



Wisconsin Public Library  
Professional Development Participation  
Research Study Report

September 30, 2019

1360 Regent Street #121 • Madison, WI 53715 • (608) 620-5421 • [www.wils.org](http://www.wils.org)

## Contents

Executive summary .....	2
Background .....	4
Definition .....	4
Methodology.....	5
Recommendations .....	6
Facilitate statewide data collection .....	6
Develop vision and goals for statewide CE efforts .....	8
Secure resources to support equitable access to CE across the state.....	9
Develop and promote best practices.....	9
Revise contact hour requirements and improve the certification process .....	11
Acknowledgements.....	13

## Executive summary

At its heart, this study's intent was to learn more about the barriers library staff face when trying to participate in continuing education so that professional development efforts, with a focus on community engagement, would be available at the times and locations and in the formats that would be most fully utilized by our library community. Understanding the barriers to participation is the first step in developing content and delivery mechanisms that minimize those barriers and increase continuing education participation throughout the state.

The majority of Wisconsin public library directors consider participation in continuing education (CE) events and opportunities to be valuable regardless of where they are from, size of their library, or time in the profession. In fact, 92% of survey participants either agreed (55%) or strongly agreed (37%) with the statement, "CE is still valuable at this stage in my career." This theme was repeated in interviews with library system representatives, interviews with CE coordinators in other states, and in one-on-one interviews with library staff.

This finding aligns with other studies and other professions. In a 2019 survey of non-profit employees<sup>1</sup>, nearly 90% of respondents answered yes when asked, "are you better able to succeed in your job because of professional development that you've participated in?" A 2013 survey by the Global Libraries Initiative<sup>2</sup> asked where the Gates Foundation should direct its future support. The top two responses were funding collaborative efforts among libraries and funding training and skill development for library workers and when asked If ONLY ONE recommendation to Gates for future library funding could be made, they answered training for staff. Continuing education is valued and it is needed.

Furthermore, many library professionals in Wisconsin felt that CE has become more important in the last ten years, in part because of the rapid pace of technology and communication change and because the need to remain relevant is a real concern in the library world. There is consensus that relevancy of the learning opportunity is the most important factor in CE participation and most participants in the study did not view a lack of high quality learning opportunities to be a barrier to participation. One interviewee put it this way, "There are more CE opportunities than funding and time allow."

In fact, there are real and significant barriers to full and equitable participation in statewide and regional CE efforts, especially at smaller libraries with fewer staff members and smaller budgets. Through discussions with library professionals in Wisconsin, in interviews with other state experts, and in a survey of public library directors in Wisconsin, it is clear that for many a lack of time, staff coverage, and money are the main barriers to participation. However, other findings indicate that contact hours for library certification, board and organizational support, and time in the profession all impact how and how often library staff participate in learning opportunities.

With an understanding of both the challenges and motivations of CE participation, the following recommendations, from the visionary to the practical, are considered the most likely to impact participation levels:

---

<sup>1</sup> 03-2019. Hulshof-Schmidt. *State of Non-Profit Professional Development*, an NTEN Report.

<sup>2</sup> The Global Library Initiative (<https://www.gatesfoundation.org/what-we-do/global-development/global-libraries>) is an arm of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that works in partnership with governments and other public and private funders to expand technology access in public libraries, foster innovation in libraries, train library leaders, and advocate for policy changes that benefit public libraries.

## Secure resources to support equitable access to CE across the state

Library staff clearly see the need for and value of continuing education. However, without adequate and predictable funding, those needs cannot be met. Through advocacy efforts, board education, and direct support, the primary barriers to CE participation - the lack of time, funding, and staff coverage - can be significantly diminished. If local funding does not account for wages, travel, meals, accommodations, and staff coverage, no amount of high quality offerings will attract equitable CE participation.

## Facilitate statewide data collection

Utilizing the library community and available data expertise, determine data points to be tracked that will help reveal a fuller picture of who participates in CE learning opportunities, how they participate, and if there is a return on investment for the different offerings. The determination of data points and the application of its analysis should result in a better understanding of how to address issues related to time and travel, two of the biggest barriers to CE participation, as well as how CE providers can create opportunities that are the best value to the largest group of library staff.

