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# OLC Membership and Staff Development: A Growing Management Trend

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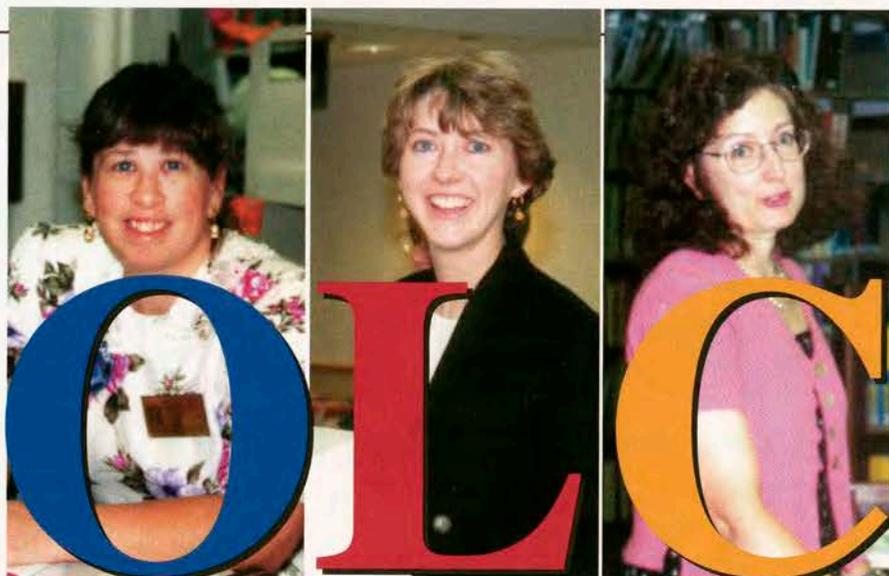
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Ohio libraries  
find OLC  
membership  
for all staff  
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of in-house  
development  
programs.



# MEMBERSHIP AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT

## A Growing Management Trend

by Susan Wehmeyer

The preponderance of management theory is directed to the private sector where money waits to be made by those who employ the most successful management practices. In *Government At Work*<sup>(1)</sup>, Marc Holzer and Kathe Callahan demonstrate that, although the public sector cannot adopt industrial methods wholesale, it has been able to adapt successfully a number of the principles. Total Quality Management (TQM), the theory created by Edward Deming, has been widely applied to public institutions. Even the federal government has embraced "Government Reinvention," a theory that borrows heavily from TQM, as the management style of the Clinton/Gore administration. In a similar vein, the Winter Commission Report on state and local public service advocates changes for lower level government agencies.

A common concern in both the private and public sectors is the need for capable and well-trained employees. Two of Deming's 14 "points" toward quality and productivity are on this topic. He encourages management to "institute training"<sup>(2)</sup> and "encourage education and self-improvement for everyone."<sup>(3)</sup> Deming's idea that improved quality is dependent upon an improved workforce is especially applicable to libraries, which deploy a large measure of their budget to personnel.

In Ohio, many libraries have taken advantage of membership in the Ohio Library Council (OLC) as an opportunity for staff development. In the June 1998 issue of *Access*, 69 libraries were recognized by the OLC membership committee for paying membership fees for 100 percent of their employees.

Washington-Centerville Public Library, one of the fastest-growing libraries in Ohio, began paying membership fees for all 100 of its employees in 1997. Cynthia Klinck, the director, says it was an easy decision for the board to make. "The majority of the trustees are still working and they are business owners or professionals. Their own dues are paid to join OLTA (the Ohio Library Trustees Association). They support the goal of staff development," she said. One of the greatest benefits she sees in OLC membership for her staff is the wider exposure to the library field. "We have a lot of people who have never worked in another library. They need to be able to see how what we offer compares to other libraries," she added.

