

ALA Emerging Leaders Program 2025

# Professional Development Opportunities for **Public Library Leadership**



**PublicLibrary**  
ASSOCIATION

Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

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# Meet the Team



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## About Public Library Association

The Public Library Association (PLA) is the largest association dedicated to supporting the unique and evolving needs of public library professionals. Founded in 1944, PLA serves nearly 9,000 members in public libraries large and small in communities across the United States and Canada, with a growing presence around the world. PLA offers continuing education opportunities, unique public library initiatives, and a conference that welcomes public library staff into meaningful partnership.



## Project Description

PLA delivers a varied program of professional development to help public library workers grow throughout their careers. To understand the needs of the field and PLA's unique value proposition, participants in this project will research and document leadership-focused professional development opportunities for public libraries across state associations, regional networks, and system cooperatives.

# Goals:

1

Environmental scan of leadership-and-management-focused professional development offerings available for public library workers.

2

Identification of gaps and overlaps between current professional development offerings and current ALA/PLA offerings.

3

Craft achievable recommendations for PLA to improve their professional development offerings for public library workers.



# Parameters and Expectations



When Group I first met at LibLearnX in January, our initial focus was getting to know each other. We all shared where we were from, what library we worked at and our role in that library as well as what had drawn us to pick this specific project. It was immediately clear that we all shared a passion for leadership, but most importantly that we wanted to help those around us become leaders too.

Professional development is an important part of that, so then it became: How can we make professional development better? When we started talking about this question, it was immediately clear that we would survey our fellow public library workers. We were able to establish a few key components of effective professional development, which include: strong mentorship, accessible training opportunities, institutional support and the flexibility to learn at one's own pace.

## Our Timeline



We left LibLearnX with a lot of ideas about our upcoming project as well as three specific goals in mind.

**First**, we would meet weekly through Zoom starting in the beginning of February.

**Second**, we would begin researching to see what professional development opportunities were already out there.

**Lastly**, we would begin to think about a controlled vocabulary; could we find an established vocabulary to use while searching these opportunities or would it be best to develop this vocabulary as we searched what was out there?

In addition, we were still coming together as a team, so it was important to us to learn each other's strengths, communication styles and what each of us felt particularly passionate about.



# Thought Process

## Leadership and Management

The conversation about leadership started when we first met at LibLearnX as we all shared our library titles, roles, and thoughts about what it means to be a leader. Right away, we all understood ourselves to be leaders - or at least, we were in the process of becoming leaders.

Defining leadership, however, was trickier. As we conducted the environmental scan of what professional development existed for library leaders, we continually returned to the question - what defines a leader? We weighed this question often as we determined which professional development opportunities met the qualifications that we were establishing as necessary for library leaders. Similarly, it was also easy to fall into the trap of leadership being exclusively for people in higher-ranking roles, like that of librarian, supervisor, and manager. It seemed initially that a lot of opportunities promised to teach you how to become a leader in a new high-ranking role. This is important, of course, but wording like that can discourage early and mid-career library professionals who are not serving in those roles. Therefore, we intentionally widened our radius to include opportunities like mentoring and early career education.



A team member presented their definition of leadership:

**“someone acting for the betterment of their team by building up staff and colleagues to advance in their careers.”**

As a group, we liked this definition because it was not associated with a particular job title or duty. With this in mind and with guidance from our PLA member guide, we further affirmed that anyone can be a leader and that leadership can come from any role in the library. We tend to think of librarianship being a linear career progression, but that’s not always the case. This was something we talked about as well; rather than define the stages of someone’s career by the roles they had, we chose to focus on the longevity of their career.

We decided to define 0-3 years as an early career library professional, 4-7 years as a mid-career library professional, 8-15 years as a career library professional and 16+ years as a seasoned library professional.



We also want to acknowledge our use of library professional as opposed to librarian or library employee. Rather than make a distinction every time between librarian and non-librarian, we use library professional to encompass both groups. We understand that you can work in a library and perform librarian duties with or without a degree and that everyone can contribute to library leadership.

## What is Professional Development?

When we began the environmental scan, everyone added webinars right away. That is what often comes to mind first when thinking about professional development, especially when the Covid-19 pandemic moved everything online. We also focused on virtual opportunities over in-person, since we were already thinking about our spreadsheet as a resource guide for others to use. Webinars can be a great resource, but they're not the only source of professional development.

A team member brought up that conference presentations (and conferences themselves) are considered professional development at many institutions. This led to us having conversations about both the format and the content of the opportunities that we included. One-off webinars on specific topics are different from an on-going mentoring relationship, but they are both professional development. We tend to think of professional development as strictly educational, but it's also important socially. Libraries in particular have a culture of sharing ideas amongst each other, whether it's programming or policies, but we don't consider these conversations professional development. Perhaps it's because these are often informal without any sort of visual aid, but we still take things away from these conversations. Maybe we can define professional development in the purest sense:

**you learned something.**



This conversation about format meant that we included opportunities like on-going podcasts with library professionals, like:



- **FYI: The Public Libraries' Podcast**
- **librarypunk**

We also looked at in-person training summits, specialized training websites - like Project ENABLE and Ryan Dowd - and state association conferences. By broadening our definition of professional development, we pulled together a list of resources that will appeal to a larger group of library professionals.

## Reflecting on Our Priorities and Thought Process

After analyzing the data and identifying common trends across public libraries, our group had honest and intentional conversations about what truly matters when it comes to professional development. One of our top priorities was access, not just offering opportunities, but making sure

**those opportunities are realistically available to all staff, regardless of location, role, or schedule.**

We recognized that for many library professionals, especially in rural or understaffed branches, getting time off or traveling to training(s) isn't always possible. Therefore, accessibility through flexible formats like virtual sessions, on-demand content, and peer-driven models were researched.

We also agreed that professional development shouldn't be one-size fits all. Librarians are at different stages in their careers and their needs vary tremendously—from librarians just starting out, to mid-level professionals looking to grow, to seasoned librarians seeking to sharpen their leadership skills, as well as mentor others. That's why we considered a wide range of topics, from foundational skills and confidence building to strategic planning, community engagement, and equity centered leadership. Our process wasn't just about checking boxes, it was about designing development that feels relevant, empowering and genuinely useful to all librarians.



