



Library Support Staff Certification Program
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Frequently Asked Questions About the Library Support Staff Certification Program

1. What is the Library Support Staff Certification Program?

The Library Support Staff Certification Program (LSSCP) was inspired by many years of discussion and by needs assessments with library support staff. In 2007, the American Library Association and the Western Council of State Libraries received a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) Laura Bush 21st Century Librarian Program to fund the development of such a national certification program. The project directors, ALA-APA and an Advisory Committee will use this grant to develop and test competencies, policies and procedures.

2. Why is this program needed?

According to the 2004 statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 230,843 workers are employed in U.S. academic and public libraries. Of these, 160,150 (69%) work as library support staff (LSS). We define library support staff as library employees holding jobs not requiring a Master's Degree in Library Science (MLS). This project addresses the following needs of these LSS employees: a national certification program to help the profession standardize expectations for LSS; mastery of critical job competencies; guidance for LSS training curriculums; and articulation of job requirements.

In 2005, the ALA Office for Human Resource Development and Recruitment (HRDR) and members of the Library Support Staff Interest Round Table (LSSIRT) received responses from 3,318 LSS to a survey about professional development and certification. In responding to this survey, 86% of respondents thought that a certification program would be beneficial. IN ADDITION, 76% said that nationally recognized professional standards were important and 66% support a national certification program to help them provide better service and grow in their chosen profession.

3. How will the LSSCP benefit the library profession?

The LSSCP will benefit individual staff, the libraries in which they work, library users, and the profession. Certificate holders will have positive proof of their mastery of vocational competencies and a broader understanding of their

work/functional area and its role in the library and the field of librarianship. Libraries can hire an employee who has been certified to have a specified body of knowledge and skills. The employer may also use the LSSCP as part of a career ladder in the library.

- ✚ Benefits to the individual
 - A better understanding of library operations
 - Positive proof of their competencies in multiple library operational areas
 - Portability of certification from one library or one state to another
- ✚ Benefits to the institution
 - Staff who are knowledgeable about broad aspects of library operation
 - Staff who might be able to serve the library in a number of different positions
 - Staff who have demonstrated ability and willingness to accept higher level responsibility
 - Assurance that an employee has a specified body of knowledge and skills
 - Standardization of expectations of library support staff in a library as distinct from that of librarians with a master's degree in library science
- ✚ Benefits to the library user
 - Library users served by the best trained staff possible
 - Better support of the library's mission and goals based on fuller staff understanding

4. What is the overall philosophy of the project?

In order to assist in the improvement of public and academic library service, ALA will develop a national **voluntary** certification program for public and academic library support staff based on a set of competencies. The program will:

- ✚ Be individually based in that the certification is accomplished by individuals
- ✚ Be portable from state to state (assuming the state library or employer in the state accepts it)
- ✚ Not guarantee salary raise or promotion benefits – all such decisions are made by the employer
- ✚ Be based upon a basic set of competencies

5. How is Library Support Staff defined?

Library Support Staff are people who work in a library position that does not require a Master's of Library and Information Science. This definition does not include library staff who have degrees in another professions and whose work is not directly related to library service, such as public relations, human resources, accounting, or facility management and maintenance. However, these people are welcome to participate if they choose.

6. Who is the target audience for the national certification program?

As currently defined, the audience is anyone who:

- ✚ Has a high school diploma or high school equivalency diploma
- ✚ Has worked in any type of library for the equivalent of one year over the last five years
- ✚ Wishes to obtain or validate possession of a specific set of library support staff competencies as defined by LSSCP

School and special library support staff are not included in the target audience at this time.

7. Why aren't school and special librarians included in the program?

The competencies are designed for work done by library support staff in public and academic libraries. Competencies needed in school and special libraries may not be included.

Special librarians are also not included because the program is sponsored by the American Library Association. The Special Libraries Association has expressed support for the project and Executive Director Janice LaChance said that SLA will be closely following the progress of the ALA-APA project.

