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**Recruitment**

## **The World Is Changing: Why Aren't We? Recruiting Minorities to Librarianship (v1n4, April 2004)**

**By Jenifer Grady and Tracie Hall**

Few would argue that there is a need to recruit into the field of librarianship, at all levels. Several sources report the dearth of library workers, such as the 2001 survey conducted by [ALA's Office for Human Resource Development and Recruitment \(HRDR\)](#).<sup>1</sup> Respondents, members of the [Library Administration and Management Association \(LAMA\)](#) cited difficulty in filling positions in technical services, children's/youth services, and managers. In the space given for comments, recruitment of diverse candidates was one clear theme. Increasing diversity in the ranks of the profession is of critical concern. Data collected over the last decade indicates that nearly 9 of 10 public, academic, and school librarians are White ([ALA Office for Research and Statistics](#), 1998; National Center for Education Statistics, 1993-94). In 1991, racial and ethnic minorities comprised only 9% or 344 of the 4,032 graduates receiving accredited MLIS degrees. In 2001, they accounted for less than 13% or 504 of the 4,109 MLIS degrees awarded ([ALISE Library and Information Science Education Statistical Report](#)) an increase that woefully fails to parallel the combined 152% growth increase experienced by these populations between 1990 and 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census). It is clear that more assertive measures are called for within librarianship. Library support staff seems to be much more representative than the librarian ranks.

There is growing evidence of higher than average attrition among ethnic minorities in the librarianship due to limited opportunities for professional mobility and access to positions of leadership (Jones, 2003; Reese and Hawkins, 1999). In March, Tracie Hall, Director of [ALA's Office for Diversity](#), received startling statistics detailing the dwindling numbers of minority librarians in Kentucky. In 1980, there were 160 African-American librarians in Kentucky. Today there are less than 25. Recruitment without retention is folly, which will be discussed in a future issue of *Library Worklife*. The Census Bureau reported that the number of librarians overall diminished by more than three percent (3%) from 1990 to 2000, but for African-Americans, the number was nearly twenty-seven percent (26.7%). For Native-Americans, the drop from 904 to 700 represented a loss of almost twenty-three percent (22.6%). Rather than tangibly multiplying the numbers of librarians of color, existing minority recruitment and education programs have simply provided for the replacement of retirees and those leaving the profession prematurely.

### **Why Is This Important?**

Demographers predict that by the year 2050, the United States will become a "nation of minorities" (U.S. Bureau of the Census). Population increases among African-Americans and Native-Americans, and particularly among Asian Pacific-Islanders and Latino/Hispanics are projected to result in a society more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than ever before.

Why it is important to have profession that has representation from all ethnicities, nationalities, and cultures? Why should library workers be reflective of the communities they serve and the world at

large? For some, that is reason enough, that the profession should look like and change like the demographics of the country. Others posit more concrete benefits. ALA is committed to raising awareness about diversity as one of its key action areas. Tracie Hall is one of proponents for increasing the number of diverse candidates in the profession. If libraries are to remain relevant, exceed existing capacities, predict and provide new service areas, they must work to build a workforce reflective of our shifting demographics. This is important for understanding how individual and intermingling forces like values, familial relationships, sociology, politics, economics, education, culture influence minority community participation in library programs. Besides obvious language differences, there may be cognitive and communication styles that are unique to a cultural group and relevant in library contexts.

There is also the concern of ensuring that minority librarians are afforded the same comfort level as their non-minority peers. There are many who wish to have mentorship and collegial relationships with librarians of color that will allow them to discuss issues that are particular to their minority experience in the profession. Teresa Y. Neely, co-editor of *In Our Own Voices: the Changing Face of Librarianship*, said the book of testimonials was conceptualized because:

We, the new breed of librarians, who happen to be librarians of color, tentatively enter graduate school and even more tentatively enter the profession, fighting our own private demons on the job and off. A number of new librarians are fortunate enough to have important mentors and role models before entering the profession and other receive mentoring while in school, and/or while in the first professional position. Still others have no mentors at all, and that is a tragedy. This volume is our Olive Branch, a tool that can be used to bridge the distances between classmates, professors, and colleagues; to reaffirm that they are not the only ones who are having difficulties and will not be the last.