## What We Hoped To See vs. What Was Missing

As we conducted our research, we hoped to find a wide range of inclusive, well-rounded professional development programs, but noticed several gaps. First, there was nominal support or tailored development opportunities for librarians with disabilities, highlighting a major equity issue. When disability was a focus of professional development, it was centered around serving disabled patrons, whether it was about learning customer service-themed sign language or making the library a neurodiverse-friendly space. We also noticed a lack of consistent leadership training for mid-level career professionals, who are often overlooked between entry-level and senior management. Lastly, we expected more community-driven learning models, but found most offerings were still top-down and one-time workshops or annual conferences, rather than ongoing, collaborative learning experiences. This desire for community driven learning was echoed in the results of our survey as well.

# Environmental Scan



We started our environmental scan in February 2025 with a basic spreadsheet where we all committed to adding at least five professional development opportunities that were local to our area (city and/or state). As mentioned earlier, we started with a focus on webinars but one group member brought forth opportunities like conference presentations and videos which in turn allowed all of us to think outside the webinar box. We decided to aim for at least 100 entries in our spreadsheet and initially ended up with approximately 125 opportunities. In performing our environmental scan of professional development opportunities we determined the following criteria for our resources:

When reviewing the spreadsheet, a group member noted that we had listed some opportunities from ALA/PLA and suggested that the spreadsheet expand into two tabs: the first being external professional development opportunities and the second being ALA/PLA. After restructuring the spreadsheet, this resulted in 108 external opportunities and 125 ALA/PLA leadership-focused opportunities. By splitting them up like this, it would make it easier for us to identify where the gaps and overlaps were and, in turn, make it easier to give recommendations to PLA.



1

May be any format including but not limited to webinars, podcasts, guides, virtual courses, series, blogs, certification programs.

2

Topics must be appropriate for those wanting to develop skills to use in a public library position of leadership, including middle managers and entry-level staff as leadership.

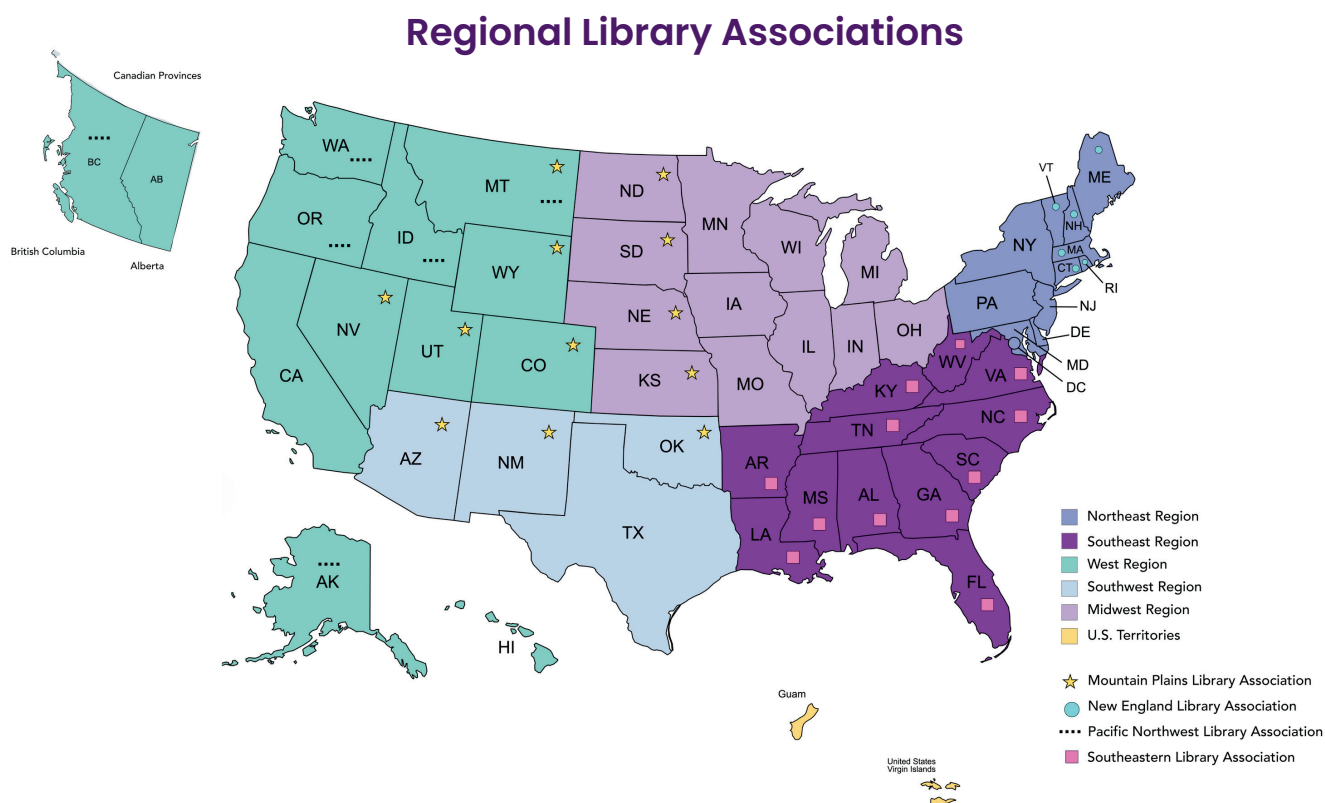
3

We determined that leadership skills are utilized in various positions and did not limit our sources by targeted job titles such as manager, director, etc.

4

Opportunities should be specifically focused on public libraries. We will not include offerings geared towards academic, special, or other library types.

As we reviewed the professional development opportunities gathered through our research, we recognized that while we had strong representation from ALA/PLA offerings and those from our own local systems and state-level organizations, our data did not fairly reflect a broad scope of opportunities that are provided nationally, through regional library associations and internationally, including U.S. territories. With this realization, it was important to research the state associations chapter directory as organized by ALA on their website. We created a new spreadsheet to analyze each state and territory by their designated region. Each team member was assigned a region to research, focusing on the professional development offerings of each state association. Below is a map of the US and Canadian provinces by region, regional associations, and the US territories that we researched.



**Alt Text:** A map of the US, including territories and two Canadian provinces (BC and AB.) The map has been color-coded into regions and regional library associations. The Northeast Region is color-coded medium blue and includes the states: ME, VT, NH, MA, RI, CT, NY, NJ, PA, MD, DE and DC. The Southeast Region is color-coded dark purple and includes the states: WV, VA, NC, SC, KY, TN, AR, LA, MS, AL, GA, and FL. The West Region is color-coded teal and includes the states: WA, ID, MT, OR, ID, WY, CA, NV, UT, CO, AK, HI and two Canadian provinces, BC and AB. The Southwest Region is color-coded light blue and includes the states: AZ, NM, OK, and TX. The Midwest Region is color-coded light purple and includes the states: ND, SD, NE, KS, MN, IA, MO, WI, IL, IN and OH. The US Territories are color-coded yellow and include: Guam and United States Virgin Islands.

