Writing our Story: Building a Community of Practice for Library Managers from within

Equity in the Ranks:
In 2016, a two-day Management Training and Community Building event was conducted for this public, academic libraries’ middle managers (non-librarian/faculty). This interactive training addressed managerial skills such as meeting facilitation, analysis and decision-making, and managing conflict. The idea behind this session was to provide skills to this oft-overlooked cohort, and create a community of practice for the participants.

This grant-funded course was sponsored by University of Florida Libraries' administration, including staff from library HR and an Associate Dean. The full-day sessions were facilitated by an external trainer brought in specifically for this group.
In 2017 the group reconvened under the guidance of library HR, and members determined they wanted to reignite the group, this time with a peer-led, monthly model. Three members stepped forward to get the group off the ground, and a faculty librarian stepped up to be the group's liaison to library administration. Thus, in January 2018, the Library Middle Management and Leadership Team came into being.
Membership:

The Library Middle Management and Leadership Team (LMMLT) is comprised of supervisors, project managers, team leaders and/or unit heads. Middle Managers usually have people above, below or beside them and are in charge of the supervision of people or processes, or both. Responsibilities involve managing a discrete functional area or some form of a library's daily operation. The members are library staff, as opposed to faculty librarians, who have their own support.

Steering Committee:

Three group members took it upon themselves to get the newly envisioned community of practice off the ground. They have the help of the training program manager, a faculty mentor, and the HR assistant program director, who all help ensure communication between the LMMLT and upper library administration, as well as the development of programming desired by the group.
Our Meetings:

Since our initial meeting in February 2018, we have held 11 meetings/trainings including:

- **CoLab**: Facilitated session where members were able to become better acquainted with one another
- **Bio workshop**: Hands-on training to create/enhance individual biographies to be shared on our group Basecamp to serve as points of information access
- **Specialists' presentations**: members share details about their job/tasks of their respective departments/units
- **Process documentation overview**: Several members demonstrated techniques for documenting workflows in their departments/units
- **Communications training**: 3-hour session taught by external trainer, focused on best practices

Tools:

Basecamp: Utilized to share contact information, meeting notes, and feedback within the group.

LibGuide: Being constructed to share information about the group with the greater library community.

Trello/Air Table: Group expressed a need for this type of platform; request went up for library-level consideration.

Employee Recognition:

Hosted a luncheon in acknowledgement of the group's first year and accomplishments. Lunch was funded by the Libraries' Employee Recognition Committee.
Library Middle Management and Leadership Luncheon

[LMMLT members enjoying the recognition luncheon]
PLOT TWISTS

Buy-in and Participation:

[Attendance compared to total membership numbers for each LMMLT meeting]

**Work hours**: limitation for individuals based on different work schedules
- Day-timers vs. overnighters
- Front line staff with no backup

**Accessibility**: meeting attendance is impacted by various factors:
- work hours
- other meetings/conflicts
- large campus/membership dispersed

To help, we have implemented use of Zoom for live-streaming, sharing recordings of meetings.
Group Engagement: participation increased when:

- Training/meetings were hands-on
- New members were added to group

Specialists' presentations provide members the chance to learn about others' responsibilities. Presenters also get the opportunity to develop/enhance their presentation skills.
DIVERGING PLOTS

Unique Path:

As a new community of practice, the steering committee was interested in how the LMMLT compared with other institutions’ similar programs, and where we could learn from each other.

HR representatives from three institutions answered the email request sent by UF's HR assistant program director. The steering committee spoke with each on the phone, trying to determine where our group was unique.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Group</th>
<th>Library Middle Management and Leadership Team</th>
<th>Library Management Council</th>
<th>Supervisors Round Table</th>
<th>&quot;Sponsored Program&quot; (no further data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>University of Florida, SE public R1</td>
<td>NE, public R1</td>
<td>NE, private R1</td>
<td>NE, private R1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who participates?</td>
<td>Supervisors; Project Managers; staff only</td>
<td>Initially Supervisory Front-line staff</td>
<td>Moved to all Middle Management</td>
<td>Supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Members</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>45-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development aspect?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many attend workshops (avg)?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>(not applicable)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussions on relevant topics?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many attend discussions (avg)?</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>12-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Frequency</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Lead</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Lead</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently active?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Comparison of LMMLT (left column, in orange) and 3 other managers groups]

Forging our own way:

In comparison with the three institutions who spoke with us, UF is unique in the fact that the group is peer-led, and that membership is limited to staff positions as opposed to being open to every library worker who supervises staff.

All groups held discussions among the members, though only the LMMLT and the Supervisor's
One group, the Library Management Council, is no longer active. The representative indicated this was due to a change in the membership and purpose, and ultimately lack of vision.
Continued Assessment:

Review topics of interest for the group to implement trainings

- **Technical**: grants, budgets, conflict resolution
- **Professional**: attending/presenting at conferences, updating position descriptions, research/writing.

Please rank the training topics in order of preference:

- Budgets
- Grants
- Conflict Resolution
- March 2019 Communication
- Project Management
- Personnel management/supervision
- Processes for documentations

[Survey results regarding interest in potential training topics]

Receive feedback for steering members

- What has worked?
- What needs improvement?