Neely goes on to say that "library administrators, personnel librarians, department heads, search committees, and anyone with a hand or interest in the decision-making process to recruit, take note [of this book]."

## What Is Being Done?

There are recruitment programs created by libraries, library schools, and associations across the country that target audiences at different age and educational levels. These programs offer a broad range of activities and some incorporate several components, such as giving interested candidates an opportunity to work in libraries, for a day or several years, scholarships, or attendance at conferences. For example, Philadelphia Free Library begins its recruitment with teenagers who are trained and paid to help students attending the **LEAP after school program**. **Chicago Multi-type Library System** invites Chicago high school students from predominantly minority schools for a Job Shadow Day, through Junior Achievement. It's goal is to "demystify the profession and dispel stereotypes," according to Veronda J. Pitchford, CMLS Assistant Director. Oberlin College (OH) received an Institute of Museum and Library Services grant to establish a **Diversity Intern Program** to attract undergraduates into the profession. The **Louisiana Library Association** offers a scholarship for students attending library school at Louisiana State University. The State University of New York at Buffalo library offers a **two-year post** in the academic library for recent MLS graduates.

The ALA Office for Diversity is one of many forces working to bring racial and ethnic representation in librarianship into alignment with the changing face of the American public. Hall manages the **Spectrum Initiative**. Launched in 1997 by the American Library Association, the Spectrum Initiative disseminated its first scholarships the following year. Originally intended to last only three years, the Initiative exceeded early targets in recruiting students and raising diversity awareness in library schools and librarianship as a whole. Just two years after it had dispensed its first scholarships, noted library educator and researcher, Kathleen de la Peña McCook would write, "new energy fueled by the Spectrum Initiative has been infused into the thinking about the kind of profession librarianship needs to become." Two hundred and fifty-four scholars have gained valuable leadership and research skills that many are now putting to use in managerial positions in libraries. In 2004, the ALA Office for Diversity launched the "Grow Your Own" campaign, an effort aimed at

targeted recruitment of students and library support professionals on college campuses serving significant populations of ethnic and racial minorities. Inaugural co-chairs of this campaign are Khafre Abif, Columbus Public Library, who will direct the campaign's recruitment efforts at Historically Black Colleges and Universities; John Ayala, Fullerton College Library, who will oversee the Hispanic Serving Institutions recruitment efforts; Joy Chase, Evergreen Valley College Library, who will focus on recruitment of Asian Pacific Islanders, and Richenda Wilkinson, Oregon State University, Valley Library, who will lead tribal college recruitment efforts.

## What Can Be Done?

Gregory L. Reese and Ernestine L. Hawkins are two advocates who told the profession to Stop Talking, Start Doing in their book, published in 1999. They suggest small steps as well as major initiatives that libraries can take. Library professionals and libraries can both embark on a recruitment effort, since this can be an individual as well as an institutional commitment.

Once the commitment is made, the next steps are either who or how to recruit. For a public library, you might recruit minority junior or high school students who frequent the library. Reach out to them, noticing those who show an interest in reading, teaching others, or who have great leadership and organizational skills. Be purposeful and let them know that you see promise in them when you form a club for them, develop a volunteer program, hire them as pages/shelvers, or invite them to local library conferences. In an academic library, your efforts might be targeted towards undergraduates who work in the library, exposing them to how interesting and challenging the field can be and how their majors and minors will benefit them in librarianship, and show them resources for finding library schools and funding. In any library, the conventional wisdom is to look within and "grow your own." There may be minority support staff that would appreciate and take advantage of being encouraged to attain a master's degree in library science.

Your marketing efforts might grow in stages, from one-on-one discussions and mentoring to a full public relations campaign. When marketing to minorities, **Reese and Hawkins caution libraries against believing 5 myths:**

1. Minorities are the same as Caucasians
2. Minorities are homogenous
3. Libraries and library professionals can effectively utilize mass media to reach all minority populations
4. Language isn't important
5. Minorities are only interested in certain careers and services.

It is critical to research the cultures of the people you wish to recruit. It is as important as research the cultures of the people you wish to serve in your communities. The detrimental effects of stereotyping should be obvious to librarians, since they play a role in the reason we must work so hard recruit. Addressing and correcting personally-held negative stereotypes will make your efforts more genuine and make your message more likely to be heard.

