

Notes on the 8Rs Report

Prepared for the Provincial and Territorial Library Directors Council – Aug. 2005

The 8Rs report, *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries* (<http://www.ls.ualberta.ca/8rs/8RsFutureofHRLibraries.pdf>) is a groundbreaking report resulting from three years of research on eight core human resource issues in Canadian libraries:

| | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Recruitment | Rejuvenation |
| Retention | Reaccreditation |
| Remuneration | Retirement |
| Repatriation | Restructuring |

Benefits of the report. Released at the Canadian Library Association Conference in June 2005, the Report provides the first comprehensive, industry-wide investigation of this critical subject. It will help libraries with the information to assess and address their most prominent HR needs proactively. It will also provide a basis for the library community to develop national strategies for the coming shifts in the library work force in the next 5-10 years and develop coalitions to address longer-term needs.

Initial 8Rs question. The research began with a question prompted by (largely American) aggregate statistics, anecdotal reports, and predictions of a succession crisis: “Will there be a shortage of librarians in the next 5 to 10 years due to mass retirements?” It concluded with a recognition that the variables involved create a much more complicated situation than simple supply and demand.

Sponsors. The project was supported by the University of Alberta, Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC), Alberta Community Development, Library and Archives Canada, Ontario Library Association, Saskatchewan Provincial Library, University of Manitoba Libraries, Toronto Public Library, New Brunswick Public Library Service, Nova Scotia Provincial Library, Atlantic Provinces Library Association, & the Association of New Brunswick Librarians.

Team and methodology. The 8Rs Research Team, chaired by Ernie Ingles, Assistant Provost and Chief Librarian, University of Alberta, included colleagues from the University and from Tandem Social Research Consulting. It was advised by a steering committee from the library sector. Over 900 variables and 167 data tables in the 275-page report attest to the study’s unprecedented breadth and depth. The methodology included a survey of public, academic, and special library institutions, a survey of individual librarians and paraprofessionals, in-depth interviews with senior library administrators, and focus groups with representatives of CARL, CULC, and the Alberta Association of Library Technicians.

Findings. Major findings indicate that, while an immediate “crisis” due to forthcoming retirements is not substantiated, the 10-year horizon is serious, with the substantial issues of recruitment into the profession (not just in numbers), development of future managers and leaders among existing practitioners, strengthening management and leadership in

library education, and restructuring for the future. There is an urgent need for succession planning and action.

CLA President's Council on the 8Rs. In May 2005, CLA President Stephen Abram appointed the President's Council on the 8Rs to provide national leadership on action arising from the data. The thirty members come from all sectors of the library community. In June 2005, PTLDC appointed Alison Hopkins, Territorial Librarian, Northwest Territories, to be its liaison with this initiative. **The 8Rs Report: Findings of Particular Relevance to Public Libraries**

This summary highlights only selected aspects of the research that are considered to be of particular importance to public libraries and PTLDC. Members are encouraged to consult the Report's Executive Summary (p. 1-12) and its Consolidation of Strategic Human Resource Implications (p. 13-21) for an overview.

The summary that follows groups findings by prominent and inter-related themes of interest to PTLDC:

- Supply and demand
- Recruitment
- Leadership
- Education
- Restructuring

Each summary includes implications for action in the PTLDC Work Plan.

Supply and demand

The data shows that the supply of librarians and library technicians is declining while the demand for them is increasing. The long term future is clearly one of a shortage of qualified people. Libraries need to look at their demographics and plan for the future now.

- The library work force is definitely ageing. One-quarter of librarians and one in five paraprofessionals are 55 years or older (compared to 11% among all Canadian workers).
- The "succession crisis" may not be immediate, but it is coming and it is serious. The study predicts the retirement of 39% of librarians and 34% of paraprofessionals in the next ten years.
- New graduates are less likely to apply to public libraries than to academic or special libraries. In a difficult hiring market, public libraries are likely to have more difficulty with hiring due to competition with other types of libraries.
- Improvements in the Canadian library labour market will be more of a deterrent to emigration than a stimulus to repatriation. Significant numbers of Canadian

librarians left the country due to library downsizing and flatlined budgets. The study shows that most will not be returning.

Recruitment

Recruitment to the profession needs to reflect the fact that most librarian jobs will involve supervising and managing. About 60% of librarians and 30% of paraprofessionals work in management or supervisory roles. This is not reflected in library recruitment literature, the aspirations of students entering educational programs, or the social stereotypes of library work.