Washington-Centerville staff member Kate Werner agrees. "I will be getting my MLS (Master of Library Science) next year. Membership has helped me learn about the role OLC plays in legislation and education. It's interesting to get other perspectives and incorporate them into what you do," she said. Werner finds the networking available at regional and state meetings invaluable. "You can read about something, but it's not the same as hearing about it from someone who has actually done it. You can't have too much training or experience. You always come away with at least one new thing," she said.

Jane Huson, who coordinates the Reader's Advisory for Washington-Centerville Public Library, says OLC conferences are a

great stepping-stone to professional development. "You find out things you would never have thought of on your own. I think it's very exciting to go off with one idea and come back with a new one. For example, I learned a lot about what you can do with a book club, not just from the presenter, but from everyone in the room," she said. "Many people don't have the option of going to get their MLS, but you want to do your very best in your job. Things like being able to go to OLC conferences make all the difference in the world," she continued.

Holmes County District Public Library began to pay OLC dues for its 26 employees just this year. Director Arlene Radden was also motivated by the desire to promote staff development at all levels. "It seemed that anyone who wanted to expand their horizons should be offered the same benefit," she said.

Milan-Berlin Township Public Library, with 14 staff, also pays the dues for all its employees. Director Ava Gardner finds it an essential benefit because it encourages continuing education. "At first, the staff felt that OLC was 'director stuff,' but they are beginning to see

the advantages of membership." She says the board of trustees was very supportive of the need for continuing education and networking. "We close the library to go to chapter conferences and when the state conference is near us as well," she said.

Many libraries pay partial OLC membership fees. Troy-Miami County Public Library, for example, pays 50 percent of the cost for all 50 of its staff. Director James A. Miley reports that the board of trustees has a strong commitment to continuing education. "Since the Ohio Library Council is so involved in library funding and the LLGSF, we felt it especially important to support the organization," he said. The library has maintained this level of support for more than 10 years.

Toni Walder, director of Wright Memorial Public Library, describes a different twist on the payment of dues for employees. "The library is willing to pay the dues for anyone who has joined the OLC on their own for two years," she said. "The board is very concerned and interested in staff development and the expanded role that staff must fill in libraries today, but they



wanted staff to show some commitment on their own first," she added. Walder finds the ability to see a wider view of libraries tremendously important to staff at all levels. "Employees need to understand that their welfare is tied to that of other libraries in the state, and to understand the importance of OLC in lobbying efforts," she said.

Patty Perry, children's librarian at Wright Memorial Public Library, wonders if OLC members realize what a tremendous opportunity they have. "At my first conference in Ohio I was just in awe. The Southwest Chapter alone has more attendees than we had at statewide conferences in Massachusetts!" she explained.

Suzanne Gourlie, a reference librarian at Wright Memorial Public Library, says that her director has been a strong advocate for OLC membership. "Toni signs you up when you start work," she said. "I had worked at other libraries in Ohio, but I hadn't even heard of OLC before I came here." She speaks positively about the benefit of paid membership. "The best thing about organization-wide membership is that everyone has an equal opportunity to develop themselves whether as an MLS or as a non-degreed professional. In our library, we all feel like professionals because of development opportunities," she added.

Clearly, libraries in Ohio have made good use of the opportunities for staff development, networking, and training available with OLC membership. Even smaller libraries have been able to offer development experiences far beyond those that could be provided in-house. As Kate Werner of Washington-Centerville Public Library explains, "We do a lot of training in-house here, but it's more 'how-to-do-it-our-way' information. It's important to be able to get other perspectives and have the chance to incorporate them into what you do."

*Susan Wehmeyer is head of information delivery services at Fordham Health Sciences Library, Wright State University. She serves on the Membership Committee for the Ohio Library Council.*

- <sup>1</sup> Marc Holzer and Kathe Callahan, *Government At Work: Best Practices and Model Programs*, (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, 1997).
- <sup>2</sup> Deming, Edward, *Out of the Crisis*, (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986), p. 52.
- <sup>3</sup> Deming, Edward. *Out of the Crisis*, (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1986), p. 86.