

## ARTICLES

# The Local Library Network

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*This article focuses on four aspects of successful local area medical library networks, their benefits, their creation, legal issues, and keeping your focus. It is based on the proposition that local medical library networks are an essential link in the delivery of information services within the medical profession and the local community. As such they are valuable enough to command the attention of their participants, and deserving enough to command the support of the profession.*

*KEYWORDS* collaboration, communication, consortium purchasing, leadership, library networks, professional development

## EXPLOITING THE BENEFITS OF COLLEGIALLY

*The very first step towards success in any occupation is to become interested in it.*

William Osler, MD (1849–1919)

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## INTRODUCTION

When Dick Kammer entered the profession in 1995, he was encouraged to join the local Kansas City area health sciences library consortium. "It was cheap, just \$10 a year, and I was assured that it would be good for me. At the time I had taken on a half-time position running a small one-person library in a community hospital. Later, by adding the continuing medical education load, which enabled me to learn about my clients, and by pushing a table of contents service, I was able to not only move to full-time, but add an assistant. Nonetheless, it was membership in the consortium that gave me the strength I needed to maintain a professional authority."

## THE LOCAL NETWORK

The progenitor of the Health Sciences Library Network of Kansas City (HSLNKC) was the Kansas City Library Network (KCLN), founded in 1976. When initially organized, KCLN's strength was based upon an interagency free lending arrangement, a paper union list, and a collaboratively hired courier. A separate organization, the Health Sciences Library Group of Greater Kansas City (HSLGGKC), commonly known as the Greater Group, provided the congeniality of social networking. With changing technologies coming to the fore and an overlapping demand for leadership, it was clear that the two organizations needed to merge and did so in 1999, creating HSLNKC. The Network currently includes 33 institutional and some 30 individual members.

The Network is organized around a mission encompassing four basic areas of local and regional cooperation:

- Support for professional education
- Support for networking
- Development and sharing of resources
- Promotion of the profession

### Support for Professional Education

Immediately after the reorganization, the Network leadership began to assemble an annual program of educational activities based upon local needs and developing technologies. Network members with specialties were drawn upon to present. Other members with professional contacts arranged outside speakers and programs. Over time, the Professional Education Committee chair has typically been someone with connections to the local public and special library groups, so that the Network could sponsor both medically oriented and more generally applicable programming.

Connections with the regional National Network/Libraries of Medicine (NN/LM) were tapped for additional programming.

One of the reorganized Network's challenges was the hosting of the 2004 annual meeting of the Midcontinental Chapter of the Medical Library Association (MLA). The breadth of the membership provided leaders with experience in putting together large-scale programs, and a support team who were comfortable working together to make it happen. Not only was the Network able to present a professional convention with high-quality programming, the event provided a training ground for leadership within the local consortium.

An example of the type of programming the Network pursues happened in 2007 when the consortium's purchasing liaison provided a series of point-of-care product review luncheons with 10 vendor representatives who provided a summary product review to all the members. The programs helped the librarians enter into purchasing dialogs within their own institutions.

One of the founding principles of the Network's educational programming was that local needs must determine local programming. As MLA Continuing Education credits were expensive, restrictive in terms of content, and difficult to obtain, the Network's bylaws were amended to give it the authority to issue its own continuing education credits, which were well received by both the membership and their institutional supervisors. The Network now has the flexibility to offer a mix of credits from the MLA, the Special Libraries Association (SLA), the American Library Association (ALA), and HSLNKC, depending on the source of the programming.

### Support for Networking

Analyzing the 33 institutional members of the local network shows that six represent major academic libraries, two are from important research institutes, and one is from an internationally recognized science library. Only a few of the remaining libraries have multiple staff. There is a large contingent of one-person libraries, and many of the 30 individual members are also from one-person libraries.

Networking, both professional and personal, is therefore recognized as integral to effective librarianship as well as personal satisfaction and the health of the profession in the local arena.

Virtually all of the four basic organizational areas of the Network focus on collaborative features, and the rotating leadership makes an effort to add networking opportunities wherever possible. Whether it is a matter of populating its committees, spreading leadership opportunities, or indulging in social gatherings, the Network offers opportunities for professional cross-fertilization and personal development.

