

**ALA SSIRT
TASK FORCE ON CAREER LADDERS
(few opportunities for advancement)**

JUNE, 1999

ALA SSIRT
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Final report
submitted by Dorothy Morgan

CHARGE

The charge of the task force on Career Ladders (few opportunities for advancement) is to determine how the SSIRT Executive Board can address this issue and determine the most effective solutions that can be implemented. The Executive Board of the Support Staff Interests Round Table would like the task force to develop a Statement of Needs, to develop an Action Plan of Implementable Solutions to Meet the Needs and a Timetable for Implementation of the Solutions identified by the task force.

BACKGROUND

The issue of Career Ladders (few opportunities for advancement) was ranked number one by library support staff in a survey which was sent out in 1997 by the SSIRT Strategic Planning Process Committee.

The issue of Career Ladders may include, but is not limited to, basic training programs, education, career development, classification, job duties and responsibilities.

Included as Attachment 2, is an issue paper on Advancement for Support Staff which resulted from a World Book-ALA Goal Award Project on Library Support Staff in 1990. This information is being provided as background information.

COMPOSITION

The Task Force on Career Ladders (few opportunities for advancement) was composed of seven individuals including a liaison from the SSIRT Executive Board. The Chair of the Task Force was recommended by the Chair of the Strategic Planning Process Committee, with final approval by the SSIRT Executive Board.

SCHEDULE

The Task Force on Career Ladders (few opportunities for advancement) will deliver the following reports to the SSIRT Executive Board:

- ☞ A written interim report at the membership meeting of SSIRT at the 1998 ALA Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. in June, 1998.
- ☞ A written progress report at the business meeting of SSIRT at the 1999 ALA Midwinter Conference in Philadelphia, PA in January, 1999.
- ☞ A written final report at the membership meeting of SSIRT at the 1999 ALA Annual conference in New Orleans, LA in June, 1999.

THE PROCESS

The committee agreed, given the recommended time frame and limited resources, that it would have to conduct most of its business online.

During November and December, 1998, the committee introduced themselves and established groundrules and expectations. January and February were spent brainstorming.

At the end of February, Marilyn Meadows requested a summary of our discussions for the SSIRT newsletter. We had progressed quite well with this issue and were eager to send the information collected.

I was not able to attend ALA Mid-Winter so an interim report was given by Paulette Feld. Even though the committee was presented with additional time to complete its charge, our intention was to finish by ALA's Annual Conference.

By March 1, the committee was able to review a preliminary draft report. In March and April, interestingly enough, a discussion concerning career advancement occurred on Libsup-L. Some of the "List Opinions" are included in this report because the committee felt this information could assist SSIRT in the development of implementable solutions.

The final draft was written May 1, 1999.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Per Roberts' Dictionary of Industrial Relations, 4th ed. (Harold S. Roberts, Bureau of National affairs, Washington DC, 1994)

Career ladder is comprised of " jobs which make up a line of progression from an entry level to a targeted position.... The construction of a career ladder includes identification of promotion paths and the establishment of criteria for job progress and promotion. Career ladders are considered useful in establishing the organization's policy in equal opportunity matters, the specification's of organizational responsibilities, clarification of individual responsibilities, and the bases for administration of the promotion program."

Webster's Dictionary definition of career: "a course of continued progress" or "a profession for which one undergoes special training and which is undertaken as a permanent calling."

Webster's Dictionary definition of a job is "an activity performed in exchange for payment especially one performed regularly as one's trade occupation or profession."

After review of the definitions, we determined that it was important to note the difference between job evaluation and the assignment of ranks and associated pay. To stay in the same job and advance in rank and pay sounds like a seniority system, not a career ladder.

During the course of this discussion, it was also important to focus on how people felt about the term "career" before we could move on to the few opportunities that are offered to support staff for career ladder advancement.

There are two ways of looking at your job that are critical to the division between a job and a career. One person looks at their work and wants to do "only" the tasks they are assigned. This person performs the job well, but that is all. On the other hand, someone else may take the same job and is motivated to search for ways to improve job performance and work conditions. These people are willing to speak up when they have an idea even though it may be difficult. To the motivated employee, their job **is** their career.