## Develop vision and goals for statewide CE efforts

Reducing participation barriers and establishing more equitable access to high-quality CE opportunities across the state will require common vision and goals for CE providers. This vision should lead to collaboration and coordinated efforts to best utilize resources to achieve the greatest impact. While there are, to some extent, different regional CE needs, directors from across the state value CE for very similar reasons. In a time in which library usage continues to decrease, CE should be focused on outcomes that will increase library staff abilities to appeal to and meet the needs of their communities.

## Ensure quality, relevant, and accessible learning experiences

Ensuring equitable and excellent learning experiences includes determining relevant topics, top notch trainers, the best method of delivery, and ensures inclusivity through the creation of environments for a variety of learners from a variety of backgrounds. The development of best practices is recommended to ensure that CE participation will have clear and useful application. Working to create expectations and environments of transformational learning will help guarantee that CE opportunities have an impact well beyond the learning opportunity itself.

## Revise contact hour requirements and improve the certification process

Contact hours are both a boon and a bane. For many libraries, especially those with unsupportive boards, the contact hour requirements help the library make the case for CE participation. However, with the statutory requirement tied to the directorship, it often means that CE opportunities are unintentionally limited to library directors. Additionally, it can be difficult for Grade 3 libraries to meet the 100-hour requirement and, even for those with the means to meet the hours, the process to submit and track CE activities is cumbersome and should be made easier.

These recommendations should result in an increase in CE participation and:

- a more thorough understanding of CE participation in Wisconsin;
- the most effective utilization of resources possible;
- CE planning focused on longer term outcome-based professional development;
- a simplified process for library professionals to find, access, and report CE opportunities; and/or
- improved advocacy for sufficient and sustained support and funding of CE at the local level.

## Background

On surveys, in focus groups, and in one-on-one conversations, the staff of the Public Library Development Team (PLD) at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has heard from the Wisconsin library community that professional development is considered necessary and important, but it is also difficult to fully take advantage of the continuing education opportunities, often due to time, travel, and budget restraints. Therefore, this statewide assessment of barriers to participation in professional development opportunities by public library staff throughout Wisconsin was undertaken in order to identify specific challenges related to library staff absences, identify existing practices in other states/regions, and to present options to stakeholders for possible solutions.

The decision to perform this statewide assessment was a natural outcome of three important documents. The [Library Services and Technology Act \(LSTA\) Five-Year Plan for Wisconsin](#) articulates the goals for LSTA efforts at the state level for the years 2018-2022, including “increased leadership capacity and utilization of management standards for public libraries” and “Stronger engagement of public libraries with their communities and utilization of data to actively adapt to community needs,” both of which share a need for effective and equitable professional development and learning opportunities. In fact, [Recommendations for Strengthening Community Engagement in Wisconsin’s Public Libraries](#), conducted in 2018, offered strong recommendations for professional development to strengthen library understanding of, comfort with, and participation in community engagement activities, but also referenced numerous barriers, including challenges to participation.

The [Final Report of the Public Library System Redesign \(PLSR\) Committee](#) also served as an important guide for this research. The report recommends enhancing collaboration by creating incentives and removing barriers as well as implementing a Learning Management System for professional development. Both of these recommendations reflect the overall intent of PLSR to provide “equitable, efficient and effective models of service to provide the best service possible for all public libraries and library users.”

At its heart, this study’s intent was to learn more about the barriers library staff face when trying to participate in continuing education so that professional development efforts, with a focus on community engagement, would be available at the times and locations and in the formats that would be most fully utilized by our library community. Understanding the barriers to participation is the first step in developing content and delivery mechanisms that minimize those barriers and increase continuing education participation throughout the state.

## Definition

For the purposes of the Barriers to Participation study, continuing education (CE) was defined as events and/or learning opportunities often for certification contact hours. The definition included, but was not limited to: workshops coordinated by system staff, trainings hosted by state library staff, library conferences, webinars sponsored by multiple library systems, online classes from higher education institutions, etc.