The regional library associations have been coded by symbol. The Mountain Plains Library Association is coded with a star and includes the states: MT, WY, NV, UT, CO, AZ, NM, OK, KS, NE, ND and SD. The New England Library Association is coded with a circle and includes the states: ME, VT, NH, CT, MA, and RI. The Pacific Northwest Library Association is coded with dashed lines and includes the states: WA, OR, MT, ID and the Canadian province BC. The Southeastern Library Association is coded with a square and includes the states: WV, VA, NC, SC, KY, TN, AR, LA, MS, AL, GA, and FL.



# Environmental Scan Findings



As we researched state and regional library association websites, we looked for information on available webinars and training, scholarship opportunities, annual conferences, leadership programs, section committees, and membership fees. We also evaluated website usability, focusing on whether these websites were current, easy to navigate, and provided career resources. In some cases, access to detailed professional development was limited to **paying members** while other websites provided some trainings that included leadership programs, and annual conferences. Many state associations offered scholarships for tuition while only a few offered conference attendance scholarships.

From our research, we found:

- ALA/PLA and our external resources are similar in their offerings, with ALA/PLA offering **more DEI-focused** opportunities vs. external sources offering **more careers-focused** opportunities.
- External resources had moved away from the traditional webinar format, with **30.8% of what we found being a mix of mentoring, podcasts, and self-paced videos**. In contrast, ALA/PLA's non-webinar options were 15.3% of the opportunities we found.
- We found an example of innovative networking in the Fresh Faces initiative from the Kentucky Library Association, which is a way to network locally with other library staffers. It was well-received by participants.
- The Texas Library Association offers an abundance of professional development. A team member noted that Texas organizes their conferences by division for a smaller conference each year.
- The majority of state library associations had their own state conferences, with some smaller states joining together for joint conferences such as Delaware and Maryland.
- Out of fifty state associations, Alberta, two territories, and four regional associations, there were **8 established mentoring programs, which is 14%** of the total associations we looked at. These were formalized mentoring programs; we know that library professionals likely have informal mentoring relationships.
- While we didn't focus on social media as professional development, we know that ALA and PLA use ALA Connect, but there are many non-affiliated Facebook groups, BlueSky lists and Discord servers where career advice and professional development opportunities are often shared.





Through this evaluation, it became evident that

**there is a significant need to expand regional networks and support state associations in building sustainable ecosystems for accessible professional development and networking.**

These findings align closely with feedback from our survey participants who expressed the need for more local and regional networking opportunities beyond annual conferences, greater support from state libraries, and more organic, idea-sharing spaces both in-person and online, and mentorship opportunities to support career development.

There were challenges when it came to performing this environmental scan. Sometimes the challenges were logistical; some associations shared their professional development opportunities in members-only areas or information hadn't been updated recently. Other times, we struggled to identify whether it was a leadership building opportunity or not, which led to a lot of discussions about how we define leadership and who gets to be a leader. Then of course, there were five of us in the group, so as much research as we did, it's only natural that we missed opportunities. We concluded this environmental scan in April 2025, so while we did look for future opportunities, the spreadsheets focus on what was available and advertised from February to April 2025.



“

**I am in an organization that values growth and provides many opportunities for professional development. Since not all libraries are in a position to provide those opportunities, I think having low cost/free webinars are key in ensuring small/rural libraries have access to trending topics and new perspectives.**

**- Survey Respondent**

”

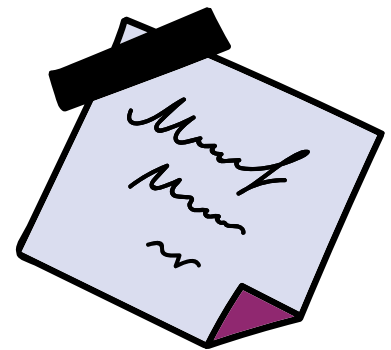
# Controlled Vocabulary

Building a controlled vocabulary for this project was something we knew that we would need to do during our initial discussions at LibLearnX. Initially, we decided to use what we could of ALA/PLA's webinar subjects and build off them as needed. Our first table of controlled vocabulary was meant to be used as a starting point. **Refer to page 14 for our preliminary table.**

During the environmental scan, everyone provided a keyword for each training opportunity that they found; sometimes it was an 'official' one, but more often than not, it was researcher-generated. This meant that at one point we had roughly 38 controlled vocabulary terms, with some terms overlapping and some terms being hybrid terms when multiple terms applied. When performing a basic data analysis, some of these generated keywords only had two or three corresponding professional development opportunities. This wasn't ideal for analyzing our environmental scan data given that we needed to be able to identify gaps and overlaps. One example of this was that we had five keywords that included leadership: DEI/Leadership, Human Resources/Management/Leadership, Leadership, Leadership/DEI, and Leadership/Policy.



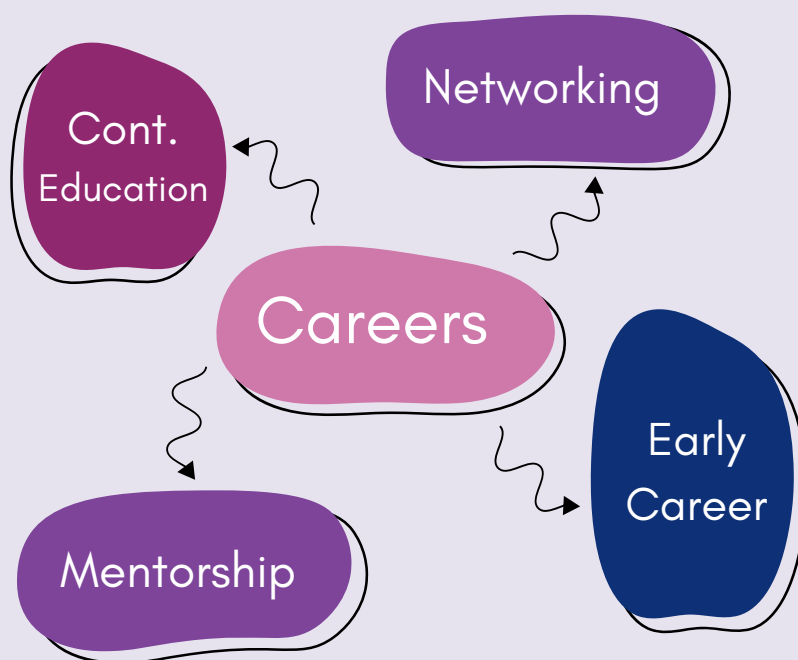
policy



While these hybrid keywords accurately represented the professional development webinars, courses, and in-person events, having more than one keyword made the data difficult to analyze against PLA/ALA's offerings.

