

Taking control of PD

Richard Sayers AFALIA, CAVAL Collaborative Solutions

Finding money and time for professional development (PD) is a perennial problem in libraries. Budgets are tight, competing priorities sap our time and energy, and staff levels are rarely better than adequate! There's also the problem of finding the right PD opportunities when and where we need them.

What's to be done? Individually and as libraries we can do much to take control of PD and make it work for us.

1. Accept responsibility for identifying PD needs

At a practical level we need to accept more responsibility for our own PD: as individuals and libraries. As professionals we need to be more proactive in identifying our PD needs and seeking appropriate ways to meet them. We need to be better at communicating these needs to supervisors. Managers are typically 'surprise averse' and more likely to approve PD that has been foreshadowed as an emerging issue or need.

2. Plan ahead and think outside the job

Across the profession there needs to be more attention to group training needs analysis on one hand and individual career planning on the other. Much of the PD offered to library workers in Australia appears to be accessed on an ad hoc and opportunistic basis. This has two effects in the workplace: one, to diminish the overall purchasing power of every dollar spent on PD, and two, to implicitly devalue the training or workplace learning undertaken. Better forward planning is needed.

Do you have a personal career or PD plan? If not, the ALIA Career Development Kit provides a useful structure and is free to members. Mentors and senior colleagues may also be useful sources of inspiration and guidance. Start your planning well before the annual budget cycle or financial year and communicate clear PD objectives to your supervisor for the year ahead. Make sure they know what's in it for them, and the organisation. Contact training organisations and ask questions about their courses. Use this information to match courses with objectives and develop a personal training plan that you can sell to your supervisor.

Be prepared also to think outside the confines of the job. If your supervisor remains unconvinced of a specific need, consider alternatives – for example, attendance at training in your time and at your own expense. ALIA has made this option more attractive by negotiating discounts for members with various training providers. It also shows genuine

professional commitment and may lead to other opportunities within the organisation.

3. Sell your commitment to PD and its outcomes

Communicating our PD needs to supervisors is an ideal time to emphasise our personal commitment to professional best practice. We should also be able to demonstrate how this commitment translates into better outcomes for the organisation. How much time and money for example has been saved for the organisation through skilful professional library practice? What is the organisation's return on investment? Lives may not be on the line, but our professional contributions to Australian business and society are still very significant and we need to show that we take our professional practice seriously.

At an operational level, we also need to appreciate the importance of demonstrating the direct benefits of PD to our colleagues, supervisors and clients. How has the PD experience improved our skill level, our knowledge, or even our motivation and professional networks?

4. Become a Certified Practitioner

The ALIA PD scheme provides members with a tangible means by which to demonstrate their commitment to professional best practice. The Certified Practitioner (CP) certificate and post-nominal letters are useful workplace reminders that we are on top of our game professionally, and can be trusted to deliver the best possible outcomes for clients.

5. Find greater strength (and choice) in numbers

If the price or availability of PD is causing problems, consider the formation of regional or sector-based consortia to negotiate with recognised training providers. The Queensland Libraries Training Consortium has been operating successfully for three years and includes members from Queensland Government, TAFE and law libraries. In addition to working in partnership with CAVAL to provide members with discounts on courses, the consortium facilitates customised programs and provides useful feedback on training needs and trends. Similar models are possible in other states and regions of Australia, and overseas.

6. Choose to become part of the solution

It is often difficult to find trainers in highly specialised areas of library practice such as cataloguing. If you have expertise in a particular area of practice and enjoy a challenge, you might consider becoming a casual trainer and sharing

this knowledge with others. Cataloguing trainers are a particularly scarce commodity at present and yet demand for cataloguing and metadata-related training continues to grow. In the recent 2006 CAVAL Training Needs Survey just over 50 per cent of respondents identified a need for training in cataloguing and classification.

If you do decide to share your expertise with others, consider investing first in a nationally accredited Certificate IV in Training and Assessment. It will be useful PD in its own right, and will give you the confidence and skills to present quality PD programs to others.

7. Consider PD as remuneration

Finally, don't be afraid to negotiate PD into contracts and workplace agreements. Generations X and Y are renowned for thinking one or two jobs ahead and keeping their options open. Their learning style is typically 'motivated by the ability to enhance their marketability and personal skills'. For many, PD forms a useful and potentially influential part of their overall remuneration package. *

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