## Methodology

This research study used a combination of approaches and methodologies to gather information from a number of different perspectives. Specific activities included:

- A literature review that included studies about professional development from the library and other fields, along with a review of the 2018 community engagement survey and the PLSR CE and Consulting Workgroup report.
- Phone interviews with statewide organizations from five other states to learn what they have done in the area of improving continuing education attendance in their states. States contacted were identified through the literature review and through conversations with DPI.
- Contact with other continuing education providers such as the iSchool in Madison and WLA to learn more about their offerings and impressions around attendance.
- Phone interviews with five public library systems that gathered information about continuing education opportunities, the challenges library staff may face to attend, and who attends learning opportunities regularly and who cannot.
- Individual interviews with library staff identified through our contact with the public library systems to explore barriers to and motivators of CE participation.
- A survey, completed by 195 library directors, that gathered information about continuing education attendance, barriers to participation, reasons for attendance, etc.

The resulting data and information was analyzed in order to develop the recommendations about potential directions and possible pilot projects or activities to overcome barriers.

## Recommendations

### Secure resources to support equitable access to CE across the state

*Library staff clearly see the need for and value of continuing education, however without adequate and predictable funding those needs cannot be met. Through advocacy efforts, board education, and direct support, whether funding, staffing or both, the primary barriers to CE participation, the lack of time, funding, and staff coverage, can be significantly diminished.*

#### Summary of findings

The biggest barrier to participation in CE was nearly unanimous – lack of time and lack of adequate staff coverage. This, of course, takes different forms. Library directors have many competing job duties and prioritizing CE often comes at the cost of another responsibility; libraries on average are open more hours and have fewer FTE hours than 10 years ago; and libraries in smaller, more rural locations face the double burden of having very few staff members to cover for CE participation and often have farther to travel to attend in-person events.

When surveyed, directors shared the relevancy of the topic<sup>3</sup> (74% answered very important), followed by the ability to fit into their calendar (69% answered very important) and the ability to get staff coverage (64%) were the most important factors when considering attendance of a CE opportunity. Coupled with this, interviewees were hesitant to attend CE events that would necessitate being away from their home library for a full day, require meals, and/or require overnight accommodations, all of which is tied to funding. In fact, it is very difficult to separate time and travel distance from money.

Helping libraries find staffing solutions would likely have the biggest impact on CE participation rates. That might take any number of forms from developing substitute staffing models to developing best practices related to travel distances and time of events, but it ultimately is tied to advocating for local funding support for library CE. One survey respondent shared, “I am very lucky that I have a very supportive board and a well-funded professional development budget line item. I am currently working on addressing low staffing at our library. I am well aware that colleagues do not have the same advantages that I do.” Another director shared in their interview that while CE is a line item in their budget, it has not increased in ten years and if there is an opportunity that is costly, that might be the only CE covered for the year or it might not be fully covered. In tight budgets, CE can be one of the first things de-prioritized.

For most survey respondents, boards were supportive of directors taking part in CE learning opportunities. In fact, when asked to rank five possible solutions to overcoming barriers to CE participation, only 4% of survey takers selected “A board that values CE” as their first choice. 75% of those same survey takers still felt that it was important or very important that they have their board’s support for CE. However, interviews with system representatives with knowledge of unsupportive boards and staff at libraries with unsupportive boards revealed that a lack of organizational support and thus financial support was crippling. Without organizational support, from the board or from library leadership, the path to CE equity is difficult indeed.

---

<sup>3</sup> Even relevancy is directly tied to time and funding issues. As one interviewee put it, “CE opportunities have to be worth the time and cost to attend, therefore topics must be relevant and content should be applicable to the needs of the library.”

## Implementation activities and strategy ideas

- Numerous survey respondents noted that scholarships were critical to their attendance of learning opportunities. Therefore, it is essential to provide financial support.
  - Provide scholarships through need-based grants.
  - Consider funding models that earmark dollars for local libraries to be spent only on CE and during a set time frame.
  - Offer grants or support lower costs for staff other than directors to attend conferences such as, WLA's Support Staff and Circulation Services Conference.
  - At the state or system level, offer grants to help pay for food and travel expenses, which were the most likely expenses to not be covered by the local library.
- Support the PLSR Steering Committee recommendation to implement a Learning Management System for professional development that will provide a centralized, convenient spot for library staff to discover learning opportunities in the state along with available financial aid and scholarships.
- Where possible, advocate for funding increases or offer resources for libraries to advocate and engage at the local level. Without more staff and therefore money, it will remain difficult for small, underfunded, or understaffed libraries to participate.
- Provide resources to help library directors and staff advocate for CE support at the local level, for example through board education and onboarding.
- Explore innovative staffing models to decrease barriers to participation related to time and travel distance.
  - Encourage county or regional staff sharing
  - Support and/or build upon existing successful models
  - Develop staff pool made up of retired library staff