As Judith Siess says in her article about **becoming more visible**, get out of the library and go to elementary, junior high and high schools where there are students of color. Make appointments through guidance counselors and teachers to speak to individual classes. Become a mentor. Make presentations across your campus. Volunteer to attend, or even host, job fairs and other career-related events in the community where minorities will be present. If you work at a library school, sponsor a talk with the larger body of support staff on campus.

One of the most important things to remember when working on a recruitment campaign, for anyone, is to **BE EXCITED ABOUT THE PROFESSION!** Your attitude, as well as your words, must convey your enthusiasm and heartfelt desire to bring more people of color into your field of choice.

## Reference

1. [www.ala.org/ala.hrdr/libraryempresources/alarecruitment.htm](http://www.ala.org/ala.hrdr/libraryempresources/alarecruitment.htm).

## Recruitment Tools

- ALA Office for Diversity—Planning for Diversity.
- ALA Office for Human Resource Development and Recruitment—[Careers in Libraries](#).
- Association for College and Research Libraries [Recruitment Page](#).
- Become a Librarian ([Central Jersey Regional Library Cooperative](#)).
- [Ethnic Librarians Library Associations](#).
- Neely, Teresa Y., and Khafre K. Abif, eds. *In Our Own Voices: the Changing Face of Librarianship* Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Pr., 1996.
- Reese, Gregory L., and Ernestine L. Hawkins. *Stop Talking, Start Doing: Attracting People of Color to the Profession*. Chicago: ALA, 1999.

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## Thinking Outside the Hiring “Box” (v2n8, August 2005)

By Julie Todaro

Getting a job in today’s market – in the vast majority of situations - involves an application and interview process. Although most institutions have designed processes bound by guidelines and rules based primarily on federal and state law, there are a wide variety of differences in specific areas of the hiring process. Two major differences include the pre-interview and the interview process. In these hiring areas, institutions and organizations have the opportunity to gather more and, often, specific data on applicants, assess a match of candidates to the open position, and match the organizations needs to the best candidate. Often, interviews can have very unusual aspects and candidates need to be ready for what comes!

### Pre-interview Issues

When discussing these issues in the global rather than local sense those reading this article and possibly taking some advice should realize that there are a number of “givens.” It’s a given that application forms are up to date; ask only legal questions; and, conform to state and federal guidelines. It’s a given that applicants must complete the application form in its entirety prior to being considered an applicant.

### Application Forms

Application forms are typically required of all candidates seeking all levels of positions, but are often too long, provide too little space for sharing information and ask for personal references rather than professional references. Candidates can’t fit their experience in, can’t decide whether they should begin with their newest or their oldest job, don’t know how to explain gaps in employment, aren’t sure which competencies to include and are often unclear on whether or not – if they have issues relating to current or previous employment– they should check “yes” for contacting supervisors. In addition, many applicants are not sure whether or not it is politic or even acceptable to leave gaps in the application form and attach a resume.

### Cover Memos

Applicants are seldom *required* to submit cover memos but may be asked to specifically identify an applicant packet with information that conforms to a standard for easier sorting of applications. Cover memos are often generic and merely provide the identification needed to distinguish packets. Many applicants wish to insert information into the cover letter that gives them an edge and/or sets them apart from other applicants. Cover memos are an opportunity to include information that is not appropriate to place on the application form or is not requested in any part of the hiring process.

### **Portfolios/Ancillary Documents/Documentation**

Although most organizations don't require or even suggest submission of portfolios, ancillary documents or documentation (exclusive of educational transcripts) many applicants use this information to set them apart from other applicants and illustrate their specific match to the organizations needs. What's in a portfolio? Examples that demonstrate competency such as web pages, pathfinders, information literacy assignments, plans, service plans or designs, publicity, books, chapters, or articles written, newspaper articles or columns, grants (without budgets,) videos, CDs, photo albums, database printouts (Excel or Access,) Microsoft PowerPoint presentations (library public relations, budget presentations), annual reports and, if an applicant is new to the field, journal, field experience reports, research papers or assignments that illustrate knowledge or ability.

Ancillary documents and documentation can include certificates of accomplishments, curriculum summaries from coursework, awards notices, and general letters of support. Other documentation – in addition to transcripts – could include test results.

