

The NCLA Leadership Institute Supports Leaders Everywhere. Join us!

The North Carolina Library Association's Leadership Institute is now in its thirtieth year! This program meets a significant need for the community it supports. Because of the Leadership Institute, NC library workers of all ranks and recognitions have an opportunity to receive targeted training in areas like project management and conflict resolution, a one-on-one mentorship experience, and supportive networking and community-building. Building these skills translates into more effective tools in a person's toolbox as they progress through their careers.

The Leadership Institute (LI) fills a gap often seen in fields and professions that are largely service-oriented: the service side can be so busy and hustle-focused that little time is left for the type of professional development that ensures well-rounded, growth-focused, career experiences that contribute in turn to positive work experiences. We live in a world where library studies and library work both function as important lynchpins in their communities, connecting users to technology, resources, materials, and more. Participating in opportunities like the Leadership Institute helps to boost development among

library employees. Past LI participants report feeling more confident in navigating difficult situations with users, colleagues, and supervisors. They also report having a clearer understanding of how to manage and complete projects, stronger connections to the profession and colleagues across the state, and more knowledge about subjects that shape the profession. Most also leave with a strong sense of support and a newfound sense of community with others participating in their LI cohort.

Unique Features of the NCLA Leadership Institute

While there are many leadership trainings offered by educational entities, local municipalities, and others, NCLA LI is particularly unique in how it cultivates community. The Institute is held in non-conference years, with the application cycle taking place in the spring. During the fall of that year, approximately twenty-four attendees participate in a four-day intensive retreat. For the past several LI cycles, this retreat has been held at Blue Ridge Assembly in Black Mountain, NC.



The idyllic setting of this retreat, nestled among the Blue Ridge mountains, encourages a sense of togetherness from the first day. The structure of the institute builds on this with expert-led presentations, activities, project management workshops, and information-sharing throughout the day with time built in for reflection and networking. Evening activities include sitting around a bonfire and sharing stories and reflections, playing games, and cheering each other on during BINGO. Almost every year, attendees also track the number of black bears spotted and, sometimes, even how often bear sightings force walking routes to shift! The evenings are just as important as the days, for it is then that the cohort gets a real chance to know each other, and to build connections that extend beyond the professional sphere, to make friends, and to serve as cheerleaders for each other. This retreat builds the foundation for the rest of the LI experience.

Each Institute participant is assigned to a mentor group and will spend time at the retreat getting to know their mentor and others in their small group. These groups will become an important part of the Institute cycle for each person, as members provide support, feedback, and encouragement to one another. Groups are encouraged to meet regularly after the retreat and to stay in contact with each other.

As part of the application process, each Institute participant decides on a project to complete at their library with the support of their supervisor. Upon returning from the Institute, they work on implementing the project and chart its progress, seeking support as needed from their mentor groups. In the April following the retreat, everyone gathers for a one-day, in-person workshop. This mid-year meeting is where formal project updates are shared and participants give one another feedback. The meeting includes time for participants to talk with their mentors and mentor groups and to fellowship with the rest of their cohort. Training related to giving formal presentations is also an important part of this mid-year meeting. The Institute cycle's second year is an NCLA biennial conference year, and participants are asked to volunteer and/or present posters or papers at the conference. Many LI attendees who present or volunteer at the biennial NCLA conference share feeling more engaged and seeing practical benefits

from conference experiences and presentations in their daily work. Those who present often walk away with ideas for future scholarship, and those who volunteer gain a deeper understanding of conference operations and gain skills in working a large event. The cohort is honored with a "graduation" ceremony during the All-Conference Reception.

The Longevity of Leadership Institute

The existence of this flagship program creates positive ripple effects that impact leaders throughout the library world. By supporting the Institute, the North Carolina Library Association, the Library of NC, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and others demonstrate the importance of cultivating strong leaders at libraries of all types and among staff of all ranks. It sends a signal to library workers everywhere that their development is important and that no matter the situation in which their daily work occurs, they are welcome members of #TeamNCLibraries. This benefit cannot be underestimated.

Operationally, the Leadership Institute utilizes a self-sustaining cycle of leaders teaching leaders. There are always four tiers to the LI structure: cohort members are made up of new applicants. Six mentors are selected from the previous cohort's graduates and then form the Planning Committee for the third cycle. Two Institute Co-Chairs are then selected from the Planning Committee to lead the next Institute. This scaffolding maintains the central objectives and outcomes for LI through sustained familiarity and long-term investment and ensures LI has the ability to continue.

How can you support the NCLA Leadership Institute?

The Leadership Institute welcomes your support of NC library workers. Individuals, institutions, and professional groups may help in any (or all) of the following ways:

- Advertise the Call for Leadership Institute applicants;
- Encourage potential applicants (or apply yourself!);
- Once they're selected, encourage the leadership journeys of participants;
- Institutional leaders are encouraged to endorse the participation of potential applicants;

- Contribute or pledge financial support to ensure LI members have the means to attend the initial retreat, mid-year meeting, and NCLA;
- Donate swag and other items to create welcome kits for mentees or to offer as prizes at team-building activities;
- Donate refreshment items or financial gifts to stock the snack and beverage table for the 40-50 attendees (mentees, mentors, planning committee, and guest speakers) at the all-day retreat sessions and mid-year meeting;
- Offer to be a guest speaker or session expert; and
- Advocate on behalf of NCLA, Library of NC, the IMLS and its LSTA grant program, and libraries everywhere.

Author Notes

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Connect with Leadership Institute

To learn more about the NCLA-LI, visit <https://nclaonline.org/leadership-institute>. For more information or to offer support, contact leadership@nclaonline.org.