## Facilitate statewide data collection

*With the library community and the utilization of data expertise, determine data points to be tracked that will help reveal a fuller picture of who participates in CE learning opportunities, how they participate, and if there is a return on investment for the different offerings.*

## Summary of findings

At the time of this report, data collection about CE participation did provide a glimpse into the topics offered, the location of the learning event, format, and attendee count. Decisions made based upon data were most frequently related to CE topics. This is, of course, critical. After all, the survey and interviews both showed clearly that relevancy of a topic was the most important motivator to CE participation. However, not every system tracks the same information (this is not only true in Wisconsin, but was repeated in interviews with other states as well) nor do they track it in the same way. Inconsistent and uneven data collection and usage leads to inequitable understanding of library staff needs. While the data collected at this time is undeniably useful for some annual planning, there are potentially missed opportunities to understand trends in CE as well as needs and behaviors of library directors and staff.

There was not enough data available for this study to identify any detailed, longer term attendance trends in the state. However, we do know that larger, in-person conferences, such as those provided by WLA and WiLS, have seen drops in attendance. Free, online learning opportunities (webinars) have seen increased participation, but it is unclear if it makes up for the total decrease of other types of attendance.

Data collection and analysis should be routine, useful, and used. On a regular, ideally annual, basis, data should be utilized as part of a planning process, most powerfully at a statewide level. Data should become part of goal setting and used to predict needs and assess efforts. It can and should be an integral part of the CE planning process as well as part of strengthening an environment of outcome-based learning.

As an example, through simple data regularization, one can learn what libraries and what staff participate in webinars. However, this information becomes more powerful when coupled with information such as library size, library location, number of hours open, etc. More fully understanding actual behaviors is necessary to most effectively identify where and for whom barriers to CE participation are greatest and target solutions and actions to improve. Any efforts to craft data collection practices should include members of the library community and should result in a process that is easy to understand and complete.

### **Implementation activities and strategy ideas**

- Research, analyze, and utilize existing groups to make recommendations for statewide data collection related to CE in order to look for trends, understand the cost benefit of different formats, topics, locations, etc. of CE, and make data supported decisions.
- Centralize data collection to make the process easier and transparent.
- Determine a single CE contact hour form so CE participation can be better tracked and understood.
- Develop a CE database that would allow for collected data to be easily entered to run reports, compare data points, and see trends.
- Utilize data expertise to support decision-making.
- Look for opportunities to participate in broader data collection efforts to learn from others and strengthen understanding of trends and needs beyond Wisconsin's border.
- Use data to better address issues related to time and travel and the frequency a particular opportunity is offered (e.g. what is the cost benefit of offering a high need learning opportunity multiple times at multiple locations versus offering unique one time opportunities).
- Use data to determine the most accessible locations and times of learning opportunities to increase participation.

### **Develop vision and goals for statewide CE efforts**

*An articulated vision and goals will further empower CE providers to collaborate and coordinate their efforts to best utilize resources to achieve the greatest impact in reducing participation barriers and establishing more equitable access to high-quality CE opportunities.*

According to PEW research, use of the library continues to decrease. 44% of survey takers in 2016 said they had gone to a library or bookmobile in the past 12 months, down from 53% asked the same question in 2012.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, a significant number of library users were unaware of many of the learning resources and services offered by the library. 2018 research from OCLC and ALA shows that 55% of voters view the public library as an essential local institution, 53% as a source of community pride, 58% feel that public libraries advance education, and 51% believe libraries enhance the quality of life of any community. However, some of these numbers have dropped in past ten years as well.

---

<sup>4</sup> 2016, April 7. Raine, Lee. *Libraries and Learning*. Pew Research Center.  
<https://www.pewinternet.org/2016/04/07/libraries-and-learning/>

In 2008 in one example, 73% of respondents thought of the library as a source of community pride, representing a 20% drop.<sup>5</sup>

Continuing education for public library staff may not be the solution to the drops in library usage and positive perception, but it could be an area in which state resources are focused to improve the library's ability to understand and respond to community needs. Using data and harnessing the existing collaborations in the state, the development of a larger vision and goals for CE should become the bedrock for statewide efforts. The development of a vision should work to answer important questions such as how does current CE work to improve library service and increase library usage and awareness and what should the major outcomes be of CE, especially CE that is publicly funded?