School librarians are also not included because their license or certification is often covered by state law. Those interested in continuing education of school library support staff should contact the American Association of School Librarians

8. Who is involved in developing the LSSCP?

ALA asked several ALA units and the Western Council of State Librarians to appoint member representatives to participate in the development of the program:

- ✚ ASCLA – Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies
- ✚ ALCTS – Association for Library Collections and Technical Services
- ✚ PLA – Public Library Association
- ✚ LAMA – Library Administration and Management Association
- ✚ RUSA – Reference and User Services Association
- ✚ ACRL – Association of College and Research Libraries
- ✚ LSSIRT – Library Support Staff Interests Round Table
- ✚ COE - ALA Committee on Education
- ✚ Western Council of State Librarians

9. Are the Advisory Committee meetings open?

Yes, like all ALA meetings, the LSSCP Advisory Committee meetings are open. The Advisory Committee meets on the Thursday prior to ALA Annual and Midwinter conferences and for a two-day meeting in Chicago in the fall. Observers must pay their own way to the meetings. The dates and times of the meetings will be listed on the LSSCP website.

10. What is the ALA-APA?

The ALA Allied Professional Association (ALA-APA) is a service organization to the American Library Association and the library community. ALA-APA was created to




enable certification of individuals in specializations beyond the first professional degree, and to work for better salaries, pay equity and increased status for librarians and other library workers.

ALA and ALA-APA are working jointly to develop this project. Once approved by the ALA Council, the Library Support Staff Certification Program will be administered by ALA-APA. ALA-APA currently administers the Certified Public Library Administrator Program, which provides access to management-related courses for public librarians who are or wish to be library administrators.







11. What are the competencies?

The Advisory Committee developed the competencies during the first year. There are nine competencies. Three will be required for certification and three more can be chosen from the elective competencies.

Required

-  Foundations of Library Services
-  Communication and Teamwork
-  Technology

Electives

-  Access Services
-  Adult Readers Advisory Services
-  Reference and Information Services
-  Supervision and Management
-  Technical Services
-  Youth Services

12. May I see the competencies?

The competencies may be viewed at www.ala-apa.org.

13. May I receive credit for my experience working in a library?

Perhaps. The Advisory Committee is considering methods of assessing prior learning gained through work experience.

14. Do I have to be a member of ALA to participate in LSSCP?

No, anyone may participate in LSSCP if s/he meets the eligibility criteria. However, non-ALA members may be asked to pay a higher fee.

15. How will LSSCP relate to state certification programs?

The LSSCP Advisory Committee hopes that state certification programs will evaluate the competencies and LSSCP certification program. States could adopt the LSSCP or adapt a state program using the LSSCP. Any decision will be up to each individual state.

16. Where will I be able to get training in the competencies?

We anticipate that there will be many opportunities for learning experiences in the areas of the competencies. LSSCP will be inviting several library-related agencies to provide courses that cover competency areas, including:

- ✚ State and regional library associations
- ✚ State Libraries
- ✚ Community colleges
- ✚ Colleges and universities
- ✚ ALA divisions and round tables
- ✚ Individual library consultants

17. What will it cost to be certified?

The planners want the program to be affordable for enrollees. The fees have not yet been determined. The LSSCP program must be self-supporting so there will be a fee to ALA for reviewing work toward certification. In addition, many course providers charge fees.

18. When will I be able to enroll in the program?

ALA has received a three-year grant from IMLS to develop the certification program. Currently the timeline is:

- ✚ 2007-08 Develop the competencies
- ✚ 2008-09 Develop the policies and procedures including assessment
- ✚ 2009-10 Field test the program

Following the field tests, we will ask the ALA Executive Board to approve the LSSCP. Applicants will not be able to enroll in the program until it is approved by ALA.

19. How long will it take for me to be certified?

This is also under development but participants will be given sufficient time to satisfy the competencies.

20. How do I keep informed about the project?

You can follow the progress of the LSSCP on a project's preliminary website: www.ala-apa.org

21. How do I contact the Project Directors?

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