### **Questions and Answers**

Organizations can require applicants to complete answers to questions in advance of interviewing and in various stages within the process and submit the answers as part of the application process. Sample questions - typically sent, answered, and returned prior to a finalized applicant pool - could include simple questions to answer (similar to interview questions) as well as cases or scenarios for applicants to discuss such as:

- Discuss the contemporary mission of the public library in society today.
- What role does the academic library play in the life of the higher education environment?
- What role does the school library play at the building level ...at the district level?
- Why should the special library and information center participate in the client billing process within the business environment?
- Name and briefly discuss three great challenges librarians face in today's (insert one: school, public, academic, special) library.
- How does a community college library differ from a college or university setting?
- What are the various information literacy modes and methods in libraries today?
- Discuss current Patriot Act legislation and it's impact on (all types or pick one) libraries.
- Imagine that two kids are causing trouble in the children's area of the library and their parents are not around/elsewhere in the library. How do you handle the trouble?
- A patron asks to meet with you regarding a book they want removed from the (pick one type of library) collection. What do you do?

Organizations can use these answers to determine initial applicant pools, finalists and the final successful applicant. Although a more stressful approach may include final applicant pool members

receiving these on site and answering them under a pre or post interview timeline, these questions provide great insight to organizations. Most questions don't have a right or wrong answer, instead answers often weed out those who don't want to go to these lengths to apply as well as those that can't write, they offer organizations a demonstration of knowledge of the field, they provide some background to an employee's breadth of knowledge as well as critical thinking and problem solving skills.

## Interview Types

As with other parts of the hiring process, there are a number of "givens" with interview issues. It's a given that interview questions conform to legal federal and state guidelines; that interview schedules be established; that interview committee members are provided with forms to complete for consistency with questions, order, and timing for all applicants; that questions are designed to elicit answers to assess the best applicant match to the organization; and, that questions are current. In addition, any testing done conforms to legal standards including standardized testing for all applicants as well as standardized environments for any testing (exact same amount of time, exact resources such as hardware and software).

While most applicants expect "standard" interviews, that is, one or more employees interviewing individual candidates - interviews can be very diverse. Examples of interviews include:

- One applicant ...one employee/employer from Human Resources rather than the library environment
- One applicant...one employee/employer from the library
- One applicant...individual interviews with individual members within the library organization
- One applicant...an interview with a hiring committee
- One applicant...an interview with any of the combinations mentioned above with a demonstration or documentation such as giving a teaching presentation, giving a storytime, delivering a booktalk, giving a speech, and/or problem solving.
- More than one applicant interviewed by a panel of HR employees
- More than one applicant interviewed by a panel of library employees
- All finalist applicants interviewed by a panel of HR employees
- All finalist applicants interviewed by a panel of library employees
- A phone interview of a single applicant with one or more HR employees
- A phone interview of a single applicant with one or more library employees
- A video one way/audio back with one applicant and one or more HR employees
- A video one way/audio back with one applicant and one or more library employees
- Interviews where applicants demonstrate competencies or are "tested" including personality or learning style testing; knowledge and application of hardware and software testing (library and non-library specific); resource and skills testing such as reference tests, cataloging materials, performing storytimes, delivering reviews, customer service, presenting a budget, or information literacy instruction to individuals and large and small groups.
- Interviews where applicants are placed in a simulation environment; that is, they are actually placed on a busy reference desk or on a busy circulation desk and observed (obviously used

less!).

And, of course, an interview may include a combination of the elements above.

## Getting Ready for the (More Standard and Unusual) Interviews

How should candidates prepare for the job hunt? What do managers look for in the most successful candidates? Any absolute *don'ts*? How *should* candidates prepare for the job hunt?

- Candidates should take every opportunity to ascertain what the organization wants and how the organization will handle the process.
- Read the job ad carefully
- Ask for an expanded job description if the job ad is brief or doesn't answer all of your questions (few do these days!)
- Review the organization's website to see where the library fits within the umbrella organization – if there is one – and then review the library's website. Review the staffing area. Seek any other content on the jobs. Look for an organization chart. Check the list of responsibilities under individual staff pages.
- Applicants should review their resume to see if their resume matches the job and revise if *they* match but their resume doesn't clearly indicate this.
- Applicants should craft an individual and position-specific cover letter.
- Applicants should – if they rise to candidacy status – ask questions such as:
- What is the interview schedule for the day?
- Can I bring a portfolio of information with me? In order to bring enough copies, how many people are involved in the process?
- You have mentioned I will be “making a presentation.” How long will it be? Who is the audience? Can I bring additional handouts? Is it possible to have specific equipment? Shall I bring it? Will I have an opportunity to test it out? *And* “I am bringing my content on a jump drive. Does the computer available to me have a port for this?”