Therefore, in order to be able to analyze our data, we had a lengthy discussion about restructuring our controlled vocabulary and returned to our original starting point of working with ALA/PLA's webinar subjects. We still wanted to add vocabulary that we felt was missing from their standard subjects, namely Health and Wellness and Finance and Funding. Eventually, we decided to restructure our controlled vocabulary into 11 main categories with 22 sub-categories. Our main categories would be used as a way to analyze the data, but the sub-categories would remain available in the spreadsheet and in the report as a way to be more specific. **Refer to page 15 for the finalized vocabulary.**

Developing a controlled vocabulary was essential for our project because it provided a standardized framework for categorizing and analyzing professional development opportunities in a consistent and meaningful way. There was a lack of consistency emerging from our initial approach to the process of categorizing the offerings by assigning keywords individually. Many of the terms overlapped, were ambiguous, or applied to only a few opportunities, making it difficult to identify clear patterns, gaps, or overlaps in the available professional development offerings. By creating and refining a controlled vocabulary, we ensured that all data could be compared uniformly. This structure allowed for a deeper and more accurate analysis of the professional development landscape, making it possible to pinpoint areas of redundancy and areas that were underserved. The controlled vocabulary was crucial for turning diverse and inconsistent data into actionable insights.



# Preliminary Controlled Vocabulary

PLA on Demand Webinar Topics	Professional Tools (subtopics)	Our Controlled Vocabulary (draft)
Administration & Leadership	Circulation & Technical Services	Community Partners
Advocacy	Community Engagement & Outreach	Interpersonal Communications
Collection Management	Directors, Managers & Administration	DEI Training
EDI	Programming & Instruction	Finance
Information Literacy & Library Instruction	Public Relations & Marketing	Wellness
Intellectual Freedom & Copyright	Reference	Early Career
Marketing & Outreach	Youth Services	
Programs & Services		
Reference		
Technology		

# Final Controlled Vocabulary

## Administration & Leadership

Long-term planning for library operations  
Sub-categories: Library Board, Strategic Planning, Policy

## Advocacy

Sharing the value of libraries and explaining library operations to policy makers and the public

## Careers

Library staff seeking to expand their understanding of the library career field  
Sub-categories: Networking, Mentoring, Early Career, Continuing Education

## Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Actively creating an inclusive workplace and public space through devoted effort to equity and diversity

## Finance & Funding

Fiscal support and management thereof  
Sub-categories: Budgeting, Grants

## General

The foundations of a public library's operations  
Sub-categories: Resources, Patron Services, Customer Service

## Health & Wellness

The mental/physical/spiritual well being of library workers and patrons  
Sub-categories: Social Work, Burnout, Mental Health

## Intellectual Freedom

The protection of every individual's right to read and access information without limitation

## Management

Overseeing library staff members  
Sub-categories: Human Resources, Interpersonal Communication, Personnel

## Marketing & Outreach

Engaging with outside publics to promote library services  
Sub-categories: Community Engagement, Community Partners

## Technology

Engaging with library data; the impact of technology in regards to media literacy  
Sub-categories: AI, Specialized Training



# Survey



We developed a survey for public library workers to help us better understand the current professional development landscape: what's working, what needs improvement, and what public library professionals need most today. Through this survey, we aimed to gather the experiences and insights of our peers to help inform and shape the future of professional development in our field. In addition to collecting demographic data, we asked respondents to share which professional development opportunities they have found most valuable, what opportunities they wish were available, what resources they consider essential for becoming library leaders, and what support they need from professional organizations to succeed.

Our goal is to use this information to help build a more sustainable foundation for public library professionals - one that prioritizes ongoing learning, strengthens career pathways, and cultivates supportive networks. In doing so, we aim to ensure that public libraries remain resilient and continue to serve as vital, accessible spaces for generations to come.

To ensure our research was both relevant and impactful, we began examining the current professional development landscape within public libraries. This initial analysis revealed significant gaps in accessible leadership training, mentorship opportunities, and skill-building resources for emerging and mid-level professionals. Recognizing this need, we developed 10 survey questions aimed at capturing real-world insights from library staff regarding their experiences, priorities, and perceived barriers to professional growth. The questions were crafted using the following key criteria (i.e. relevance, clarity, actionability, and inclusivity). We distributed the survey to public librarians nationwide through professional listservs, library networks and social media platforms and received a total of 109 responses. This strategic approach allowed us to gather meaningful data that will guide the creation of targeted professional development initiatives tailored to the evolving needs of tomorrow's library leaders.



**109**  
responses from public  
library workers

# Survey Findings



A total of 109 public library professionals from across the country responded to our national survey. Their feedback offers an honest and compelling look at what's working, what's missing, and what's needed to move forward.

## Top priorities identified:

1

### **Leadership and Management:**

Many respondents noted a strong desire for structured support in transitioning into leadership roles.

2

### **Mentorship and Networking:**

Respondents highlighted the value of formal mentorship programs, networking with like-minded professionals, and opportunities for small group discussions.

3

### **Specialized Skills and Training:**

Areas such as readers' advisory, cataloging, tech services, data analytics, disability awareness, outreach to under-served communities, and business/accounting practices were cited as critical PD gaps.

4

### **Accessibility and Flexibility:**

Barriers such as lack of funding, limited local options, and time constraints were consistent themes. Respondents requested more in-person options, especially for adult and emerging adult learners, as well as continued virtual access.

5

### **Addressing Real-Life Issues:**

Respondents expressed a need for PD around managing patrons and staff experiencing homelessness, addiction, mental health crises, and other real-world challenges, along with addressing ethics and workplace conflict.

