

Pipelines and Partnerships in Diversity at the National Library of Medicine

Kathel Dunn, Associate Fellowship Coordinator, National Library of Medicine

Joyce E. B. Backus, Associate Director for Library Operations, National Library of Medicine

The US National Library of Medicine (NLM) uses partnerships with other library organizations, as well as building on its own expertise, to attract and retain a talented and diverse staff of librarians.

The Division of Library Operations, within NLM, is home to 270 federal employees. In order to meet its mission of enabling biomedical research, supporting health care and public health, and promoting healthy behavior by acquiring, organizing, preserving, and providing access to the world's scholarly biomedical literature, staff expertise is needed in traditional areas such as acquisitions, e-resource management, collection development, reference, document delivery, conservation, preservation, outreach, and in newer areas of digitization, digital preservation, web development, social media analysis and deployment, and systems. However, the scope of a national, federal library that produces over 295 databases and APIs, curates and manages medical terminologies, and regularly conducts research and analysis with its own and others' data sets, requires staff expertise in usability testing, user experience (web), data analysis, terminology creation, customer service, and education and training scaling from small in-house projects to products and services for the public.

This range of traditional to newer skills, of library services to library products, means NLM regularly seeks librarians of all kinds. NLM needs newer graduates who can bring a perspective unencumbered by a "the way it's always been done" mentality, as well as experienced librarians who bring perspectives from other institutions, offering a "here's how others do it and why not try it here?" approach. NLM's range of products and services also demands finding staff who reflect the diversity of the United States public, whom the library serves; librarians whose approach to work and library service offer new methods and ideas; librarians whose path to the field may not match the path of the hiring managers; or librarians who exist outside the extensive network of the library's best recruiters: its own current and former staff.

NLM has long supported the early careers of health sciences librarians through its own nationally recognized Associate Fellowship Program, which offers fellowships for recent library science graduates interested in careers in health sciences librarianship. The NLM Associate Fellowship Program is over 40 years old, and uses NLM institutional experience in curriculum development, mentorship, project sponsorship, and guidance in developing future leaders in librarianship.

NLM could have developed its own diversity and inclusivity recruitment and development programs to encourage librarians and other talented personnel to apply for its jobs, serve on its public boards and committees, and actively engage with NLM in improving its products with constructive criticism

and honest approval. However, any potential advantages in specificity and flexibility of NLM-focused programs are far outweighed by the advantages of a collaborative, partnership approach to diversity recruitment. A partnership approach gives NLM a view into others' work, programs, and goals; makes NLM part of the profession's wider issues and discussions; and provides an opportunity to influence the collaboration with NLM's mission, vision, values, and goals.

NLM has therefore expanded existing partnerships with other organizations to include talent recruitment and retention. Collaborating with existing partners gives NLM access to talent beyond its own staff network, and provides a continuous flow of access to the talent pipeline. Working with existing partners also connects NLM to talent that is vetted by another organization, and to people who are making themselves known and available within the larger job marketplace. Partnerships also offer the potential for shared follow-up and evaluation: if the pipeline dries up or sees a sudden increase, the questions of why and what can be done about it can be assessed and lessons learned and addressed together.

One partnership program with both a library school and an academic health sciences library that NLM actively supports is a collaboration between the University of Arizona Health Sciences Library (AHSL), the National Library of Medicine, and the Knowledge River Program of the School of Information Resources and Library Science (SIRLS) at the University of Arizona (UA) to provide internships in health sciences librarianship to Hispanic and/or Native American students accepted in the Knowledge River Program. The internship opportunity exposes Knowledge River students to career opportunities in health sciences librarianship by providing a working internship at AHSL.

NLM and ARL's Career Enhancement Program

NLM reaches a diversity of potential candidates and partners in its services through its long-standing relationships with library associations. NLM is actively involved in the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), with institutional membership in the association since 1948. The current member representative to ARL, Joyce Backus, associate director for library operations, is the chair of the ARL Diversity and Leadership Committee. NLM is also an active institutional member and partner with the Medical Library Association, the leading organization for health sciences librarians in the United States. NLM also partners with the Association of Academic Health Sciences Libraries (AAHSL) in a Leadership Fellows Program for mid-career health sciences librarians who aspire to positions at the more senior level, including those seeking positions as a director. This program, too, takes an inclusive approach in identifying program participants.

ARL's Career Enhancement Program (CEP) is one example of a successful partnership in diversity recruitment. The ARL CEP, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), offers master of library and information science (MLIS) or equivalent students from underrepresented racial and ethnic populations within the United States a career-enriching internship at an ARL member library, coupled with extensive support and career development from ARL. The program includes attendance at the ARL Annual Leadership Symposium, held in conjunction with the American Library Association Midwinter Meeting, a six-week internship at an ARL CEP partner library, and mentorship. The Annual Leadership

Symposium brings leaders and potential leaders together for discussion, networking, and professional development. Leaders from CEP partner libraries attend the symposium, meeting the students who will join their libraries for summer internships, when their staff will be able to highlight the opportunities for librarians in research libraries to these interns who reflect the diversity found in the student population of ARL universities.

Following decades of experience with its own Associate Fellowship Program, NLM has participated as a partner library during the six years to date of CEP from 2009 through 2015. NLM hosted 14 fellows in a variety of settings such as the History of Medicine, the National Network of Libraries of Medicine Office, Specialized Information Services, Reference and Web Services, Exhibits, and Preservation. The internship projects ranged from market research and the creation of an outreach plan for online exhibitions, to research supporting a traveling exhibition on Native Hawaiian healing, to documentation for NLM's participation in the Medical Heritage Library, to analysis of online customer service satisfaction index data.