## Development and Sharing of Resources

In 1995, newbie medical librarians quickly became familiar with the multi-volume Index Medicus and the two-pound paper union list needed to find journal articles within the Network community. That has long gone by the by, but the notion of freely shared resources remains a mainstay of the local group.

The original consortium contracted with a courier to provide daily service to its institutional members. Today's Network is affiliated with the Kansas City Metropolitan Library and Information Network (KCMLIN) and contracts with their courier service at less than \$7 per day per institution. This service extends our previously limited range to the nonmedical libraries in the area and far beyond the local area into the surrounding states.

In the case of the single-person libraries, it is common practice for Network members to offer phone coverage for their colleagues on vacation or out sick, which not only relieves the local librarian, but also promotes the professionalism of the Network in the eyes of his/her administration.

Institutional members are encouraged to set up their Docline routing table to place member colleagues in the first cells, offering an opportunity for the small libraries to get initial requests as often as possible, and holding off requests to the larger libraries until later. Thus the smaller libraries get to loan more while the larger ones have to loan not as much.

In 2004, the Network instituted its first consortial purchasing agreement involving 17 institutional members in a full-text, online 250+-journal database at a significant cost savings. In ensuing years, other resources were investigated and in 2008 eight members joined in the purchase of significantly discounted professional library software. In that instance, the membership provided a \$4000 training grant for the software, which saved the participants collectively about \$28,000.

In time, it became clear that the Network could offer its services beyond the metropolitan area and benefit libraries in the far reaches of both Missouri and Kansas. Today, membership stretches from St. Louis to Wichita.

## Promotion of the Profession

Proverbially last, but never least, the members of the Health Sciences Library Network of Kansas City believe that their profession needs their collaborative support at a time when technology challenges the traditional notion of librarianship and accountants seek their savings on the back of information services.

The local Kansas City Network opens its arms to a variety of individual members, but at the institutional level, where most of the service impact is felt, it is strictly regulated. Institutional membership requires a physical library staffed full time by a professional, preferably degreed, librarian. Access to consortial purchasing agreements relies on a memorandum of

understanding that specifically states this requirement, and that status is reviewed every year for every library.

The Network maintains an online repository of materials in support of advocacy for the profession. Some of these are links to professional standards, analyses, and testimony. Others are illustrations of home-grown efforts. In more than one instance members have drawn successfully upon those materials to justify the continuance of their operations.

Perhaps one of the association's most impactful activities has been its annual award of five separate plaques for excellence. Given at the annual meeting in January, the plaques are accompanied by certificates detailing the reasons for the award. Hospital administrators are canvassed for supportive comments, and press kits, including pictures, are made available to the public relations departments in the libraries' home facilities. Although it is obvious that the strength of each library depends on direction by a librarian, the awards are given specifically to reward, and draw attention to, the value of the library itself to the institution it serves.

The program has had significant success in increasing the visibility of the hospital library, and in bringing recognition to the often invisible efforts of the professional librarian.

This year, the association has instituted a program to certify the professionalism of its member libraries, including a provision for certification with commendation.

### At Bottom

At bottom, the Network reminds its members and their administrators that they are professionals, that their efforts have an impact on patient care in the community, and that their collaboration is a testimonial to their value in medical information services. It underscores the importance of both training and experience and recognizes that competence is necessary to best serve the goals of the profession.

Within the profession different values will be expressed or emphasized by different groups and each group will do different things. Nonetheless, professionals with complimentary skills, working together on what is important, will provide optimal delivery of information to improve patient care. They will touch the actual lives of people they will never see. For that reason, the Network's motto reads: Where information touches life.

### CREATING AN ORGANIZATION AND KEEPING IT ALIVE

*By far the most dangerous foe we have to fight is apathy—indifference from whatever cause, not from a lack of knowledge, but from carelessness, from absorption in other pursuits, from a contempt bred of self satisfaction.*

William Osler, MD (1849–1919)

Both library needs and the climate for libraries has changed significantly since HSLNKC was founded. Three major needs, however, might seem to stand out across the profession. One is to find better ways to live within an ever-tightening budget. Another would be to discover exceptional training opportunities for keeping up with technological innovation. And, the third, and perhaps most important, is fighting the perception that libraries add no value to the institutional mission, or the bottom line.