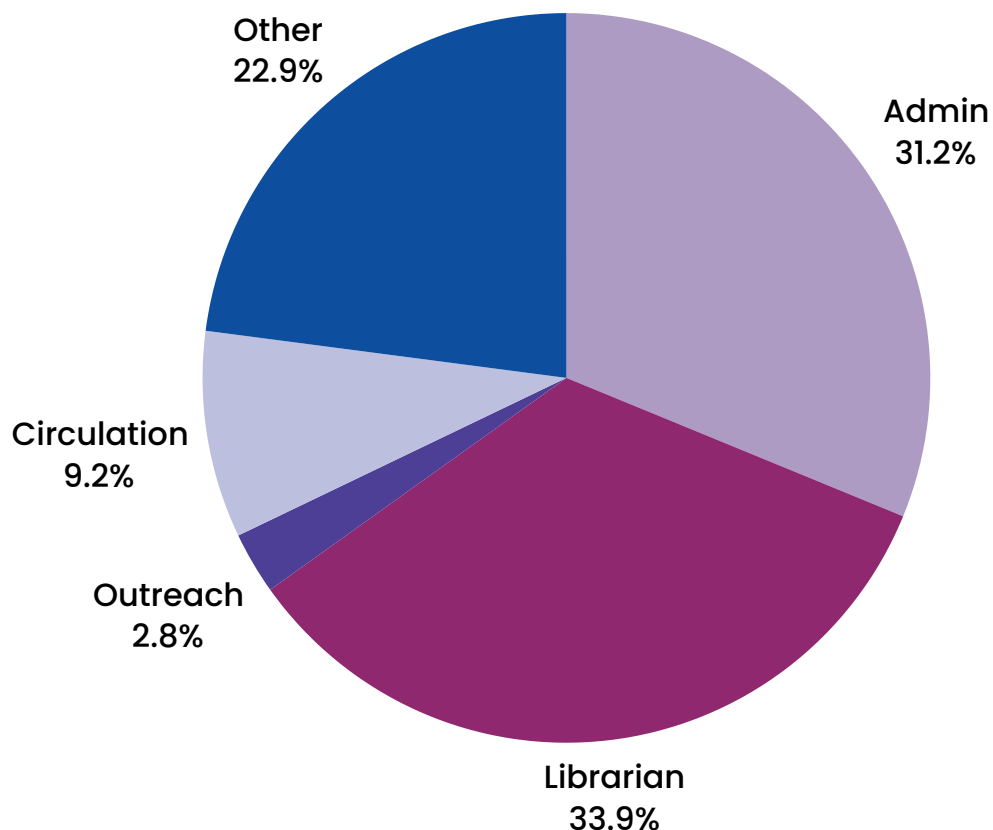


# VISUALIZATION OVERVIEW



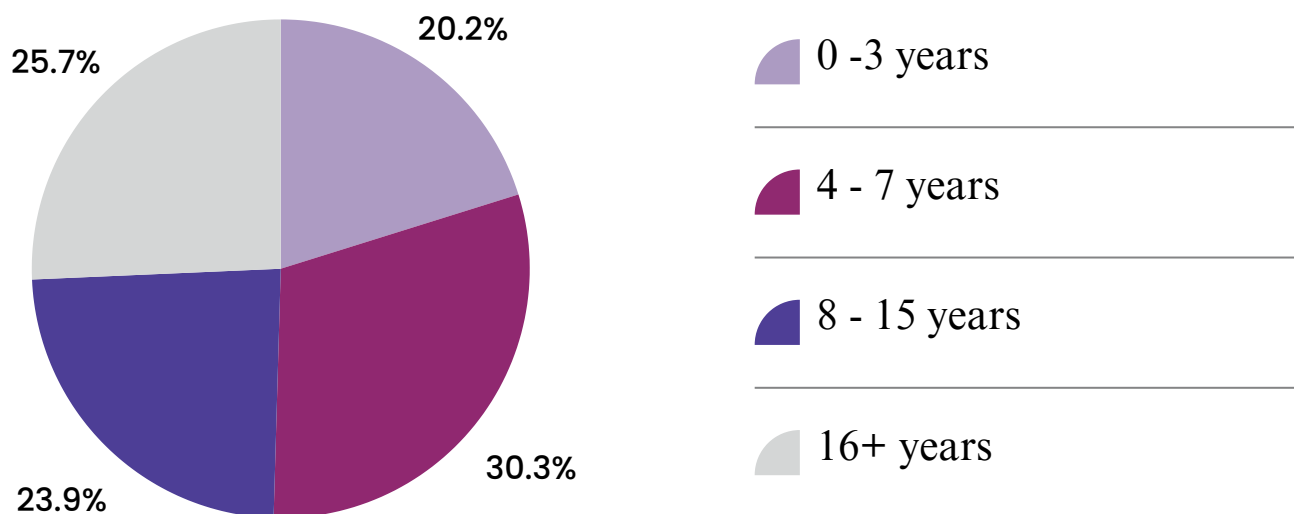
A total of **109 public library professionals** from across the country responded to our national survey.