SUMMARY

While working on this report it was clear that the following issues identified in the national survey as needing the highest priorities all played an interdependent role:

1. Career Ladders (few opportunities for advancement)
2. Compensation not appropriate to level of education
3. Access to continuing education and training opportunities

The Task Force on Career Ladders (few opportunities for advancement) has identified the following points that we would like addressed by SSIRT.

Any career ladder program proposed should emphasize the individual's need to take control of his or her career, not leave it to the institution. Careers will happen when we have a mechanism in place by which we can quantify our qualifications (certification) and progress (career ladders). We will have careers when our bosses recognize that to do our work well we need more than on-the-job training given second and third hand by someone who attended a workshop and has photocopies of the handouts to share. We will have careers when we recognize that we need to take responsibility for our own progress by reading the journals of the profession and supporting those groups that do work to advance the standards of our profession. We will have careers when we care that the standards of our profession are upheld no matter what. We will have a career when we are paid a living wage.

Career development programs should be encouraged in state and national forums to insure that the individual recognizes their skills, particularly those that are transferable. Skills are not labeled appropriately and opportunities for advancement are missed. Advancement means looking at your current position and planning for the future. For some a career ladder is a mind set. It's how you look at yourself and your work.

Career development shifts the responsibility to the individual and away from the organization. Library organizations need to recognize their obligations towards employees at all levels in the organization. These include:

- fair and equitable job analysis and evaluation
- opportunities for advancement and use of skills
- fair pay scales
- opportunities for skill development and promotion

STATEMENT OF NEEDS

- Opportunities to identify skills and competencies that can lead to advancement in areas of library services for which one may be suited or has an interest in.
- Opportunities to find out ways we can harness our skills and personality traits toward the types of libraries (ie. public, academic, special libraries, etc.) and areas of library service for which each of us feels best-suited: serials, cataloging, children's services, interlibrary loan, circulation, computers, or whatever.
- Opportunities to develop skills in order to advance into higher-level paraprofessional work (eg. supervisory, assisting with reference or cataloging, etc.)
- Good educational or job-training programs by which to gain these skills (especially alternatives to library technician training programs, since these are difficult to come by).
- Educational or job-training programs not just specific to a particular job. Training represents the employer's investment in the individual. Some training should be in transferable skills valued by libraries and other employers.
- Identification of issues that have a special potential to bring librarians and paraprofessionals closer together. For example, library assistants can be on library committees helping with activities such as library fundraising and outreach programs. These projects speak directly to sustaining the library as a vital institution in the community. They provide potential opportunities for paraprofessionals to contribute to their community knowledge and contacts in a way that does not rely on an MLS.
- Sources for job-leads
- Evaluation of job classifications based on job analysis and job evaluation. We need more education on these various programs that determine and define pay and often include promotion ladders. We need to know how these programs work for and against library workers.

ACTION PLAN

Without sufficient data, we realize that some of these needs can not be determined easily for all libraries on a national level. Even statewide will be problematic. We must emphasize also that a collaborative effort must be made to involve other national and state forums.

2000-2001

❖ Define the difference between training and development. ALA/SSIRT should define, research or ask another ALA Committee or Section to define.

2000-2001

❖ Define the library's responsibility to develop the employee at all levels of the organization.

2000-2001

❖ Define the value of education to the employee and the library, both library education and non-library education.

2000-2002

❖ Identify competencies for library support staff positions in different types of libraries, at different levels, in different specialty tracks.

❖ Identify experts we can call on to educate us on these issues.

Educators could provide instruction or course work that may be useful in library paraprofessional work (eg. computer skills such as HTML).

❖ Sponsor forums and events to educate the profession.

SSIRT could hold focus groups at ALA annual meetings and invite paraprofessionals in higher level jobs to talk about their background, what skills they have, how they got them, and what assistance the library or supervisor was in this process. Are there other sources to get these skills? Library paraprofessionals who are advanced in their fields would be willing to share their educational and job background, and career decisions made along the way.

❖ Experienced librarians and administrators could be consulted regarding their library's mission and vision and how paraprofessionals can assist in fulfilling the overall goals of their library systems.

❖ Examine state certification programs to see if any address these issues.

Action Plan continued

2000-2002

- ❖ Develop a voluntary certification program that provides training on various competencies for a basic level in four areas (Philosophy, Public Services, Technical Services, and Technology).

The state support staff organizations or library associations may be able to work with library organizations and systems to offer this.