Interviews and survey comments showed that library staff in Wisconsin want CE to be more than ticking a box. They want rich learning experiences that are relevant and can be implemented at their library in an efficient and effective way. Developing a regular planning process, led first with the creation of a vision for CE, will help focus efforts on meaningful outcomes for all libraries in the state.

### **Implementation activities and strategy ideas**

- Create and guide a workgroup, made up of CE practitioners and recipients from different areas of the state and library sizes, to develop a vision for statewide CE outcomes.
- Harness existing expert groups, such as CE coordinators, to annually set goals and objectives and regularly assess progress in order to:
  - Coordinate efforts to reach statewide goals and guide the creation of CE events and opportunities to ensure they fit the needs of libraries to best serve their communities.
  - Routinely understand the progress of efforts to reach the statewide goals, respond to changes in library needs, and improve where necessary.

### **Ensure quality, relevant, and accessible learning experiences**

*Ensuring equitable and excellent learning experiences includes determining the topics and trainers that are most relevant, but it should also include determining the method of delivery, the location that will best meet the needs of library staff, as well as ensuring inclusivity and creating environments for a variety of learners from a variety of backgrounds. Working to create expectations and environments of transformational learning will ensure that CE opportunities have an impact well beyond the learning opportunity itself.*

### **Summary of findings**

This recommendation is intended to make practices among CE providers consistent and resources easy to find. It is also intended to make CE comfortable and accessible to the broadest array of library staff possible.

In 2013, SRLAAW set forth standards for system-delivered continuing education to establish guidelines and best practices throughout the state. In those standards, SRLAAW approved the following: "The library system, with input from member libraries, evaluates each CE opportunity and conducts an annual outcome-based evaluation of its continuing education program. Results from evaluations are shared with member libraries." The work of developing outcome-based, transformative learning has already been started and by supporting and further cultivating this work, through increased information sharing and collaborations, best practices can be shared widely and consistently.

---

<sup>5</sup> OCLC and American Library Association. 2018. *From Awareness to Funding: Voter Perceptions and Support of Public Libraries in 2018*. Dublin, OH: OCLC. <https://doi.org/10.25333/C3M92X>.

As noted elsewhere in this report, time is a valuable and endangered resource for library staff. The development of practices and resources to help maximize CE time will diminish some barriers. In interviews, library staff shared that system-required meetings take them away from their home library and make it more difficult to fit in-person learning opportunities into their year. Several systems we spoke with had also come to this conclusion and were actively working to combine system meetings with CE opportunities. In the survey, respondents shared that most attended 1-2 in-person trainings per year along with 1-2 in-person conferences and that they are more likely to watch a recorded webinar than attend a live virtual event. Both of these are likely responses to limited time away from other library duties. Understanding the needs of library staff and particularly library directors should be the basis for best practices to be shared and implemented.

Some guidelines and best practices help the CE provider while others should work to help the CE participant (and some do both). Helping to develop language and practices to make CE part of every library staff member's professional world will help to build a broader culture of CE participation. For example, in a recent survey of non-profit employees, 83% respondents answered yes to "Is the inclusion of professional development in your annual evaluation meaningful to you?"<sup>6</sup> However, financial realities likely make it very difficult to include this in every staff person's evaluation.

The survey of library directors revealed that those who had been in the profession more than 20 years attended more CE events and were the most likely to strongly agree with the statements "Continuing education (CE) is important to me" and "CE helps me provide better service at my library" and "I prioritize CE." They were also the most likely to strongly agree to "CE is important to me" (of note, those in the field 0-5 years were the least likely to strongly agree with the same statement). This same group also was the most likely to be salaried, expect their expenses to be paid by the library, and have supportive library boards. They were the least likely to agree or strongly agree with "Having adequate staff coverage would increase my CE participation." Again, access to funds, staffing, and supportive boards are critical to participation in CE. However, there may be ways in which participation could be increased for those newer to the field through mentorships, perhaps harnessing the enthusiasm of more experienced professionals and by developing recommendations to make CE experiences as welcoming and inclusive as possible.

