proposals that are (i) incomplete, (ii) not in the required format, or (iii) otherwise non-compliant, in whole or in part, with any of the requirements set forth in this RFP may be disqualified by the Contractor and will not be evaluated.

6.18 Proposer Presentations. Proposers may be invited to present their program/service to the Project Directors, who will establish the format, time, date and location for presentations.

SECTION SEVEN - EVALUATION, SELECTION, AWARD

7.1 Discussions with Proposers. The Contractor may conduct discussions and/or negotiations with any Proposer that appears to be eligible for award pursuant to the selection criteria set forth in this RFP. In conducting discussions and/or negotiations, the Contractor will not disclose information derived from Proposals submitted by competing Proposers, except as and if law requires disclosure.

7.2 Selection of Proposer. The Proposer selected for award will be the Proposer whose Proposal, as presented in response to this RFP and as determined by the Contractor in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth in Section 5.5, to be the most advantageous to the Contractor. Proposers acknowledge that the Contractor is not bound to accept the lowest-priced Proposal.

7.3 Evaluation of Proposals. The Directors will evaluate the proposals. Submission of a Proposal indicates the Proposers acceptance of the evaluation process set forth in this RFP and the Proposers acknowledgement that subjective judgments must be made by the Contractor about the evaluation process.

7.4 Criteria for Evaluation. Evaluation of Proposals and award to the Selected Proposer will be based on the following factors.

- Quality, thoroughness, and clarity of Proposal
- Demonstrated ability of the Proposal's work plan to fulfill current and predicted Contractor needs
- Proposer's experience with similar projects
- Rates for Services quoted

7.5 Consideration of Additional Information. The Contractor reserves the right to ask for and consider any additional information deemed beneficial to the Contractor in evaluation of the Proposal

SECTION EIGHT - GENERAL TERMS AND CONDITIONS

The contract between the Proposer and the Contractor shall contain the following provisions, and others satisfactory in form and substance to the Contractor:

8.1 Term. The Contractor anticipates a term of March 15, 2008 to March 1, 2009.

8.2 Termination. The Contract may be sooner terminated as follows:

A. Termination without Cause. In the event the Contractor or the Proposer shall, with or without cause, at any time give to the other at least 60 days advance written notice, the Contract shall terminate on the future date specified in such notice.

B. Mutual Agreement. In the event the Contractor or the Proposer mutually agree in writing, the Contract may be terminated on the terms and date stipulated in the writing.

8.3 Indemnification by the Proposer. The Proposer agrees to and shall indemnify and hold harmless the Contractor and all its members and employees from and against claims arising out of or attorneys' fees and for general conduct, whether based upon Proposer, employment, apparent Proposer, joint venture, partnership, or any other legal theory by which liability is adjudged against Contractor for the acts, intentional acts, omissions, negligence, or gross negligence of the Proposer and/or any personnel or individuals providing Services on behalf of the Contractor pursuant to the Contract. The indemnification obligations set forth in the Contract shall survive termination or expiration of the Contract.

8.4 Right to Inspect. The Contractor retains the right to examine, inspect, audit, and copy, regardless of location, all documents, records, files, data, and information generated or utilized by the Proposer in the performance of the Contract.

APPENDIX A

ISSUES RELATING TO ASSESSMENT IN THE LSSCP Submitted to the LSSCP Advisory Committee By Nancy Bolt January, 2007

There are several issues relating to assessment in the LSSCP. The project timeline calls for assessment to be discussed and decisions made in year 2. However, issues relating to assessment impact the competencies, the policies and procedures and the field tests. There is funding in the budget in year 2 to employ an assessment expert to assist in determining resolution to these issues.

This paper will present an overview of the assessment issues in preparation for employing the assessment expert.

Definitions

Certification (from the National Organization of Competency Assurance)

“The certification of specialized skill-sets affirms a knowledge and experience base for practitioners in a particular field, their employers, and the public at large. Certification represents a declaration of a particular individual’s professional competence. Certification enhances the employability and career advancement of the individual practitioner or employee.”

Assessment

Assessment is determining if the participants in LSSCP have met (achieved?) the competencies. There are multiple ways described in the literature to assess learning. The most common are testing, observation, portfolios, coursework and evaluation of projects relating to the competencies.

This paper will discuss four possible assessment approaches:

1. Assessment of the learning by participants in courses, workshops, and learning events provided by approved providers
2. Individual assessment of participants’ achievement of competencies whether they achieved the competencies via new learning events or by demonstrating past learning
3. Assessment based on review of individual achievement or passing a national test
4. A combination of assessment approaches

Purpose of assessment

The purpose of assessment is to establish a valid, reliable, and consistent method of determining if participants in LSSCP have met the competencies. One of our reasons for establishing LSSCP is to provide a consistent understanding of the role of LSS in public and academic libraries and also to assure (but not guarantee) potential employers that LSS certified by ALA actually can perform as described in the competency areas.

The only way to provide that assurance is through a valid assessment.