## 2. What is/was your role in the public library?



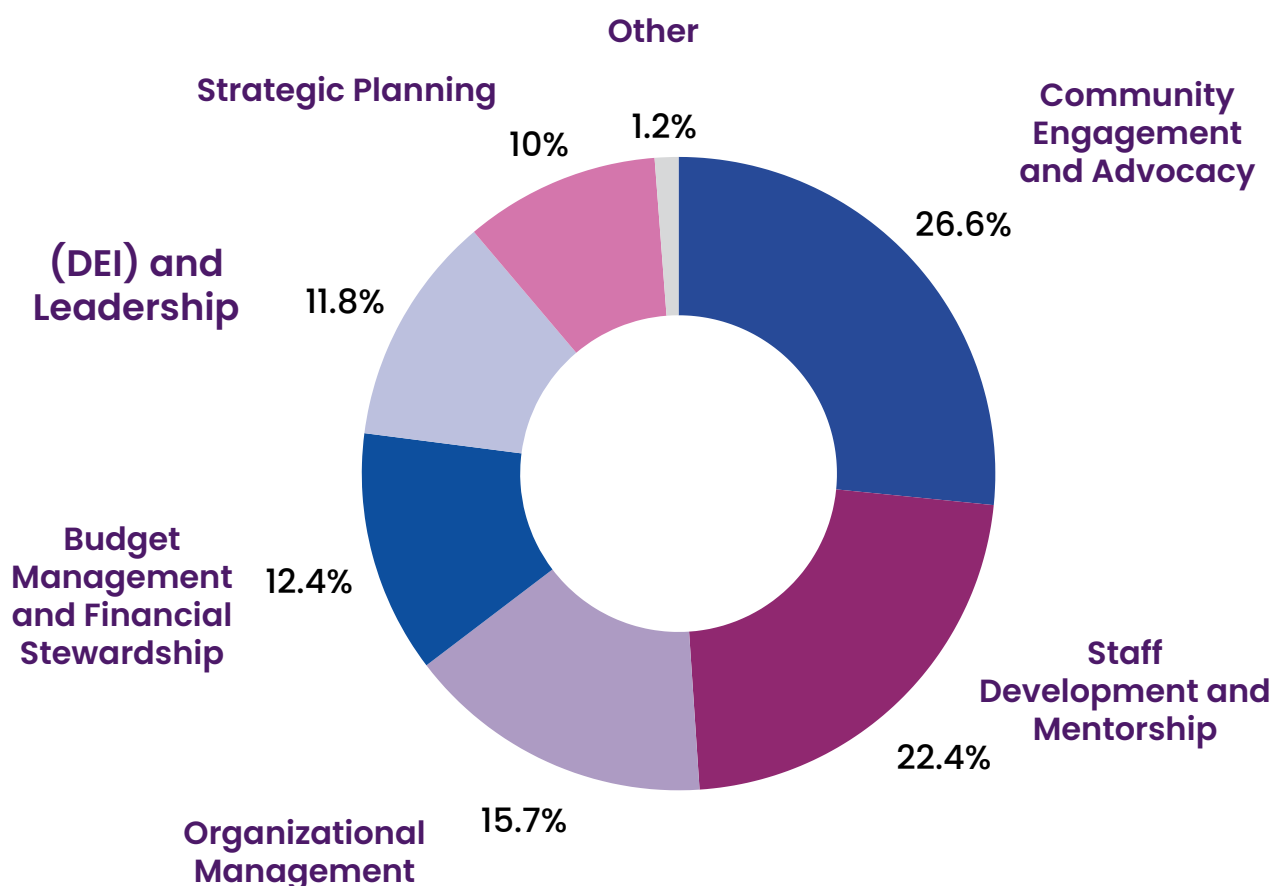
**Alt text:** Pie graph of answers to the question “What is/was your role in the public library?” The first segment is 31.2% Admin, the second segment is 33.9% Librarian, the third segment is 2.8% Outreach, the fourth segment is 9.2% Circulation, and the fifth segment is 22.9% Other.

### 3. How long have you/did you work in the public library?



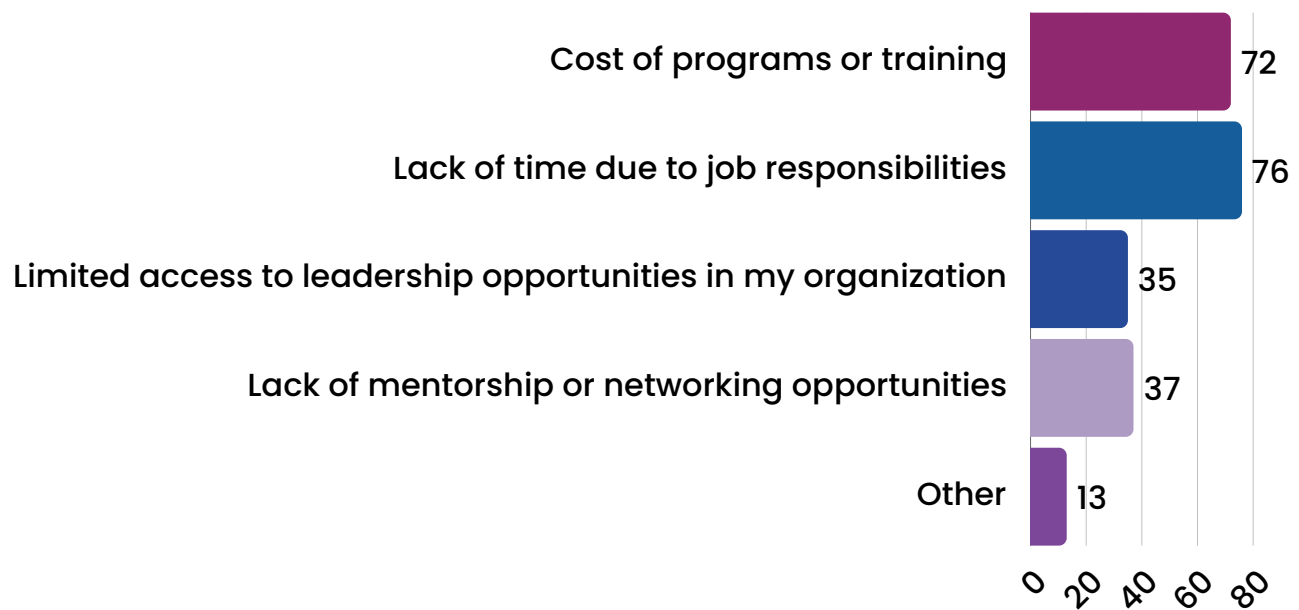
**Alt text:** Pie graph of answers to the question “How long have you/did you work in the public library?” The first segment is 20.2% for 0-3 years, the second segment is 30.3% for 4-7 years, the third segment is 23.9% for 8-15 years, and the fourth segment is 25.7% for 16+ years.

#### 4. What leadership skills are the most important for library staff to develop? (Select up to 3)



**Alt text:** Donut graph of responses to the question: “What leadership skills are the most important for library staff to develop? (Select up to 3).” The first segment is 26.6% for Community Engagement and Advocacy, the second segment is 22.4% for Staff Development and Mentorship, the third segment is 15.7% for Organizational Management, the fourth segment is 12.4% for Budget Management and Financial Stewardship, the fifth segment is 11.8% for (DEI) and Leadership, the sixth segment is 10% for Strategic Planning, and the seventh segment is 1.2% for Other.

## 5. What barriers, if any, have you encountered in accessing leadership training or development opportunities? (Check all that apply)



**Alt text:** Horizontal bar chart showing responses to the question: “What barriers, if any, have you encountered in accessing leadership training or development opportunities? (Check all that apply.)” The first bar is for Cost of programs or training with 72 respondents. The second bar is for Lack of time due to job responsibilities with 76 respondents. The third bar is for Limited access to leadership opportunities in my organization with 35 respondents. The fourth bar is for Lack of mentorship or networking opportunities with 37 respondents. The fifth bar is for Other with 13 respondents.

# Final Thoughts

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When we first met at LibLearnX and discussed our project, we quickly agreed that we shouldn't stop at the asked-for environmental scan. It was important to us that we hear from a wide range of library professionals, because professional development is something that everyone does and everyone has an opinion on. We had to know what was out there and then we had to ask people what they thought about it. This allows us a full picture of professional development today.

