



Wanted: library leaders for the future

Wanted: Proactive, passionate, persistent and pragmatic people to lead the library and information industries forward into the next decade. These positions offer considerable rewards and benefits, including opportunities for influence in your community, interesting and varied career paths, and personal work satisfaction.

Does this sound like you? Does it sound like someone you know? Or someone you would like to be?

Many people have written about the generational change in librarianship and the anticipated leadership shortage expected by the retirement of the Baby Boomers. Today's leaders will be moving on and a new generation of leaders is starting to emerge. But what do the future leaders of our libraries look like? What decisions will they face? I had the opportunity to find out when I was selected for the eighth Aurora Leadership Institute held in February this year.

The Aurora Leadership Institute is a five-day intensive residential experience for people in all types of libraries and associated organisations in Australia and New Zealand. Aurora is held annually in the mountains at Thredbo to help future library leaders to develop their leadership skills and realise their potential. Aurora was first held in 1995 and is modelled on the now-defunct Snowbird Institute. Thirty-two participants are selected each year. As one of 2005 participants, I had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn from the wisdom and experience of the American facilitators, Becky Schreiber and John Shannon, and the eight senior industry leaders who acted as mentors.

Participants in this year's institute came from all areas of Australia and New Zealand, from public, academic and special libraries. Some were managers, some were in charge of teams and some, like me, had been identified by their employers as 'leaders of the future'.

I must admit that I approached Aurora 8 with some trepidation. I did not know what to expect and, while trying to keep an open mind, I was hesitant about the experience. But I soon forgot all about these issues as I became immersed in the activities and learning experiences. We were challenged to explore the environment, take risks, participate in change and to create our vision of the future of libraries. Our mentors provided feedback, which at times was confronting but ultimately encouraging. Over the five days at Aurora, I had to re-evaluate long-held assumptions about myself and my abilities. My perceptions about nature of leadership and the role of leaders were refined.

What do our future leaders look like? From my Aurora experience, I think that our next generation of leaders will have clear personal visions for the future of libraries. They will

be able to identify global, national and local environmental impacts and manage change effectively. They will have a commitment to meeting evolving client and community needs and ensuring equity of access for all. They will be able to form innovative partnerships and to empower their colleagues. They will be actively involved in their professional associations, including ALIA.

So why should new-generation librarians concern themselves with leadership issues? This topic was discussed on the aliaNEWGRAD e-list last year with some contributors suggesting that they did not go to library school to become bosses. Being a leader does not mean that you have to be a manager or supervisor. But as a library professional and ALIA member, I am hopeful that new graduates are concerned about the future of our industry, so that we can continue to be innovative and provide the best possible services to our clients. While I am not a team leader or a manager yet, I have discovered that I can have influence in my workplace and create opportunities to empower myself, my colleagues and my clients.

There are many opportunities for new-generation librarians to develop their leadership skills. Your organisation may offer leadership training or financial support for study or professional development. You may like to volunteer to help at a conference or event in your region. ALIA groups are a great way to become more aware of the wider issues in the industry, outside your immediate workplace, to find mentors and to develop your leadership skills.

The Aurora Leadership Institute is one opportunity for developing leaders. Aurora has challenged me to keep focusing on my end-users, to start looking for new opportunities to inspire and lead others to achieve their best, and to work towards positioning my library as an integral and essential part of its community. Aurora is an intensely personal experience and, for myself, I am sure it will be a significant landmark in my career.

Aurora is presented by ALIA and sponsored by EBSCO Information Services and the National Library of Australia. To find out more, visit the Aurora Foundation website at <http://alia.org.au/aurora/>.

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...gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column coordinator, Kate Watson, k.watson@cqu.edu.au.



Participants at the 2005 Aurora Leadership Institute
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