Assessment approaches

Approve providers

This approach would be very similar to what the Certified Public Library Administrator Program (CPLA; www.ala-apa.org/certification/cplaproviders.html) is already doing. The CPLA program is managed by an affiliate of the American Library Association, the American Library Association-Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA). ALA-APA would also manage LSSCP once the program has been finalized and approved by ALA. The providers are a proxy for ALA-APA doing the assessment of each individual participant. In applying for approval to be a provider, the providers indicate the following:

- the curriculum so that the CPLA review committee has tangible evidence to verify that the curriculum teaches all the competencies in a competency area
- the evaluation that allows the candidates to demonstrate how they meet the competencies
- resumes of the course instructors to demonstrate their ability to teach and experience with the subject matter

The actual degree of detail desired in an application from a provider (assignments, teachers/presenters, course purpose and philosophy) would have to be determined.

In order to be successful in obtaining approval, providers would have to understand the competency areas and competencies, as well as project evaluation preferences. Are the competencies as currently written specific enough that it will be clear to a provider what must be taught/learned? Does LSSCP prefer a specific type of evaluation; for example, portfolios or demonstrations over a paper test? Are some competencies more suitable for a certain method of assessment?

Once a participant has taken a learning event in a competency area, either the provider or the participant would have to send information to ALA-APA indicating successful achievement of the competencies. If it is the participant who sends this to ALA-APA, the provider would need to give some secure evidence to the participant that can be trusted by ALA-APA that the achievement actually occurred.

Approving providers may provide a funding stream for ALA-APA.

Individual assessment of individuals' achievement of the competencies

In this approach, no providers would be approved. Each individual participant would be expected to take courses or learning events to achieve the competencies or demonstrate that they already have the required knowledge, ability and skills through past learning experiences at work.

Not approving providers

ALA-APA can forego approving providers. In this scenario, ALA-APA would develop a method of assessing if participants achieved the competencies. In this method, participants would need to be well-informed and clear about what is required to achieve a competency since ALA-APA staff and volunteers (committee members) would be evaluating whether any provider submitted has imparted the learning required, based on participant-submitted documentation..

Assessing prior experiential learning

Many LSS have indicated a desire to demonstrate that they are already competent based on prior experiential learning. Susan Simosko in *Assessing Learning* makes the point that people should not receive credit for past experience but for learning that comes from that experience. She calls this experiential learning and defines it that “experience often leads to learning and the learning to understanding. From understanding comes the ability to generalize and from that comes insight.... Experiential learning is defined as learning in which the learner is in direct contact with the realities being studied or practiced to achieve a level of competence in a particular skill or knowledge domain.” Paul Pottinger and Joan Goldsmith, editors of *Defining and Measuring Competence*, define this as “the professional abilities to apply knowledge in the context of specific tasks and situations and to integrate

knowledge, skills, and judgment in the many complex processes required on the job.” Demonstration of experiential learning should be comparable and as rigorous as taking a course in the same subject area.

One approach to this demonstration would be through participants submitting portfolios. For this approach to be successful, the project would have to be very clear on its expectations for participants in demonstrating the competencies.

One method adapted from David Kolb’s “experiential learning” model would involve four aspects:

- 1) Indication of past experience in the competency area
- 2) Reflective observation on the learning from that experience
- 3) Reporting current research on new trends in the competency area
- 4) Examples of possible future applications in the competency area

Simosko also points out the difficulties of doing these individual assessments. “What one hopes for in any evaluation is that groups of experts can agree to the criteria being set in the assessment process, and that there will be consistency among experts making independent judgments about those criteria.”

Thus, the process to allow participants to prove that they have achieved the competencies would require

- explicit description of the learning outcomes expected for the credit (Are our competencies sufficiently detailed?)
- how that learning can be demonstrated
- explicit articulation of criteria to be used in evaluating the work (what constitutes a minimally acceptable response)
- training of the evaluators to insure consistency and fairness

Assessing individual’s achievements toward the competencies may be a revenue stream for ALA-APA.

A National Test

A national test could be developed and then administered via a secure website by ALA-APA, on paper facilitated by proctors at established locations or administered on-line or in print by an external organization such as the National Center for Competency Testing. The National Organization of Competency Assurance specializes in helping organizations and associations develop a national certification program that meets standards for certification programs. They also certify that certification programs meet these standards.

The national test could test all or some aspects of every competency area. Participants, particularly initially, would be responsible for preparing for the test by taking courses or reading, relying on past experience. ALA-APA might later provide study materials for participants.

A national test requires a cadre of experts willing to develop a sufficient number of items for a test bank. Also, a test must be psychometrically sound, requiring an additional expert to validate the test, questions and delivery.

Administering the test or the participant’s taking of the test may be a funding stream for ALA-APA.

Combining approaches

It would also be possible to combine some of the approaches outlined above. For example, ALA-APA could approve providers and also allow for assessment of individual achievement of the competencies where the participant wished to demonstrate learning from past work experiences.

National tests could cover only some of the competency areas. Some competency areas could be achieved through approved providers or individual assessment.

In all of these approaches, participants will need extensive guidance to help them decide which learning events to take, how to demonstrate their learning, and or how to prepare for a national test. Staff, volunteers and providers will also need to understand how to objectively, efficiently and effectively manage their roles in this complex program.

For more information, contact:

Library Support Staff Certification Program
American Library Association
c/o ALA-APA
50 East Huron, Chicago, IL 60611
312-280-2424
www.ala-apa.org/certification/supportstaff.html

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