Any of these makes a decent rationale for local organization. All of them create an imperative for that organization. But how to begin? And more importantly, how does it all keep going?

### Gumption: A Recipe to Begin a Truly Beneficial Organization

In the back hollows of the Ozarks, people understand the term gumption. Our parents used it liberally. But we haven't heard it in common parlance in many a year. Fortunately, today we have the Internet to point to when we need to convince the younger generation that we really are using a good English word. The Wiktionary ([en.wiktionary.org/wiki/gumption](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/gumption)) defines "gumption" as "Energy of mind and body, enthusiasm; boldness of enterprise; initiative or aggressiveness, guts; spunk."

It does take a little gumption to get started. In our collective experience we find that getting going sometimes takes a little more effort than keeping going. Mostly that's because most people don't feel as though they know how to lead. It doesn't matter. You can take leadership courses. There are Web sites devoted to leadership. You can talk to leaders in your churches or the Rotary. At the bottom, leadership just takes an invitation to join in.

Most librarians know other librarians in their area, maybe not all, but some. Starting off only requires inviting those you know to lunch. Want to be bolder? Invite them to a barbecue at your house on the weekend. Feed them and then express the needs that lead you to want to consider a local Network. Remind them that "two heads are better than one" and that free associations in this country are responsible for most of the good things that get done.

Remember that there are already many local and regional library Networks. The National Network/Libraries of Medicine regional chapters have lists of them available on their Web sites. Every one provides a model for organization. Some are loose, some are highly organized, and all have contacts listed. Most respond organically to the needs and capacities of the membership. The important thing is to have the gumption to start.

### It Doesn't Run On Automatic

Having started a Network, one cannot allow one's gumption to dissolve. It can be passed around to different members, but someone always has to have it. Local Library Networks do not live on their own, but rely on the energy

of their members to keep them alive. The cost of collectivity is a continuous contribution to it. Of course, if you feel your needs strongly enough, then the motivation is always there.

As an example, for many years HSLNKC pretty much did run on automatic. The times weren't as crushing and the needs were easily met. Meetings were an enjoyable way to visit with local colleagues. When the Network began to engage in consortium purchasing, things changed dramatically. Institutional members were making significant savings, and the Network began to process over a quarter million dollars annually through its books. Consequently it became necessary to purchase Directors and Officer's Insurance and to employ an accountant to navigate IRS Form 990. HSLNKC stopped running on automatic.

More services meant a greater need for an informed leadership, and the response to this change was to focus more on cultivating the membership generally. The Network had always rotated its officer corps through its membership, which now posed a challenge to provide informed leadership while not imposing too heavy a burden on those already professionally burdened.

In looking at this conundrum, certain basic principles were recognized. The more committed members had to be willing to develop their own leadership skills to make it possible to inspire other members to contribute, and although crisis can bring a group together, the group also needs ongoing support for everyday living.

### Cultivating the Membership

The Network uses a variety of tools to develop its membership.

- Good service: First and foremost the Network has worked to meet the needs of its constituent members as effectively and efficiently as possible, maintaining clarity of information, transparency of governance, and meeting its deadlines on time.
- Commitment: The Network expects each member to renew a Memorandum of Understanding not only to pay dues on time, but to also offer some service to the group. We seek to be clear that this is a peer-run organization and that reciprocity, in terms of both professional and Network service, is the sine qua non of membership.
- Opportunities for service: By rotating the various leadership and committee positions, the Network offers as many opportunities for participation as possible. Recognizing that one person can only do so much while others can do more, we seek to provide a variety of leadership activities. Those who can do more are encouraged to do so. Those who can do less are provided with appropriate opportunities to participate. Some may take on the top leadership positions for a year or more, whereas others may chair a committee for several years, or simply host one of the quarterly meetings.

In many instances we have seen members move from hosting meetings to becoming committee members, going on to chair committees, and then accepting a nomination to an officer position.

In the top slots, only the treasurer's position runs for more than 1 year. All other officer positions are limited to a single year.

- Maintaining the friendly face: Although the Network has grown more "organizational," there has been a continued effort to emphasize the old fashioned sense of friendly collegiality. We recognize that social consciousness must exist in the leadership to bond the group together.

