

2015 Achievement Awards Virginia Association of Counties

APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 1, 2015.** Please include this application form with electronic entry.

PROGRAM INFORMATION

Locality: Henrico County

Program Title: Study Abroad for Library Staff

Program Category: Organizational Development

CONTACT INFORMATION

Name: Barbara Weedman

Title: Public Services Administrator

Department: Libraries

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Name: John A. Vithoukas

Title: County Manager

Signature: 

Overview

Beginning in August 2011, Henrico County Public Library (HCPL) began a staff study abroad program which required all public service staff to work at another library within the system for a total of at least twenty four hours or three days each year. This supported the new Area/Branch Library model for staffing that the library had adopted to help solve staff coverage challenges. HCPL consists of four Area Libraries, five Branch Libraries, a Municipal & Law Library, and a Mobile Library Service. These libraries are arranged into “clusters” so that an Area Library works in coordination with two or three of the closest branch libraries to coordinate staff coverage and programming.

Problem

Due to the economic downturn, HCPL, like many public libraries around the country, saw decreasing budgets and many position vacancies being eliminated and/or not being able to be filled. Covering essential service points, like reference, children's and check-out desks became an increasing challenge. This was especially true at the smallest libraries where even one or two unexpected absences would make it difficult to staff a single service point in the library all day.

How the program meets criteria

This is any easy to replicate staffing and training model that costs no money. HCPL has found that it creates a more versatile and confident workforce. It also provides opportunities for learning the strengths and challenges of each library which makes workflows and processes more efficient at each library. The program has also been necessary to covering service points at all libraries with less staff.

How the program is carried out

Beginning in August 2011, HCPL implemented a Staff Study Abroad program in which all public service employees would work at another library for at least three days (twenty four hours) for the calendar year. Barbara Weedman, Public Services Administrator, discussed the new program at a Leadership Committee Meeting which included Library Managers. After this meeting, Ms. Weedman sent an email to all library public service staff explaining the new requirements. In addition, the email stated the reasons for the program, the advantages to the employee and that she, too, would be participating in the study abroad.

Employees worked with their local supervisor and manager to choose which location and days to do their study abroad. Library Building Managers oversee and coordinate desk coverage and the staff “swap.” Generally, staffs stay in their same departments, such as circulation or adult reference in the study abroad library, but if an employee has an interest in another department then this can be an opportunity for that employee to be able to shadow, observe, or help in another area during their study abroad or when shortages arise at other libraries. It is not always a true “swap” (one-for-one), but staffing levels and schedules are thoughtfully considered.

Staffing & Costs

There is no cost for this program outside of minimal staff time needed to coordinate schedules between libraries.

Results

The program has been incredibly successful and invaluable for providing staff coverage even when a last minute need arises. Staffs are much more comfortable covering service points at other library locations. The fear of the unknown is no longer there. Even staff that was initially apprehensive about the program now looks forward to their "study abroad" day which provides variety and reconnection with colleagues at other locations. While career development was one of goals of this initiative, the opportunities for professional development far exceeded expectations. There are many instances where more efficient processes at one library are brought back to the "study abroad" librarian's home library.

A SurveyMonkey survey was sent to the 135 public service staff who participated regarding the study abroad after the first year it was implemented. 92.7% of respondents (76 people) said they met someone new or got to know other staff better. 89% (71 people) said they would feel better prepared and more comfortable helping during a staffing emergency. 46.2% (36 people) said they learned something that could improve their library or work performance.

The survey also included an open response option and 51 comments were provided. One staff member said, "...I think that Study Abroad is a great initiative and should be continued. It's rewarding working with other HCPL staff members that you would only otherwise see at Staff Development Day."