### **Implementation activities and strategy ideas**

- Work with systems to understand CE evaluations to ensure uniformity, including how and with whom CE evaluation results are shared, align any newly created practices, and decrease duplication of effort.
- Develop a process, using library staff and CE experts, to clearly indicate the outcomes expected through participation in a learning opportunity. When promoting an event, the outcomes should be clearly shared to help library staff determine applicability of a learning opportunity to their own particular library needs.
  - Make the core outcomes part of the CE activity report. This then becomes justification for a CE opportunity and also a data point that can be tracked for trends.
- With CE experts and library staff, develop a set of core competencies, with a topic-based approach, that library CE should advance and support.
- Ensure that there is a focus on transformational learning rather than completing a class or ticking a box.
- Facilitate coordination of CE activities across the state and throughout the year, for example, when toolkits are released have follow up workshops and check ins to help with the implementation of ideas.

---

<sup>6</sup> State of Nonprofit Professional Development March 2019

- There may be emotional barriers to participation, especially when staff may not have a degree or background in libraries, or may come from a library that has not participated much in the past. Develop and share guidelines to help trainers, coordinators, etc. welcome all staff members to CE opportunities and reduce feelings of being an outsider.
  - CE needs to be reflective and inclusive of the larger community. Work to ensure that presenters, trainers, and experts reflect the diversity of the state.
  - Provide guidance to make sure that CE is accessible (use mics, have slides, etc.).
- Develop mentoring opportunities to encourage those who are newer to the profession to take part in and value CE learning opportunities.
- Consider developing best practices for times of in-person CE. Start and end time of in-person CE is an important barrier for those who are parents or have other reasons to be back home by a certain time. All-day events plus travel can be difficult, if not impossible.
- Provide resources and language to make CE part of staff annual evaluations for those libraries that can provide support/funding for CE participation.
- Provide an easy to access page or portal for CE resources and guidelines, which is also noted in the PLSR CE and Consulting Workgroup report.
- Host or provide location suggestions for in-person events, carpooling lists, etc. to help diminish barriers related to time and travel.

### Revise contact hour requirements and improve the certification process

*For many libraries, especially those with unsupportive boards, the contact hour requirements help the library make the case for CE participation. However, with the statutory requirement tied to the directorship, it often means that CE opportunities can be unintentionally limited to library directors. Additionally, it can be difficult for Grade 3 libraries to meet the 100-hour requirement and even for those with the means to meet the hours, the process to submit and track CE activities is cumbersome and could be streamlined and made easier.*

#### Summary of findings

There was, overall, support for the certification process and the contact hour requirement. The requirements are viewed as an important tool for local libraries to make the case for their participation in continuing education. Certification helps libraries maintain professional relevancy and acts as outside justification for CE participation. As one interviewee put it, “Certification requirements are invaluable. Without them, the board would not support any CE.” The survey showed that awareness of contact hours was high.

There were two main issues raised related to contact hours. Directors at larger libraries, those that serve larger areas, have more staff members, and are open more hours typically have fewer problems meeting the 100 contact hour requirement. However, interviews and survey comments clearly indicated that directors at many small libraries, especially those that work less than full time and lead libraries with limited hours, find this requirement difficult to meet. One director wrote, “Certification requirements are unreasonable for part-time directors. I am half-time. It's an unreasonable burden to participate in CE the same number of hours that a full-time director is able.”

When looking at annual report data for 2018, there are just over 200 libraries that serve a population under 3,000 (Class 3). Looking at those libraries more closely, they are on average open 38.7 hours a week and while there is range of hours for these libraries (one library was open over 60 hours a week, another reported being open 20), just under 100 of the libraries in this group are open less than 40 hours a week. Further analysis might be helpful to get a better understanding of staffing levels, but it is

safe to say that for libraries that are opened limited hours, meeting the contact hour requirement is more difficult.

A second concern related to contact hours is that by tying the requirement to directors, the natural result is that often CE opportunities are limited to library directors. In some interviews we heard that it even meant that the director attended an event even though it might have been more valuable for another staff member to attend. There is no statutory incentive for broader library staff participation. There is also very little to encourage sharing back what is learned during a CE event, statutorily or in the existing DPI Public Library Standards.

