Building Our Future: The Public Library Leadership Fellows Program

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As the 21st Century unfolds, public libraries and their leaders will face unique issues that warrant focused thought, research, discussion and visioning. The Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC), in partnership with the iSchool Institute, University of Toronto is seeking to help prepare leaders with the launch of the new executive Public Library Leadership Fellows (PLLF) program. The goal of the PLLF program is to contribute to the vitality and success of public libraries and the diverse communities they serve by positioning public library professionals to be proactive, effective leaders in the global information environment. The Public Library Leadership Fellows program (PLLF) is about the future of public libraries and the changing communities they serve.

The program will feature self-assessment, discussion, analysis and exploration. Sponsoring public library CEOs, iSchool Institute instructors and guests, and library leaders will facilitate a program designed to integrate the fellows' individual learning goals with the "big picture" issues that will affect public libraries and their future leaders. PLLF will provide a framework for a continuing relationship between the academic and the public library sector that holds the potential to inform and stimulate research.

Why this program has been developed

Leadership potential and management skills were identified as two of the most important and difficult to fulfill requirements identified by employers in the "8Rs" report published in 2004 and at the Human Resources Summit convened by the Canadian Library Association in 2008. Since the release of the 2008 Summit report, the situation has become critical, as the majority of public library Chief Executive Officers and senior administrators will be at retirement age within the next 5 years. The 8Rs report recommended a number of strategies, including mentorship programs and leadership opportunities. Though much progress has been made, and the highly effective Northern Exposure to Leadership (NELI) program continues to work with high-potential new librarians, these recommendations have yet to be implemented in a comprehensive manner. A need remains for a national program for mid-career leaders who have degrees in library science and experience in management. Current Chief Executive Officers have a wealth of insight and experience to share, but the public library community still needs to tap this asset through organized high-impact mentorship.
opportunities, particularly at the executive level. The PLLF will facilitate this mentorship as well as provide participants with focused professional development and networking opportunities.

PLLF is based on two successful programs designed to prepare the next generation of library leaders: the Association of Research Libraries' Research Library Leadership Fellows (RLLF) Program and the Urban Libraries Council Executive Leadership Institute (ELI). Both programs focus on strengthening the participating fellows' understanding of core strategic challenges and issues facing senior library leaders and the need to address the demand for a new generation of well-prepared executive leaders.

The Public Library Leadership Fellows program is a unique strategy to address this unique circumstance. The PLLF program is designed as an eighteen month program, including a combination of instructional hours, webinars, public library site visits and conference opportunities. The program is designed both to develop a network amongst a new generation of library leaders and to link leaders across North America in meaningful dialogue and action in the development of the future of Canadian public libraries. The program has been designed in partnership with the chief librarians of participating institutions, academic partner University of Toronto iSchool, the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC), and an advisory team comprised of public library leaders and University of Toronto faculty. With the guidance and support of an advisory committee comprised of Sandra Singh (Vancouver Public Library), Wendy Newman (University of Toronto) Jefferson Gilbert (CULC) and Ken Roberts (Hamilton Public Library), an 18-month certificate program has been developed that combines classroom work and case studies with site visits at 'best practice' public library systems and their leaders. The Public Library Leaders Fellows program will launch in the fall of 2012.

Historically, the research capacity of public libraries has been limited by both human and financial resources. The PLLF program will provide an exceptional opportunity to utilize the research skills of the selected cohort to work collaboratively with academic counterparts to explore research opportunities into the current and future state of public libraries in North America.

**Program Structure**

The program will combine instructional hours, field work (in the form of site visits) and back-at-office work. The site visits will focus on actual library case studies and require participants' understanding of context and options for solutions. The program will concentrate on identified areas of focus to extend the professional skill and experience base of the participants. These themes, addressing essential areas of leadership knowledge and skill, will be integral to the curriculum, including the site visits, webinars and evaluation.

This part-time professional certificate program is designed for working professionals looking to enhance their knowledge and professional skills. By the end of the program the participant will be able to:
- Reflect constructively on the nature of leadership and the role of leaders in the building of organizational capacity and resilience;
- Understand the role of leaders in shaping and engaging teams that advance institutional vision and mission and the knowledge to use that understanding effectively;
- Identify key concepts, directions, and expert resources in finance, human resources, facilities, collections, partnerships, community development, and technology;
- Develop and manage effective relationships and collaborations with boards and governments;
- Develop and manage relationships and partnerships with staff, community, partners, and members, and foster appreciation of value, benefits and risks of strategic initiatives;
- Identify and understand their personal leadership strengths, their growth and mentoring needs, and their potential and responsibility to mentor others;
- Knowledgeably engage in communities of practice with other professionals and research leaders.

Based primarily in Canada, the program provides an opportunity to showcase leading Canadian public libraries to librarians from across North America. The program is designed to be an excellent networking and learning opportunity for all participants including Canadians working in the United States who are looking at returning to Canada. For more information about the program, visit CULC website at http://www.culc.ca/knowledge/pllfprograms/.

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**Works Cited**


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