As we worked through our environmental scan, it first seemed like PLA was on track with its offerings. We found that the amount of offerings per category are about the same for both external professional development and ALA/PLA professional development, with the latter having slightly more across the majority of categories. This can be explained by the latter all coming from one source (the professional development database) whereas the former came from multiple sources.

However, if we focus on the responses from the survey, things begin to look different.



**69.9% of librarians surveyed agreed that effective mentorship was important, while 29.4 % were unsure.**

This data analysis also showcased the barriers,

**where 66.1% of respondents believed there were many obstacles to accessing leadership development opportunities, while 69.7% of public librarians cited a lack of time as a major factor.**

It becomes evident that while the desire for professional development exists, systematic and logistical barriers continue to hinder progress, highlighting a serious need for more accessible, flexible and time-sensitive development pathways within the library profession. We have prepared five recommendations for PLA, ordered by importance.

# Recommendations

- 1. Support state associations** and strengthen regional networks.
- Focus on **increasing finance/funding professional development** opportunities.
- 3. Expand financial and institutional access** to professional development opportunities by focusing on funding support, reducing time constraint barriers, and advocating for institutional support in prioritizing professional development.
- Explore **alternative forms of professional development** beyond the typical webinar format, including podcasts and small group discussions.
- 5. Market PLA's specialized professional development** to students and early career professionals.

## Recommendation #1

### Support State Associations



Our first recommendation is to support state associations through collaborative professional development that can strengthen and expand regional networks. Doing so would allow for more tailored, needs-based professional development specifically for public libraries facing financial or time constraints that limit their access. Many participants of our survey expressed a strong interest in being able to meet and learn from other libraries in their regions. Expanding regional networks would not only promote equity but also build on collaboration opportunities beyond national conferences. PLA can support this by facilitating hybrid regional meet-ups, developing an idea-sharing repository, and encourage learning in key focus areas.

A thorough assessment of available resources by region could help PLA identify gaps in support and access, particularly for smaller libraries in rural communities. Strengthening regional networks can empower library workers to address challenges specific to the populations they serve, while also encouraging deeper engagement with their state associations.



### Some suggestions to consider:

- Launching pilot programs that include quarterly **hybrid meet-ups** hosted by rotating libraries within their designated regions.
- Creating a **digital hub for idea-sharing**, mentorship matching, and skill exchange.
  - ALA Connect does exist, but perhaps can be more organized so that it's easier to navigate. An idea of how to organize opportunities for peer collaboration would be to create region focused communities and threads. For example, the Texas Library Association has their own community on ALA Connect and meet ups at national conferences.
  - Create themed **listservs** and email listings that library professionals can subscribe to and offer various content in more informal settings than the ordinary section committee.
- **Partner with LIS programs** to include students in regional initiatives, strengthening the professional pipeline and continue to build on leadership in our field.
- Collaborate with other organizations on annual conference scheduling to **create a wider opportunity for library workers to attend and participate in conferences**. For example, if ALA is on the west coast then Core Forum can meet on the east coast.



Conference scheduling should also be mindful of important periods for library workers like summer reading kick-offs, and national library week.

Building a stronger local and regional support structure can allow more library professionals to actively contribute their expertise and take full advantage of their state and national association memberships.

## Recommendation #2

### Increase finance and funding PD opportunities

Our second recommendation is to expand professional development opportunities in the area of finance and funding. In response to the survey question asking respondents what professional development opportunities they wish they had, participants mentioned needs such as “financial management training,” “business and accounting/admin practices,” and “finance training.”



**I wish there were a more effective way to network and include smaller/rural libraries that have limited staffing and budgets. Cost (both for the trainings themselves and for travel) inhibits so many smaller libraries from participating in professional development.**

**- Survey Respondent**



Our environmental scan of 124 ALA/PLA leadership-focused professional development opportunities and 107 external opportunities revealed a significant gap, with only five offerings, or about 2%, in the area of finance. This gap shows the need to expand offerings in this focus area to better support library professionals in developing essential financial competencies. Strengthening financial literacy is critical for individual career growth as well as establishing long-term sustainability and strategic management of library services.

Some finance and funding PD opportunities we found include:

- **Budget Management Fundamentals** by Library Journal & School Library Journal
- **Public Library Financial Management Guide** by Library of Michigan

By prioritizing finance-focused professional development, organizations can empower leaders to make informed budgetary decisions, effectively advocate for resources, and navigate increasingly complex funding environments.

## Recommendation #3

### Expand Financial & Institutional Access

Our third recommendation is to work toward expanding access to professional development (PD) opportunities by focusing on funding support and helping to reduce time constraint barriers by advocating for institutional support in prioritizing PD.

**When asked through our survey what barriers are encountered in accessing leadership development opportunities:**



**67% of 109 survey respondents selected the cost of programming or training.**



**68.9% selected lack of time due to job responsibilities.**



**31.1% feel limited by access to leadership opportunities.**

Current costs of ALA/PLA PD opportunities range from free to the most costly of \$360, plus membership fees for ALA and PLA members. When asked how organizations can better support emerging library leaders, one respondent answered

“Provide support through alternative scheduling, allowing educational and professional development opportunities on work time, offering mentor programs... many library workers are denied the opportunity to expand their knowledge and abilities because of time, money, and fear of change.” This lack of investment limits their ability to stay current with emerging technologies and best practices. Therefore, providing greater funding and financial support for librarians’ professional development is a critical investment in the future of our communities.



**It's time to invest in  
Library Leaders.**



Librarians are on the front lines of information access, digital literacy, youth engagement, and social services, yet many lack the financial resources to grow professionally. If possible, PLA should consider expanding low-cost, sliding-scale, or grant-funded offerings, and should encourage libraries to support PD during work hours by creating advocacy materials to highlight its value and recommending a selected percentage of hours worked be dedicated to PD, helping to embed PD access into institutional culture. While professional development is always important, in times of budget uncertainty, you will want to be sure that it is highlighted in upcoming planning.

## Recommendation #4

### Encourage Alternative Forms of Professional Development

Our fourth recommendation is to explore alternative forms of professional development beyond the typical webinar format, including podcasts and small group discussions. One survey respondent stated:

**“I wish we had space for more small group discussions. I feel like there's too much emphasis put on lecture style webinars. I am interested in creating space for more organic information sharing and trouble-shooting with peers, rather than ‘I am the expert let me tell you about this topic’ style webinar.”**



While hearing from professionals in the field has its place, it's also important to make space for peer-to-peer interactions and conversations.