NLM also complemented the CEP projects with professional development activities during the fellowship, following an 80/20 rule of 80% project time and 20% professional development time. In the 20% of professional development time, the students met with senior leadership and participated in a new managers' discussion—new managers at NLM, coming from academe or other government agencies, shared with the students what new managers can expect, what surprises they encountered, and what kinds of work had to be given up in becoming a manager. The CEP fellows also participated in a *Résumé Review*, where hiring managers reviewed the students' résumés and offered tips for successful federal or industry résumés and academic curricula vitae. The students took field trips in Washington, DC, to the ARL offices, the Government Printing Office, and the Library of Congress. At the Library of Congress they participated in a discussion of what makes a successful exhibit and followed that with trips to visit exhibits at museums in the area. The students also had an opportunity to extend their peer network by attending a new librarians' discussion with NLM staff who were recent library science graduates.

Each CEP fellow at NLM was assigned a mentor from a division other than the one in which the student was working to provide a safe space for discussion and voicing any concerns. The 14 ARL CEP fellows who interned at NLM are now a cohort of alumni participants and many mentors keep in touch with their fellows. NLM recently contacted the fellows to find out where they are now. All of the NLM ARL CEP fellows were employed, or still in school; one is now a program analyst at the Institute of Museum and Library Services. NLM uses their post-internship stories to celebrate the completion of the program and share their outcomes at a meeting of all Library Operations staff, bringing to the staff's attention the mentorship, supervision, and inclusion of the fellows in NLM work life.

NLM, MLA, and ALA's Spectrum Scholarship Program

Prior to the ARL CEP fellows program, NLM actively engaged in the support of library science students through annual sponsorship of two of the American Library Association's (ALA) Spectrum Scholars, in partnership with the Medical Library Association (MLA). This support extended efforts NLM already

had underway in providing MLA with support for its minority scholarship program. The Spectrum Scholarship Program is a national diversity and recruitment effort, offering scholarship support and attendance at a leadership program at the American Library Association's annual meeting, for library science students from underrepresented populations. NLM/MLA's support of the Spectrum Scholarship began in 2001, supporting a single student and expanded in 2006 to support two students annually. The MLA provided a mentor for the students.

In 2009, NLM sought an assessment of its nearly 10-year investment in the Spectrum Scholars program. The American Library Association Office of Diversity provided follow-up data on the Spectrum Scholars supported by NLM, indicating that four were employed in health sciences libraries, four were employed in other libraries, and the whereabouts of four were unknown. At the same time, ALA was actively engaged in its first follow-up and evaluation of the Spectrum Scholars program, so aggregate data on the group was expected later. NLM, however, realized that it had little connection to the scholars beyond the named connection of the financial support of tuition. NLM discussed what factors would have an impact on recent library science graduates and how NLM could make a stronger connection with them.

As a result of this assessment, in 2009 NLM began offering a one-day visit to NLM for its named Spectrum Scholars. The scholars' trip is paid for by NLM, and during the visit the students meet with senior leadership and with the staff of the National Network Office, which oversees the National Network of Libraries of Medicine, a 6,000-member network of health sciences libraries, public libraries, and community-based organizations engaged in the provision of health information for the public. The students also meet with staff in program areas of interest, including Big Data, Reference, Outreach, and Preservation. This early visit in the careers of library science students—often the visit takes place before the student even begins school—could have a profound effect on a student's interests. In some cases the early visit to NLM has influenced choice of courses and presented new options in career paths. These visits also offer staff an opportunity to be in touch with the scholars, further extending the connection.

Conclusion

Since partnering with ARL, ALA, and MLA in diversity programs, NLM has seen ARL CEP fellows and ALA Spectrum Scholars appear in its recruitments for open positions and for the NLM Associate Fellowship Program. After the ALA/MLA/NLM Spectrum Scholars visited NLM, one scholar became a self-described "NLM fan" and several others have applied to the NLM Associate Fellowship Program, with one scholar joining the 2014–2015 NLM Associate Fellowship cohort. Two of the ARL CEP fellows joined NLM on staff.

The successes NLM has realized from a pipeline that routinely delivers a diverse and talented pool of future colleagues appear to be due to multiple factors. One scholarship or one internship is unlikely to be the only deciding factor in the direction a new professional takes as the next career step. Instead, scholars and fellows require financial support, practical support, mentorship, project opportunities, and the guidance of mentors offering the sign that says "this way" as they think beyond a job to having a career, and about what it takes to make a difference in their chosen profession.

As this article is being written, NLM is actively recruiting recent library science graduates to fill over a dozen open positions across Library Operations and other NLM offices. In the context of that recruitment, NLM is seeing the benefits of being able to use the existing relationships with the ALA Office of Diversity to reach the Spectrum Scholars, and with ARL, to reach not only the ARL CEP Fellows, but all of the recent graduates who are or were participants in ARL diversity programs. It is exciting to see the work of many years' duration in supporting and mentoring these students pay off in this current recruitment. Of the over 200 applicants to the positions, many listed participation in some type of diversity program, either through ALA, ARL, or through the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) Internship Program held at the Library of Congress.

The next steps for NLM are to continue to support the talent pipeline through partnerships, seeking to be part of programs that offer systematic and multi-pronged support for students. And the step after that will be to mentor and support its diverse staff in developing medical information products and services that meet the needs of the changing United States population.

Copyright notice: The authors' contribution to this work was done as part of the authors' official duties as National Institutes of Health employees and is a work of the United States Government. Therefore, copyright may not be established in the United States.

To cite this article: Kathel Dunn and Joyce E. B. Backus. "Pipelines and Partnerships in Diversity at the National Library of Medicine." *Research Library Issues: A Report from ARL, CNI, and SPARC*, no. 286 (2015): 3–7. <http://publications.arl.org/rli286/3>.