Discuss next steps:

Revisit mission/vision

Rotate leadership

- Keep 2 of 3 steering members Rotate on an annual basis

Implement new ideas:

Mentorship program

- Peer-to-
- peer Staff-
  librarian
Group Engagement:

Establish regular meeting time
Seek supervisors' encouragement for their staff to attend
AUTHOR INFORMATION

Author Info - Writing our Story: Building a Community of Practice for Library Managers from within

Christy Shorey
Metadata Associate
Digital Support Services, George A. Smathers Libraries University of Florida
chrshor@uflib.ufl.edu

Jason Heckathorn
Collections Support Unit Manager
Acquisitions and Collections Services, George A. Smathers Libraries University of Florida
jrheckathorn@uflib.ufl.edu

Melissa Jerome
Project Coordinator, Florida and Puerto Rico Digital Newspaper Project Humanities Library (Library West),
George A. Smathers Libraries University of Florida
mmespino@ufl.edu
In 2016, a two-day Management Training and Community Building event was conducted for the middle managers (non-librarian/faculty) of the George A. Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida. This interactive training addressed managerial skills such as meeting facilitation, analysis and decision making, and managing conflict. The idea behind this session was to provide skills to this oft overlooked cohort, and create a community of practice for the participants.

This idea was revisited with participants in late 2017, where they expressed the desire for a community of practitioners and internal experts who can learn from one another, request and deliver trainings, and discuss procedures and workflows, in order to better address the pragmatic challenges the middle managers face. The result was the development of the Library Middle Management and Leadership Team (LMMLT). The goals of this peer-led group are to 1) create and share knowledge, 2) offer pertinent trainings, and 3) develop a platform for sharing knowledge and relevant information. Unlike similar initiatives at other institutions, this group is led by members of the group, and not library HR or administration. A faculty liaison represents the group to the administration, and the training program manager facilitates organization of training sessions.

To date, this community of practitioners have not only worked to define their vision for the LMMLT, but also began implementing that vision. To ensure the LMMLT is truly a peer-led group, members have drafted a mission and vision, participated in an internal survey to solicit feedback on the direction of the group, and organized a "Collaborating with Strangers" (CoLab) event to get to know one another and build trust. To meet the needs of continued communication and resource sharing, as well as growing skills, the LMMLT has also conducted training on development of personal biographies, and about web platforms of interest such as Basecamp and Libguides.

The middle managers cohort oversees the majority of staff, which make up 3/4 of our organization, serving as conduits sharing information between library administration and those on the front lines. The group seeks to encourage members to share personal backgrounds, experience, expertise and interests in order to support professional development, and empower staff in their continued efforts to implement policies, make decisions, and communicate the Libraries’ vision.

The poster provides more information on this group’s origins, the need for this group, who its members are, and how it compares to similar middle manager focused groups at other institutions. It showcases examples of what the group has accomplished, challenges faced along the way, stories from members, and a glimpse at future plans.

ABSTRACT

In 2016, a two-day Management Training and Community Building event was conducted for the middle managers (non-librarian/faculty) of the George A. Smathers Libraries at the University of Florida. This interactive training addressed managerial skills such as meeting facilitation, analysis and decision making, and managing conflict. The idea behind this session was to provide skills to this oft overlooked cohort, and create a community of practice for the participants.

This idea was revisited with participants in late 2017, where they expressed the desire for a community of practitioners and internal experts who can learn from one another, request and deliver trainings, and discuss procedures and workflows, in order to better address the pragmatic challenges the middle managers face. The result was the development of the Library Middle Management and Leadership Team (LMMLT). The goals of this peer-led group are to 1) create and share knowledge, 2) offer pertinent trainings, and 3) develop a platform for sharing knowledge and relevant information. Unlike similar initiatives at other institutions, this group is led by members of the group, and not library HR or administration. A faculty liaison represents the group to the administration, and the training program manager facilitates organization of training sessions.

To date, this community of practitioners have not only worked to define their vision for the LMMLT, but also began implementing that vision. To ensure the LMMLT is truly a peer-led group, members have drafted a mission and vision, participated in an internal survey to solicit feedback on the direction of the group, and organized a "Collaborating with Strangers" (CoLab) event to get to know one another and build trust. To meet the needs of continued communication and resource sharing, as well as growing skills, the LMMLT has also conducted training on development of personal biographies, and about web platforms of interest such as Basecamp and Libguides.

The middle managers cohort oversees the majority of staff, which make up 3/4 of our organization, serving as conduits sharing information between library administration and those on the front lines. The group seeks to encourage members to share personal backgrounds, experience, expertise and interests in order to support professional development, and empower staff in their continued efforts to implement policies, make decisions, and communicate the Libraries’ vision.

The poster provides more information on this group’s origins, the need for this group, who its members are, and how it compares to similar middle manager focused groups at other institutions. It showcases examples of what the group has accomplished, challenges faced along the way, stories from members, and a glimpse at future plans.