If the applicant is able to, they should visit the library prior to the interview to estimate time for driving, arriving and parking and to take a personal, self-guided tour of the facility and pick up library print materials.

## The Interview

If an applicant is able to prepare based on the recommendations above, they should be ready *but* there are additional things to consider for the typical and unusual interviews.

If any aspect of the interview is “remote” or “virtual, and primarily an audio situation,” applicants should have paper and pencil ready and should create a visual picture of an interview environment with graphics representing each interview committee member with their names. As the applicant answers each question, clarify who is asking the question and focus on the individual mentally or as if they are in the room. This technique of focusing on interviewers, mentioning their names, asking “Did that answer your question, Richard?” will assist applicants in appearing organized and thoughtful.

If applicants find themselves one on a panel of people all interviewing at the same time, they should:

- *Not* be the first to answer always, but be sure to be included
- Be verbally respectful of other panelists by saying things like, "That's a good idea and I would add ..."
- Be an active listener while others are speaking, even though you may be taking notes to assist you in answering.
- Use standard interview techniques such as asking, "Did that answer your question?"
- Watch the time and don't hog the time. You might segue by saying, "I'd like to add to what Geoff said by saying..."
- If applicants find themselves in a video setting, find someone who has experience and can help you with these issues:
  - What you colors and prints should wear since some patters and colors are not complimentary on camera.
  - How to wear your hair so it does not obstruct your expressions or mouth as many watch as well as listen.
  - A reminder to sit up straight and firmly on your jacket or dress.
  - Practice positive body language and avoid crossed arms, waving hands.
  - Rehearse mindful that the camera image is flat and normal pictures are distorted.
- If applicants find themselves in a testing, demonstrating or assessment situation:
  - Make sure all questions you have are answered before the testing and ideally, before you attend the interview/testing portion, so that you can "study" or "refresh" yourself.
  - Ask any clarification questions before the test begins.
  - Be honest in your levels of expertise (as in all aspects of job hunting) so you are not caught testing low on something in which you indicated "you were an expert."
  - Keep track of time - ask for your time limit and adhere to it.

### **What Do Managers Look for in the Most Successful Candidates?**

Obviously, managers are seeking the perfect person for their position. Ideally this sounds great, and there are *many* other things individual managers may say are their critical needs but, at the very least, you need to match yourself to general expectations. Managers are looking for:

- A specific match of your experience and education to the job responsibilities, which can be evidenced in the cover letter, application and resume.
- A reason why you stand out in a field of people who may have similar credentials
- An honest and clear reference check if references are queried
- A "fit" to the existing team
- Evidence of an ability to – in the vast majority of cases – be self-directed once the position is clarified and you are trained for the specific environment

### **Any Absolute *Don'ts*?**

- Don't tell people in the cover letter reasons for applying that have nothing to do with the job such as your spouse or family member is relocating; your parents are sick; you've heard they pay well; you have always wanted to live in their town; you want to retire there, etc.
- Don't speak for others in situations. Don't say in a panel something like "I think all people here would agree..."
- Don't be late for the interview.
- Don't expand or exaggerate what you do or when you did it.
- Don't send a generic cover letter.
- Don't submit an incomplete application and attach a resume and then put "see resume" on sections of the application.
- Don't send a cover letter or any documentation that isn't free of spelling and grammar errors.
- Don't bring just one copy of your documents with you. Do the copying work for them.
- Don't forget – even though it sounds trite – to send a follow up thank you if you have made it to the candidate stage and get an interview!
- Don't forget to be as specific as possible *using their words* from the job ad and job description. Often Human Resources departments screen and they don't know *libraryspeak* (initialisms and acronyms, educational terms, etc.). Be specific and spell things out for the cover letter, application and resume process. They need to clearly see the match between you and the job.

Good luck job hunting and let us know if you make it through the typical and unusual pre-interview and interview process and – using these techniques – you get the job you want!

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We would love to have your **feedback** on these articles!

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