

The North Dakota State Library, in partnership with the South Dakota and Wyoming state libraries, is seeking a Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program planning grant for a workforce study. This project will evaluate needs and set strategy to cultivate a highly educated workforce that strengthens learning in libraries.

North Dakota and South Dakota and Wyoming are facing an unprecedented wave of librarians leaving the profession. In Wyoming, 2015 brought a 39% turnover of its public library system directorships, more than half due to retirements. The South Dakota State Library suspects they may see up to one-third of its school library staff leaving their positions within three years.

A workforce study conducted by the Wyoming State Library in 2008 illustrates the demographics. At the time it was conducted, just prior to the financial crash, the workforce was aging: 55% of those surveyed were older than 50, and 15% older than 60. The study revealed that 25% of library workers planned to retire within 5 years. Among school library workers, it was 31%.

Many of those retirements were put on hold when the stock market fell. Now that the financial situation has improved, both the librarians who had delayed their retirements and the ones who reached their planned retirement age in the meantime are leaving the profession.

In South Dakota, retirements are also expected to increase, with public, school and academic librarians all reporting that the next five to ten years will see a greater demand for highly trained library personnel. School libraries are of particular concern. As in many states, the past few years have seen a shift from certified library staff to paraprofessionals. In the 2014-15 school library survey, only 26% of librarians were certified teacher-librarians. This situation is expected to reverse with the advent of Common Core standards; currently, more administrators are seeing a need to hire professionally trained teacher-librarians in their districts.

In FY 2013, North Dakota's percentage of librarian FTEs holding the MLS degree was only 31.5%. With many smaller libraries in the state lacking the resource to recruit nationally, the best way to improve this situation is to provide educational opportunities to the people already in the state's libraries who are moving up in the profession.

In the meantime, as many librarians are leaving, the challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century librarianship are mounting. Librarians are increasingly asked to curate a growing sea of digital content and to help patrons navigate these resources. Libraries are adding makerspaces and becoming community anchors. Education is vital to meeting these challenges. Whether it's a school, college, university or public library, professionally trained staff bring the knowledge that transforms a library into a vibrant center of learning.

As three of the five least populated states in the nation (all have fewer than 1 million inhabitants), these predominantly rural places already face challenges ensuring that libraries have professionally trained staff. There are no physical graduate library schools in these states, and it can be difficult to recruit candidates from more populated parts of the country. In FY13, only 29% of **professional librarian FTEs** in

public libraries in these states held a master's degree in library science – less than half the national average of 67%. A sustained strategy for developing the people already in place is needed.

The North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming state libraries are jointly seeking a \$50,000 planning grant to evaluate workforce needs and establish strategies to ensure that libraries have a professionally trained workforce to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century librarianship.

Grant funds will be used to hire a consultant to conduct a formal workforce study. This study will quantify the anticipated need for professionally trained librarians in all library types and will establish strategies to meet those specific needs. It will evaluate not just the number of positions, but also the specific skills and qualities needed for this future library workforce. The entire amount will be put toward the consultant, with no agency overhead requested.

The study will serve two major purposes. First, it will be used as the basis for a Laura Bush 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian Program grant application in 2016 to fill specific workforce gaps. The planning grant will enable these three states to target efforts where they are needed most and enact any specific coursework or experiential learning requirements needed to meet future needs. Secondly, study findings will guide internal programs and library development projects at the three state libraries to mentor and support library staff working toward formal education in librarianship.

Project goals will be a completed study that quantifies workforce needs and establishes strategies to meet those needs, both for future grant applications and for library development programs developed internally by the three state libraries. The impact of this grant will be to create a sustainable pipeline of librarians completing the formal education they need to create vibrant libraries. Outcomes will be an increased number of innovative programs in the three states' libraries, increased use and creation of digital content, increased outreach, and stronger community engagement with local libraries.

The budget of \$50,000 will go entirely toward the consultant and any expenses associated with the study; no agency overhead is requested. The grant will be matched by \$12,000 of in-kind staff hours at the three state libraries.