The officers routinely provide opportunities for socialization, whether it be a Cinco De Mayo celebration at a Mexican restaurant, a Christmas dinner at a member's home, a 30th Anniversary birthday bash, or a potluck picnic with free burgers and games. Life events (births, marriages, deaths) are recognized with cards and gifts. Birthdays get special e-mailed notices so that all the members can offer their congratulations or condolences. Officers are particularly expected to present their congratulations or words of sympathy.

At a time when neighbors gather less and less frequently on their front stoops, and pick-up ball games have been brought under the umbrella of organized sports, the consortium strives to maintain personal relationships between its members. In a real sense, professional difficulties can only be best shared when we know and appreciate our colleagues as human beings first. In a time of teleconferencing and Web meetings, the Network still strongly favors face-to-face meetings, preferably with cookies and soft drinks.

- The formal process: Every summer to fall, the nominating committee seeks the officer slate for the coming year. In 2007 HSLNKC initiated a formal orientation program for incoming officers. This was in response to a realization that much of the institutional history was not being passed on, and incoming officers were not necessarily cognizant of their duties or the underpinnings of certain historical practices, or of their legal obligations. It was also an effort to avoid the development of a stagnant leadership group.

Occurring shortly after fall elections, the orientation program is conducted by members of the nominating committee utilizing various organizational documents, i.e., corporate papers, bylaws, policy and procedure statements, a calendar of obligations, outlines of committee practices, and a review of resources, officer duties and expectations, and the role of leadership.

The session is thorough and takes two thirds of a day, with lunch provided. Past presidents are always invited to attend to discuss their experiences, and in its second year, attendance was thrown open to all members. New officers go home with notebooks for review before they take office in the following January.

- Remember that we are social animals. Although all of this may seem daunting, it loses some of its burden when you remember that we are nothing if not socially grounded. Granted that modern society may discourage us from human contact, we nonetheless crave it, and even a little encouragement can go a long way. Those of us who have been involved over the years find that it has been enjoyable to extend our wings, to engage the challenges that the Network presents, and to have some impact on the library profession in the local arena. We have discovered like-minded friends in the profession who are willing to engage with us in trying to find answers. We have enjoyed the cup of friendship where we hadn't known it existed, and though there are always struggles, there are also deep satisfactions, and as we share the work, we share the joy.

### TECHNICAL ISSUES, LAW, AND LEGAL MATTERS IN REGULATING ORGANIZATIONS

*The best preparation for tomorrow is to do today's work superbly well.*

William Osler, MD (1849–1919)

In the previous section, it was mentioned that the HSLNKC includes “a calendar of obligations” in the material presented for its officer orientation. For years the demands upon the organization were such that they rested easily in the collective mind. Once it began to work more aggressively to meet the needs of the membership, it became obvious that the oral tradition form of record keeping was not enough.

As the membership rotated through the various leadership positions, it became clear that policies and procedures were liable to shift with the tides of time. And, at one point important data such as the tax ID number could be found only after a search through past office holders. Recognizing that there's nothing more anathema to librarians than sloppiness, the Network began a major technical reorganization.

#### Preserving the Data

The first major effort at organization was to separate the information from the personalities by moving all the important information to a Yahoo group site. With a nod to transparency in governance, the site is not just accessible to Network leaders, but accessible to all Network members.

The first additions to the site included the consortium's bylaws, corporate certificates, Internal Revenue Service (IRS) letter, and accounting spreadsheet. Over time additional folders were included to keep track of committee reports, historical information, various standards, and so forth.

Possibly one of the more important items is a collection of documents in support of the value of medical libraries.

The Yahoo site works particularly well because it acts as a listserv, rebroadcasting member e-mails. That feature attracts the membership to the site, and membership qualifies for access to the file folders at the same location. The site also sports a calendar whose entries (meeting dates; birthdays) are announced automatically to the participating members.

Archival space for paper copies of much of the data, or for seldom needed, but important, supportive documentation, is provided by one of the member institutions.

### Bylaws, Policies, and Procedures

When in 1999 the modern HSLNKC was formed by the merging of two predecessor groups, an effort was made to create bylaws that would stand the test of time. Of course, that failed, and several revisions have been made over time to bring the bylaws into accordance with both the law of the land and actual Network practices.