There was some ambivalence shown in the survey about tracking contact hours; 34% of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Tracking my CE Contact hours for certification is confusing" and another 33% neither agreed or disagreed. Several interviewees and survey takers indicated that they wanted a less confusing, more streamlined process to find CE opportunities and track contact hours. As a survey taker shared, "The system for tracking CE credits on paper is cumbersome and converting CEUs to CEs is confusing. I never know where I'm at or [if what] I've done qualifies."

### **Implementation activities and strategy ideas**

- Consider changing contact hour requirements for Grade 3 libraries.
- Streamline the contact hour process through the development of an online system that tracks and validates hours with less paperwork, aligning with the PLSR CE and Consulting Workgroup recommendations.
- Analyze categories A, B, C to determine if they still fit the learning needs and larger environment. For example, webinars/virtual opportunities that are recorded or passive (no chat; no comments required, etc.) increasingly meet the needs of library directors and staff, but they are not part of the A/B category of contact hours.
- Learning that requires time outside the classroom needs to be valued more.
- Find ways to encourage CE sharing so opportunities are not limited to directors.
  - Example: have a share back component be part of contact hours earned.
- The learning needs and goals of a library are staff-wide. Having certification requirements lie just with the director may unintentionally limit learning. It may be valuable to examine certification requirements that are based upon an overall library level for the staff as a whole.

### **Other activities and strategies**

Although many of the findings fit into the five primary recommendations, there were several from the survey, interviews, and readings that did not. Because they are valuable, achievable, and have the potential to increase CE participation, they are listed below.

### **Technology**

- While most libraries in Wisconsin have access to high quality internet access, not all do. Also, in the future, technologies such as live streaming may require more robust networks as well as equipment improvements. The state, along with library systems, should be on top of this trend and preparing to invest in technology and infrastructure.

## Communication and Awareness

- Overall, most survey respondents felt they understood contact hour eligibility, but in interviews and on the survey, there were some comments that indicated there was confusion about what is eligible for contact hours, especially non-library/library system provided events and opportunities. It might also benefit directors to understand how conference attendance may result in several sessions meeting contact hour qualifications.
- Ensure opportunities are easy to find for both attendees and providers. Of note, survey respondents who made less than \$20,000/year were the most likely to rank “Easy to find, one stop location for information on CE” as their top solution to overcoming CE barriers.

## Innovation

- Investigate innovative and flexible CE opportunities that better meet individual library staff needs. Examples might include a build-your-own-curriculum approach focused on larger learning outcomes that includes events and opportunities that build toward a single, large achievement (ex. Increase knowledge of advocacy principles; building needs, etc.). The curriculum might include readings, webinars, in-person events, etc.<sup>7</sup>
- Support collaborations among libraries to test innovative new services and share results with others in the field. This was identified by library professionals as one of the top ways that the Global Libraries Initiative could develop important professional attributes such as “Trained librarians” and “Visionary, effective leadership.”
  - Help fund CE partnerships or help secure grant funding for innovative approaches (IMLS Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program grants, for example).
- Continue to support and grow collaborative CE efforts that have a proven record of success, decrease duplication of efforts, and increase the reach of CE events/opportunities.

## Future Study

- Because most of our interviews were with library directors and the survey was only completed by library directors, study how CE is shared and the role of contact hours on non-director participation in CE.

## Acknowledgements

This report is culmination of over a two dozen interviews and nearly 200 hundred completed surveys. We offer sincere thanks to our colleagues in Minnesota, Illinois, Massachusetts, Colorado, and Ohio who shared their time, experiences, and ideas to overcoming barriers to continuing education. We also thank the Wisconsin library system staff members and other CE professionals that shared their expertise and suggestions.

And, finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to the library staff of Wisconsin. The willingness of our library professionals to discuss, in telephone interviews and via survey, why they take part in continuing education and the challenges they face and the solutions they have implemented is deeply appreciated and their ideas and experiences are at the heart of these recommendations.

---

<sup>7</sup> This approach was noted in interviews and Gutsche, Beth. 2013, February 5. *Running the River of Lifelong Learning*. [https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/Running\\_River\\_Lifelong\\_Learning.html](https://www.webjunction.org/news/webjunction/Running_River_Lifelong_Learning.html)