

**Mutual Respect Task Force
North Carolina Library Association
Recommendations
September 2005**

I. Introduction

In January 2004, the NCLA executive board unanimously passed a resolution to form a task force to study the state of respect in the North Carolina library work environment. The task force crafted and distributed a survey as its primary research instrument, focusing on library workers' perceptions of their work environment, their actual and perceived access to professional development opportunities, workers' level of interest in professional development activities, and correlations between these categories and the workers' overall sense of respect in the workplace. The survey represents perspectives in community college, public, academic, and special libraries, with 68% of the respondents working as support staff and 32% working as librarians.

We, the members of the Mutual Respect Task Force, officially submit the following recommendations document to the North Carolina Library Association based upon data gathered from our survey. We further request that the North Carolina Library Association demonstrate to its membership and the overall North Carolina library community its dedication to this crucial topic by immediately establishing and publicizing a timeline for the review and implementation of these recommendations.

Key Terms

Library Staff: Inclusive term referring to anyone employed by the library (professionals, paraprofessionals, administrative staff, graduate and undergraduate student assistants).

Paraprofessional: Anyone working in a library who does not hold a graduate degree in Library Science and does not carry the title "librarian." This term is used interchangeably with "support staff."

Professional: Anyone working in a library who holds a graduate degree in Library Science and carries the title "librarian."

II. General Recommendations

The overall survey responses reveal a desire among the members of the North Carolina library community to grow professionally—support staff and librarians—but the data also reveals a slight gap in the communication and professional

understanding between librarians, support staff, and library management. NCLA can play a key role in speaking to these issues, as any statewide library association representing not just members, but the overall community, must do. The library association is obligated to serve as a representative of all who work in libraries and to facilitate communication both within the organization and among the entire statewide community. Such a role, we believe, is vital to Dr. Bracy's 2003-2005 agenda of infrastructural integrity and productive engagement.

Recommended Overall NCLA Goal: Improved outreach to the overall library community in North Carolina, recognizing the importance of and speaking to the professional needs of both librarians and support staff in all library environments.

Recommended Deliverables:

- a. Expanded online learning opportunities and resources for support staff and librarians either sponsored by NCLA or linked from NCLA's web presence.
- b. Print and digital "toolkits" for professional development and other library education targeting support staff and librarians in their respective roles.
- c. Partnership with library certificate/degree programs at both the university and community college level.

III. Perception of the Work Environment

The survey data revealed a tension between librarians and support staff, with 22% of the respondents indicating some level of this tension and another 8% suggesting that workplace tension exists but is not a constant force.

Recommended NCLA Goal: Directly and actively address the issue of misperceptions in the North Carolina library work environment relating to differing roles and training of support staff and librarians.

Recommended Deliverables:

- a. Initiate new and support existing programs for both support staff and professionals in all categories of library instruction and management.
- b. Advocate and facilitate intra-organizational education on the MLS curriculum, with workshops, print and/or digital resources.
- c. Advocate and facilitate intra-organizational education on support staff training and duties with workshops, print, and/or digital resources.

IV. Development Opportunities

The responses in this section revealed an overall lack of development opportunities for all library workers. Where there was opportunity, it was seen as stronger for librarians than for support staff. Furthermore, the survey data revealed that many support staff are completely unaware of their library's policies regarding extracurricular activities, and they are also unaware of the many opportunities available to them.

Recommended NCLA Goal: NCLA should strive to make the entire library community aware of development opportunities and serve as an example to individual institutions by working to inform the entire library community of pertinent and relevant options.

In addition, we recommend that NCLA, in cooperation with the NCLPA, focus at least one entire conference or non-conference year workshop on support staff issues. In 2003, the American Library Association hosted its third Congress on Professional Education, and the focus was on support staff. We recommend that NCLA take this lead among state library organizations.

Recommended Deliverables:

- a. Adopt a biennial conference core track focusing on paraprofessional issues.
- b. Sponsor an "off conference year" support staff workshop/seminar/program.
- c. Sponsor or co-sponsor an educational institute focusing on support staff issues.

V. Level of Interest in Development Opportunities

The data from this section revealed that both support staff AND librarians would like to participate in development opportunities and that some are even willing to take personal time and pay out of pocket to do so. Most, however, would like for their organization to show some level of support for their interests—money, time off, communication of opportunities, etc.

Recommended NCLA Goal: Serve as a resource to the North Carolina library community regarding professional development opportunities for all library workers.

Recommended Deliverables:

- a. Draft a resolution letter from the NCLA executive board to library directors in support of all library workers and the duties they perform.

- b. Activate the web page for information on conference and extracurricular activities for all library workers.
- c. Revisit the language and target of NCLA scholarships and awards to focus on support staff as well as librarians.

These recommendations are respectfully submitted by the **Mutual Respect Task Force:**

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