However, there was never a question but that there is a need for relatively simple, clearly stated bylaws to regulate the governance of the group, to make leadership accessible to any member, and to provide a clean window into the day-to-day operations. Over time, as the Network has been unexpectedly challenged by outside institutions, the bylaws have saved the Network from legal entanglements more than once. Much of the credit for that must go to one net borrowing institution that reciprocates by providing legal review of the consortium's bylaws, contracts, and other legal documents, an example of the strengths of a multitype consortium.

For a while bylaws changes seemed to come out of the woodwork, until it was finally recognized that a formal set of policy statements and procedural pathways would suffice to provide guidance that did not have to be incorporated into the bylaws. Network leaders created a template and a standard numbering system that allowed anyone to create a policy or procedure that would be approved by the relevant authority, e.g., committee, board, or membership.

This actually relieved a long-standing concern that we were losing good procedures when positions turned over. Although an effort had been made, we could never get wholesale policies and procedures written for the various positions. The template allows for the creation of specific policies or procedures when such is deemed necessary, without the expectation of a comprehensive document. When approved by the membership at the quarterly meetings, policies have virtually the same authority as the bylaws themselves, without the pain of an official revision.

## Tax Exempt Incorporation

On its organization in 1999, HSLNKC was incorporated as a nonprofit corporation in the State of Missouri. In addition, HSLNKC also applied for and was granted the status of a 501 (3) c under the rules of the IRS. Although it is possible for an individual to take this on for a group, as done by HSLNKC, it is suggested legal guidance be sought. This not-for-profit status led to the opportunity for the organization to receive tax-exempt status in the State of Missouri, another fairly complicated bureaucratic process. Although this status for HSLNKC provides many important benefits, there are some required reports that must be attended to, including

- maintaining a legal address of the organization (which can be a challenge with rotation of the leadership);
- filing an Annual Report to the State of Missouri;
- filling out an IRS 990 form every year;
- renewing tax-exempt status with Missouri every two years; and
- providing on demand an IRS letter or Form W-9.

## Taxes and Insurance

For a long time after the Network had been formed, and while it collected minimal dues and made no real profits, successive officers ignored the whole question of taxes. We had no profits and no employees. Our courier was a contract service, which required no documentation from our end. The Network coasted along fat and happy.

When the Network became involved in consortium purchasing and began transferring large sums of money, astute leadership recognized the need to look at the Network's IRS obligations and found that the Network was now required to complete the regular and extensive IRS Form 990, even though the organization is nonprofit and tax exempt. It needed an accountant.

At the same time the president realized that the financial obligations placed an untenable burden on the officers and that they needed to be covered by Directors' and Officers' Insurance.

Fortunately, when consortium purchasing was initiated, an administrative fee was imposed on all the participants and that fee was able to immediately support the cost of an accountant to handle the taxes and the cost of the insurance. Whether or not a local network involves itself in money transactions of any size, officers insurance not only protects the leadership, it makes accepting a place on the board more appealing to potential candidates.

## The Cost of Consortium Purchasing

A truly important benefit to members of HSLNKC is the consortium purchasing agreements negotiated by the Network. One of the participating libraries in the Network's consortium purchasing program calculated its annual savings at over \$125,000. Member organizations collectively save well over one and a quarter million dollars. But it's not all free.

Even before its 1999 organization, HSLNKC established the position of Institutional Liaison, one institutional member to whom all the institutional members looked for information support, and, occasionally, encouragement. This position was never term limited, and has been held for long periods by members who have had a passion for the organization, the position, and the responsibility it represents. Consortium purchasing was always considered an institutional matter.

Although the position has always had a supporting cast, responsibility for consortium purchasing contracts has been the main responsibility of the Institutional Liaison. The Network currently has contracts with two information providers and one software vendor. Although each vendor has a canned contract, the liaison has always worked with legal counsel to construct custom contracts that accommodated the participating members as much as the vendors. She has also ensured that the contracts were clear to everyone, and that participants were clear in their understanding of their obligations as well as benefits.

Although many consortia basically arrange the discounts, they place the financial dealings between the individual participants and the vendors. Although vendors prefer to bill individual institutions in a consortium, HSLNKC prefers the vendors to bill through the consortium itself. This provides one strong and clear source of information from the participant's point of view. It creates loyalty within the consortium, and provides a mechanism to ensure that the relevant invoices are correct across the board.