- Public libraries need to promote more vigorously the non-salary benefits of public library careers to MLIS students and library school professors, and extend practical public experience opportunities to students.
 - A large portion of librarians were attracted to the profession because they worked in a library or had a positive relationship with a librarian.
 - The study notes a high rate of job satisfaction among librarians, of whom 88% stay in their jobs primarily because of job satisfaction - a potentially powerful asset in recruitment.
 - Median salaries for public librarians are \$10,000 lower than for academic librarians; they are also significantly lower than those of school and special librarians. Only 55% of public library professionals and 62% of paraprofessionals in public libraries consider their salaries to be fair (as opposed to 72% of all librarians nationally).
- Librarians and paraprofessionals do not yet reflect Canada's multicultural reality. Visible minorities (at 7%) and Aboriginals (1%) are poorly represented in professional and paraprofessional library positions, in relation to their rapidly growing numbers in Canadian society (14% and 3% respectively).

The CLA President's Council on the 8Rs, noting the issues in the Report, is developing a recruitment Web site that, among other features, will reflect the role of managing and supervising in the majority of library careers. It is gathering short autobiographical summaries from Canadian librarians and library technicians for this resource.

Leadership

- Retirement estimates indicate that the grooming of the next generation of leaders and managers needs to begin now with both mid-career practitioners and new entrants.

- There is a gap between available skills and those most sought by employers to backfill for retirements. Leadership, management, flexibility, innovation, technology, and workload needs are the most difficult of the libraries' HR needs to fill. Concern for replacement of leadership qualities exceeds concern about skills and knowledge replacement.
 - One of the most consistent findings is that librarians are increasingly required to assume management and leadership roles. There is a consensus among administrators that this trend will continue. However, leadership training is not provided to the extent this change would imply.
 - Librarians generally indicated a greater interest in leadership than in management roles.
- Interest in and awareness of leadership needs to be stimulated within libraries. Human resource administration should emphasize leadership and management needs.
 - Education for librarianship needs to place greater curriculum emphasis on management, business, and leadership skills, and enable greater knowledge of the "librarian as manager" reality through such means as internship and practicum programs.

The CLA President's Council on the 8Rs has formed a sub-group to address the implications of the findings about leadership. The group will propose action steps and projects in September 2005.

Education

- Paraprofessionals, who would ordinarily be good prospects to pursue a professional education, find accessibility to library education a major barrier. As well, since many work part time, training and skill development opportunities are limited.
 - 30% of paraprofessionals are interested in obtaining an MLIS degree
 - 50% of paraprofessionals have university degrees.
- Both individuals and institutions believe MLIS programs need greater emphasis on management, leadership, and business skills and opportunities for practical experience. Large urban public libraries are the most emphatic employers on this point.
- There is greater satisfaction among recent library technician graduates with the overall quality of their education.

- Although large urban public libraries were the least satisfied with the skills of recent MLIS graduates, they budgeted less money for training to fill gaps and prepare for the future than academic libraries.
- Libraries located in Manitoba and Saskatchewan are most likely to experience recruitment difficulties, primarily because of their geographic location.

The CLA President's Council on the 8Rs has formed a sub-group on this; recommendations and projects will be proposed in September 2005.

Restructuring

- Paraprofessionals continue to take on roles once performed by professionals. They are more likely than professionals to be in children's programming and technical service roles.
- Although nationally only one library in ten Canadian libraries has a formal succession plan in place, 31% of large urban public libraries have developed such a plan.
- Low staff turnover of the recent past has limited promotional opportunities.
- Analysis of the data showed the two most important factors influencing job satisfaction among both librarians and paraprofessionals are respectful treatment by superiors and the opportunity to grow and learn new skills in their work.
- Technology, re-engineering, functional integration, downsizing, and centralization were the major drivers of role change in libraries. Librarians are both generalists and specialists.
- The dramatic changes in both paraprofessional and professional work have resulted in higher stress levels. There is a need to balance increased workloads with more task variety.
- Recognizing that financial constraints will always affect their ability to recruit replacements for retiring librarians and paraprofessionals, libraries overall need to focus on restructuring, working in consortia, and other means of addressing constraints of budgets and size.

Implications for action in the PTLDC Work Plan:

Given the strong interest shown in this report at the Ministers' meeting at CLA, what aspects should we focus on and bring to the next meeting?

Recommend focusing on the need to increase funding for succession planning and leadership development at the provincial/territorial level.

Communication to libraries.

Succession planning on a national and provincial/territorial level.

Offer assistance to the CLA President's Council on the 8Rs in promoting the recruitment web site.

Promote benefits of public librarianship to colleges and universities.

Work to increase provincial/territorial funding for succession planning and leadership development.

Work to provide something like the Ontario EXCEL certificate program (for managing a small public library) on a national level.

Communicate with the Canadian members of ALISE concerning the need for library education to be provided in non-traditional ways.