Many library professionals are already having these conversations online through social media options like Facebook groups, BlueSky lists, and Discord servers. Being able to have these conversations in person would be hugely beneficial. For those topics that may benefit best from webinars, we also recommend including asynchronous options and easily-pausable training. People aren't always able to dedicate one chunk of time to professional development opportunities either.

Finally, libraries should consider physical professional development materials; state libraries often have professional development collections and PLA could help increase access to these materials as well as promote relationships between public libraries and their state library.



facebook

 **Discord**

 **Bluesky**

## Recommendation #5

### Increase Marketing of Niche Professional Development

If PLA encounters barriers implementing previous suggestions, perhaps a change in marketing techniques for the existing PLA webinars may boost engagement and awareness. Our fifth recommendation is to invest more marketing resources to promote PLA's specialized/niche professional development opportunities. A well-rounded leader must have knowledge of the various aspects of librarianship - tech services, customer service, collection development policies - as well as a growth mindset, developed through the sharing of ideas and information between library professionals. When asked what professional development opportunities library professionals wish they had in our survey, one respondent wrote:

“ **Continuing Education in Information Science: This would include specialized workshops or certifications on topics like metadata, cataloging systems, and information retrieval to improve the quality of services provided to patrons.** ”

These continuing education courses are available through PLA, but they are not often highlighted.



### Some suggestions to consider:

- It may be beneficial to focus **marketing on early career professionals and recent MLIS graduates.**
  - Outreach initiatives at MLIS universities to build face-to-face connections with students and show them what PLA has to offer.
  - Connect with advisors at MLIS universities to distribute information about upcoming specialized professional development opportunities from PLA.
- We know library professionals are pressed for time, so **organizing professional development opportunities in a linear format** could help professionals spend less time searching for professional development and more time engaging with it. We propose the creation of certification programs with designated tracks of study, awarding professional development credit at the completion of the track. Examples of tracks include:
  - Technical Services - Cataloging, Metadata, Interlibrary loans
  - Reference - Readers' Advisory, Genealogy
  - Archives - Archival management, Best preservation methods

This linear course of study is not only easy to follow for users, it also encourages ongoing engagement with PLA professional development offerings.

# Conclusion

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In the five months working on this project, from the environmental scan to putting everything together for our website, we've learned a lot about professional development and developing leaders.

We've taken the basic expectations: be promoted into a managerial role and watch some webinars to learn how to lead people; and transformed it into:

**give people a variety of options to learn how to lead, regardless of their title or longevity in the library.**

We've seen that the opportunities are out there, whether it's through PLA or an external resource. We've been able to identify gaps and overlaps and provide recommendations for PLA. It's important to note that PLA is doing well with the professional development opportunities that they provide. It's also important to listen to what survey respondents have to say, so that PLA can do even better.



In today's uncertain times, with institutions like the Library of Congress and the Institute of Library and Museum Services under attack in addition to on-going budget and censorship issues, we have to do what we can to help each other. PLA is and should be on the front lines with public library professionals; professional development is only one piece of that. If there is one thing to take away from this project, it's that we all have leadership potential -- but **there isn't only one way to become a leader.**



**PublicLibrary**  
ASSOCIATION  
Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

# Appendix

## A

### Website

To go along with our report and poster, we've also created a website where people will be able to browse our research and view our findings on their own time.

Website link: [developingtomorrowsleaders.com](http://developingtomorrowsleaders.com)

QR Code:



## B

### Spreadsheets

As part of this report, we're sharing the spreadsheets made to track external professional development opportunities, ALA/PLA professional development opportunities, and state and regional library association professional development opportunities.

Live spreadsheets are available at our website here: [developingtomorrowsleaders.com/research-process](http://developingtomorrowsleaders.com/research-process)

QR Code:



**C****Survey Questions**

The following three pages are the survey that the team designed.

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**1****Do you/have you ever worked at a public library?**☐ Yes☐ No**2****What is/was your role in the public library?**☐ Admin☐ Librarian☐ Outreach☐ Circulation☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_**3****How long have you/did you work in the public library?**☐ 0-3 years☐ 4-7 years☐ 8-15 years☐ 16+ years



**4**

**What leadership skills are the most important for library staff to develop? (Select up to 3)**

- ☐ Strategic planning
- ☐ Budget management and financial stewardship
- ☐ Staff development and mentorship
- ☐ Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) leadership
- ☐ Community engagement and advocacy
- ☐ Organizational management
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**5**

**What barriers, if any, have you encountered in accessing leadership training or development opportunities? (Check all that apply)**

- ☐ Cost of programs or training
- ☐ Lack of time due to job responsibilities
- ☐ Limited access to leadership opportunities in my organization
- ☐ Lack of mentorship or networking opportunities
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

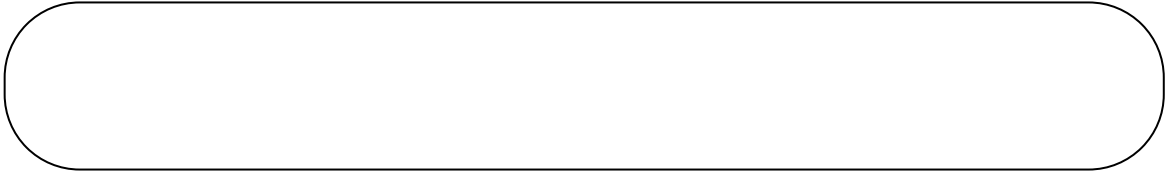
**6**

**Do you think mentorship programs are effective in supporting public librarians who want to be library leaders?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

**7**

**What professional development opportunities do you wish you had?**



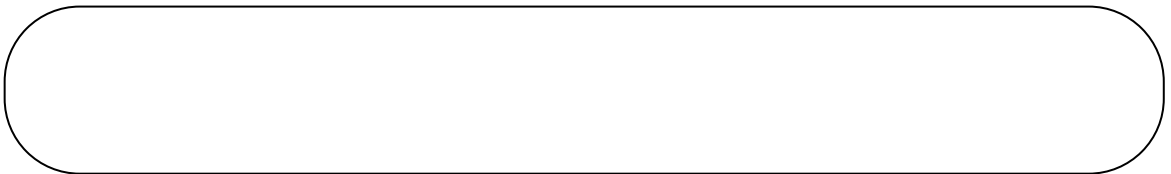
**8**

**Can you describe a professional development opportunity that you enjoyed/thought was useful to your professional growth?**



**9**

**What resources or support do you believe are essential for emerging library leaders to succeed?**



**10**

**How can professional organizations better support emerging library leaders?**