The process involves the use of clear, uncluttered forms and templates to assure efficient handling of business so that it does not significantly detract from the members' actual work in the library. To that end all billing and payment activity devolves upon a close working relationship between the liaison and the treasurer and efficient use of standard computer applications (Microsoft Excel and Word). Therefore, the treasurer is the only multi-year officer position in the organization.

In developing the Network's process for dealing with consortia agreements, the Network formed a system where the organization has one contract with the vendor and Letters of Agreement with the participating members. In 2006 one participating hospital folded midway through the year, and the administration requested the return of half of their consortial payment. The Letter of Agreement protected HSLNKC in that instance, and the hospital corporation did not get its money.

An immediate review of the terminology of the Letter of Agreement suggested that, although the wording was adequate, it needed to be strengthened. Such letters now have clear statements to the effect that

- The letter is a legally binding agreement
- No refunds are made once the agreement is signed
- The agreement is to be signed by an “authorized person”

The latter became advisable after the 2006 incident when it was the library director who had to take responsibility for the hospital not getting its money back. Now we strongly suggest that library directors have at least their direct supervisors sign the letter. Some do; some don't.

Subsequent phraseology was added making it clear that participation in the purchase program requires that the institution maintain a physical library fully staffed by a professional librarian. This position is vital, because the purchased programs demand a qualified administrator on site. HSLNKC facilitates the purchase, but it does not set up or maintain delivery of services within the participating institutions.

At the same time, the institutional liaison and the Network officers do not negotiate with anyone except the member librarians in the participating institutions. Network matters are not discussed with supervisors or hospital officers (CEOs, etc.). Instead, it is maintained that the only appropriate person for institutional officers to deal with is their own professional librarian. This reinforces the important role of the local librarian as the information professional. Having put together the discounted purchase opportunities and completed all of the financial transactions, it is not the liaison's obligation to operate beyond the local librarian who is expected to become knowledgeable about Network issues or consortia products within his/her walls. For Network leaders, dealing with hospital officers is not a part of their contribution.

### But It's Not All So Bad

So far this reads as one difficult trial after another. Certainly, HSLNKC's officers have met problems over time, and had to research or make up solutions. Sometimes solutions didn't work and had to be addressed more than once to find an appropriate answer. But there has been no professional development course or conference that could have taught the Network members more. And there is a deep sense of personal satisfaction that we, the members of HSLNKC, have been able to fend for ourselves and to provide both leadership and resources for our members.

As it turns out, librarians can handle calendars and spreadsheets. They can write coherent sentences. They can ask cogent questions that lead to marvelous understanding. They can discuss business with vendors and occasionally hold the vendors' feet very close to the fire. They can talk to CEOs,

CFOs, and COOs on issues of purchasing and value-added services. And once the course is laid, the spreadsheets formatted, and the forms, letters, and responses devised, we still enjoy the fellowship of the meetings, the educational programs, and the picnics.

## HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR FOCUS?

*Courage and cheerfulness will not only carry you over the rough places in life, but will enable you to bring comfort and help to the weak-hearted and will console you in the sad hours.*

William Osler, MD (1849–1919)

Having begun life as a nice little collegial gathering of library directors wanting to expedite interlibrary loans and worrying over whether the courier made timely deliveries, HSLNKC grew over 30 years into a strong service-oriented association of library professionals focusing on education, discounted resources, and advocacy. Declining budgets and reduced staffing, the challenge of supposedly free online resources, and the pressure from point-of-care products have challenged local library networks to remain strong and focused.

It brings to mind the situation in Fairmont, West Virginia, many years ago where the president of the local Newspaper Guild lamented the fact that he could only keep his membership loyal during contract negotiations. In the period between negotiations, when the company could work on the loyalties of the membership, he could hardly get anyone to come to his picnics.

It is one thing to carefully craft the structure of an organization, quite another to maintain the commitment of its membership over time. This section shares some of the ways HSLNKC, as an organization that focuses on people, works to stay relevant and timely to its members.

### Structure for Bonding

Probably the main bond between the members of any volunteer organization is the personal bond. In an era when more and more communication is electronic, and classes meet online, where voices are tinny and facial expressions cannot be seen, the depersonalization of society may be the local network's greatest enemy. Now it takes greater determination to maintain strong links between professionals.