Certification provides a common, quality program on the basics; a second piece "Career Renewal" will provide guidance for self-directed specialty studies, such as the Generalist, Management of the small or one person library, Reader's advisory, Reference, Childrens' Services, Preservation, Technology/Systems, etc. (This model is being implemented in Minnesota.)

- ❖ Select sample libraries and study job ladders, job requirements.

The following items should be conducted on an on-going basis:

2000 -

- ❖ Strong discussions and presentations about the nuts-and-bolts of library issues.

Issues about things such as cataloging trends, "mainstream" library issues like censorship and the "Net". Policy-making and administrative issues are of interest to library paraprofessionals because while we seldom shape these things, we are very affected by the end results in terms of not only obvious things such as pay and job-security, but also in terms of the type of work we do, how our organizations (and by extension, our jobs) are perceived by the public, and how we feel about supporting the philosophy of our organization.

2000 -

- ❖ Sponsor discussions/sessions on the ethical issues e.g. de-skilling effects of computers and the shifting of formerly librarian responsibilities to paraprofessionals with attendant pay, reward issues.

SSIRT, PLA, or another AIA group could be approached to co-sponsor.

2000 -

- ❖ Focus on the practical need for filling positions in the future as the baby boom generation retires. How will we attract employees? How will we keep them?

The following is one example of a library developing a new career ladder system:

Until recently Auburn Library support staff worked within a system that did not allow many opportunities for promotion. There were more than 25 library-specific job titles, for only about 75 staff, and each job's grade level was strictly defined. The only way an employee could advance was by competing for job openings at a higher grade level whenever a vacancy occurred. In addition, most of the higher-level jobs required a bachelors degree, leaving many long-term employees with no opportunity to promote.

On March 1, 1999, a new human resource structure was put into place at AU Libraries, one involving career ladders, wherein an employee can promote within their job "family". This implementation was part of a campus-wide trend - we were not the first at AU to go through the process. The majority of the work of writing the new job descriptions was done by AU Libraries' Human Resource Associate, with additional help from campus Human Resources. The system is composed of two job families: the Library Assistant family, made up of six grade levels, and the Library Associate family, with only three levels. The Library Assistant jobs require no advanced degree, and are non-exempt. Library Associates are exempt employees, and must have a bachelors degree.

Movement from the Assistant to the Associate level is based on competitive selection, but within each family, it is now possible to promote without changing jobs. Promotion is based in part on successful completion of various training units. We are now in the process of designing these courses.

For more information, please see the related documents:

Auburn University Career Ladders Info at
<http://www.lib.auburn.edu/dean/career/index.html>

See also the following for a Duke University Career Paths program:
Turning Jobs into Careers: A Preliminary Report on Career Paths for Support Staff
from the Career Paths Task Force, Perkins Library, Duke University, August 1999 revision at
<http://www.lib.duke.edu/staff/ssc/career/report.pdf>

CONCLUSION

The Task Force on Career Ladders (few opportunities for advancement) has completed its task. In doing so, we have fulfilled our charge and we hope that we have provided the Support Staff Interest Roundtable of ALA with enough information and suggestions to solutions. Our sincere hope is that SSIRT will continue its interest and responsibility in this endeavor by implementing the suggestions submitted.

Before beginning the process, it was necessary for me to review the suggestions from support staff on how ALA/SSIRT could address the issues that were identified in the national survey.* I would strongly suggest the SSIRT review those suggestion again and make every attempt to explore and implement some of those as well.

I would like to thank the task force members Carol P. Johnson, Danice Faulkner-Edwards, Arleen Untamo, and Linda Porter (see Attachment 1) for their invaluable input.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Ed Gillen who acted as the process guide for the Chairs of each committee. His guidance and suggestions from the beginning to the end helped me to stay focused and made possible a finished document sooner than expected. Some of the material used in starting this process was a direct result of the work that Ed accomplished when chairing the Strategic Planning Process Steering Committee.

Thank you to Pat Clingman for acting as our liaison.

A special thank you to the following for their input and opinions:

Francine Joy Allen

Eleanor Wheeler

Linda J. Owen

Marilyn Ketcherside

Jack D. Fitzpatrick (example from Auburn University Libraries)

Martha Parsons

* see Ed Gillen's June, 1997 report.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attachment 1

ALA/SSIRT Task Force Members
Career Ladders (few opportunities for advancement)

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