That has been reflected in the history of the Network, which has developed several strategies to cope with it.

When it reorganized in 1999, the Network made it a point to include a Social Committee in its structure. Its charge was to explore ways to keep the

membership in touch with one another and to recognize, on behalf of the organization, the personal milestones passed during the year. But separating that function from the leadership never sat well. Today, the vice-president (or president-elect at HSLNKC) is tasked with the duty to bring members together socially.

There are two reasons for this. One is that it gives those taking on the eventual leadership of the Network an opportunity to get to know individual members more closely. The other is that if one has agreed to offer service as an officer, he/she should be more willing to make the effort to fulfill this charge. If it seems strange that social relationships have to be given structure, it only underlines the extreme importance of the need in these times.

### Presidential Leadership

In a rotating leadership it can be challenging to maintain a consistency of focus. One president may do quite well. The next worries that he/she may not be able to do as well and holds back. One is more socially adept than another and gregarious leadership is followed by a shy demeanor.

But, have you ever walked through the halls of your institution and observed the number of people walking head down, or with eyes studiously avoiding eye contact along the way? And then you say something to one of them: "Good morning, hope you're doing well today." And you see them smile as they respond. It is clear that most people appreciate simple recognition, and that anything beyond that is even more appreciated.

Although various personalities may occupy the officer corps from year to year, it is important that those accepting official positions realize that it is one of their primary obligations to communicate his/her recognition of every member and to acknowledge their value as a person, as a professional, and as a colleague within the Network. It is particularly the duty of the president to do that.

Over time, various tools have been provided to assist HSLNKC leaders to carry out this function, but there is no bylaw, policy, procedure, or tradition that will substitute for a leader who truly likes and appreciates the Network members. Of course, sometimes if you pretend you like someone, you may actually come to like them.

### LEADERSHIP SKILLS SOMETIMES NEED STRUCTURAL HELP: HOW TO RUN THE ORGANIZATION—HOW DO YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO?

Nothing so undermines a leader as not knowing how to keep things on track. HSLNKC's annual Memorandum of Understanding requires each member to attend at least one of the four Network meetings each year. If

the meeting they attend is not well run, the overall picture they get of the association is not flattering.

### Officers' Orientation

Because HSLNKC believes in giving as many members as possible leadership experience, it occasionally occurs that someone who has little knowledge of Network affairs may be elected to office. In the past other active members have helped to keep affairs on-task. In 2007 the nominating committee created an orientation program designed to help bring the newly elected officers up to speed. Committee members, including three past presidents, present a wide-ranging review of the organization, its mission, its obligations and expectations, its tools and resources, and its opportunities. The session takes most of a full day and provides a lot of Q&A opportunity.

### Running Meetings

If you look at the bylaws of practically any formal organization, you will find a little note that Roberts Rules of Order will govern the running of their meetings. On the other hand hardly anyone actually knows what Roberts Rules of Order are. Two years ago a past president noted that one of the best tools she had for running the Network meetings was a one-page outline of the meeting, much like an agenda, with crib notes inserted (for example, "Having been moved and seconded, is there any discussion."). The previous president had gifted it to her. Now a similar sheet is provided to every officer before the beginning of their term. It's a help.

### Setting Calendars

A lot of the stress of running a local library network is worrying about deadlines. HSLNKC keeps three calendars up to date:

- The officers maintain a one-page "Calendar of Obligations" that denotes when specific events have to occur. These include such items as when invoices are to be mailed out, contracts renegotiated, state mandated reports due. It's an unchanging notice of things to be done.
- The membership maintains a calendar on its Yahoo group site that includes things that need to be automatically announced to the membership. These include meeting dates, times and places, and birthday announcements. The bulk of these can be set once and forgotten.
- The Network maintains a public calendar on its Web site (<http://hslnkc.org>), which is easily accessed whenever members want to check on upcoming events.

This is one of those things that may appear onerous on the surface, but which lubricates the flow of business and actually makes things easier to manage.

### Setting the Budget

The HSLNKC dues schedule has not been changed since the reorganization in 1999. Individuals pay \$10; institutions pay on a tier basis between \$50 and \$500 (including a free membership for their representatives); and associate members (vendors) pay \$50. Most facilities within the Kansas City SMSA pay the \$50 dues fee. More distant libraries unable to participate in the organizational activities of the consortium pay higher fees. Other income comes from administrative fees on the various consortium purchasing programs, and, occasionally, from educational program fees.

Each January the treasurer works with the president to publish a budget for the year. Based on previous transactions, it provides a fiducially sound roadmap for the coming year. Once approved by Network members at the annual meeting in January, expenditures can be made throughout the coming year without reverting to the membership for special permissions.

### Setting Meeting Dates

In the olden days the last question at any meeting was, “Where will we meet next time?” Now the first duty of the newly elected president-elect in the fall is to set the meeting schedule for the four Network meetings in the coming year. There are specific considerations.

- Is there access to parking?—This is especially important in the case of downtown libraries where space may be hard to come by or require special permits.
- Is it in a part of the metropolitan area that hasn’t been visited recently?—Since the Network requires every member to attend at least one meeting a year, it is important to make it easy for those at a distance to attend.
- Is there facility for a brief educational program following the meeting?—All Network meetings are followed by an educational program of some sort. Mostly there’s no need for facilitating technology, but it’s important to have it available if necessary.
- Does it give the host credit for service to the organization?—Because members are expected to provide service during the year and some face difficulties doing that, hosting a quarterly meeting is considered qualifying service. It is considerate to be aware of their situation and to try to account for it.

## Committees are Training Grounds

HSLNKC has only a few committees: Bylaws, Policies and Procedures; Education; Nominating; and Professional Activities. In addition, there is an institutional liaison and a Web site coordinator. The chairs, liaison, and coordinator are all appointed by the president and often serve several years. Each has a charge laid out in the bylaws, and each solicits members or assistance at the beginning of the year.

It is important that individuals feel like they can do what they volunteered to do and to that end committee membership is never restricted. Reports are solicited at each Network meeting, and the president encourages activity where needed. Committees are the training grounds for membership participation in advanced levels of leadership, as they offer beginning levels of orientation and mentoring.

## ON THE WHOLE

It is necessary to give the individual members a sense of belonging to an organization of peers working collegially to accomplish important goals. They need to feel that they are valued partners and that their participation is important. At the same time there's a sense that the value of what one gets out of the organization is pretty much going to equal what is put in. Participation brings learning and connection. It elevates the mind and the spirit and creates a fellowship out of a profession.

It is the leaderships' charge to make these points and to cultivate the membership. HSLNKC looks at all its members as leaders, so when HSLNKC focuses on cultivating its members, it means recognizing the value of its members, and promoting the leadership qualities each possesses in order to continue the vitality of the Network. This is, perhaps, the primary obligation of the Network as a whole.

The authors wrote this article in the hope that it would encourage unaffiliated librarians to think about coming together to better serve their constituencies and to help set the future agenda for the profession. We believe that in unity there is creativity, in unity there are answers, in unity there is power. Good results depend on the effort of many who work together with confidence.

## APPENDIX

HSLNKC members include The American Academy of Family Physicians; Children's Mercy Hospital; Cleveland Chiropractic College; Cox Medical Center-North; Graceland University; Heartland Regional Medical Center;

Kansas City University of Medicine & Bioscience; Liberty Hospital; Linda Hall Library; Menorah Medical Center; Midwest Research Institute; North Kansas City Hospital; Olathe Medical Center; Missouri Baptist Medical Center; Providence Health Center; Quintiles, Inc.; Research Medical Center; Shawnee Mission Medical Center; Shook, Hardy & Bacon Drug and Medical Library; St. John's Health System; St. John's Regional Medical Center; St. Joseph Medical Center; St. Luke's Hospital; St. Luke's Hospital–St. Louis; Stormont-Vail Healthcare; Stowers Institute for Medical Research; Truman Medical Center–Lakewood; University of Kansas Medical Center; University of Missouri–Kansas City Health Sciences Library; University of Missouri–Kansas City Dental Library; VA Medical Center; Via Christi Regional Medical Center; Wesley Medical Center.

A review of the foundation of the original Kansas City Library Network is recounted in Corry AM, Thomas DA. Kansas City Library Network, Inc. Show-Me Libraries. 1987;Feb:11–15.