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Supporting the Academic Library Workforce: Updates from the Canadian Association of Research Libraries

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**Supporting the Academic Library Workforce:
The Canadian Experience
Vivian Lewis**

The Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL) has invested significant energy over the last 20 years in building workforce capacity across the country's academic libraries. The global pandemic has given this work a whole new intensity as directors find themselves seeking to fill large numbers of vacancies in a highly competitive market, to encourage more candidates from equity-deserving groups to apply, to prepare both new and long-serving staff members to take on new kinds of work, and to create workplace environments that encourage staff to stay.

This paper will update the international community on a number of CARL initiatives that are collectively building the national understanding and approach to library workforce capacity. Most notably, the paper will introduce the new *Competencies for Librarians in Canadian Research Libraries* (September 2020) which aims to help with both personal and organizational goal setting, recruitment and professional development. The paper will also describe the national *Diversity and Inclusion Survey* conducted in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) to better understand both the demographics of the CARL workforce and how individuals from various equity-deserving groups experience that workplace. The paper will document the dramatic increase in the number and engagement in professional learning and development opportunities for staff in Canadian research libraries, from webinars and symposiums to community calls and cross-Canada coffee chats. Finally, the paper will demonstrate the use of a logic model as envisioned by CARL's Library Impact

Framework Working Group, as a strategy for an individual library to visualize the impact of its various efforts on welcoming and retaining new staff.

Canadian research libraries have been actively engaged in workforce analysis and development for well over two decades. When observed from 20,000 feet, at least four key themes become evident in the Canadian environment:

- 1. National Approach:** CARL has consistently taken a long-range and national approach to building workforce capacity. Leaders recognize the importance of focusing the Association's energies on areas where collective action at national scale brings clear value.
- 2. Competencies Based:** CARL has placed significant attention on identifying and describing the competencies required to be successful in the Canadian research library context. The concept of codifying expertise is proposed as an aspirational (rather than a prescriptive) exercise – with the expectation that individual library workers will place varying emphasis on specific components depending on the positions that they hold and the specific environment within which they work.
- 3. Shared Responsibility:** Those active in CARL workforce initiatives have historically viewed continuing professional development as a shared responsibility. Library workers hold significant personal responsibility for their own development, but they share that responsibility with their employers, with the library schools that provide their original training and with their national and provincial associations for ongoing post-degree development. (Note that this concept aligns very well with the IFLA Continuing Professional Development Guidelines.)ⁱ

- 4. Avoid Duplication:** Finally, the CARL approach puts heavy focus on the avoidance of duplication. If another group is already doing good work in a particular area, CARL leaders will seek to partner with that group to leverage strengths, share resources and amplify the message.

Some Historical Context

The Canadian library community's interest in its workforce took on considerable urgency in the early 2000s following the 2005 publication of *The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries* (affectionately known as the 8Rs study in light of its focus on retirement, retention, reorganization, etc.).ⁱⁱ This massive national study emerged out of a well-documented concern that large numbers of Canadian library workers were expecting to retire within a five-to-ten year time frame. The study explored over 600 variables using data from 461 library administrators, 2,200 librarians and 2,000 para professionals across all library sectors. The 8Rs study revealed many areas of concern – the rapid aging of the workforce, the lack of diversity in the ranks and, perhaps most noteworthy, the clear perception by large numbers of librarians that they were ill prepared for the leadership and IT roles increasingly being required of them.

The impact of the 8Rs study was felt across the community and on multiple fronts. For the first time, directors, human resources managers and individual library workers had access to vast quantities of human resources data about the profession. As a result, the community became much more attentive to workplace diversity, training gaps and workforce needs. In doing so, the 8Rs study laid the groundwork for much of what came afterwards.

In 2009, a small team drawn from the CARL Library Education Working Group was tasked with drafting what was described at the time as the ***Core Competencies*** required of ALL librarians, regardless of their role, in 21st century CARL libraries.ⁱⁱⁱ The document was envisioned as a checklist against which individual librarians could benchmark their own development. For library directors and HR managers, the document would assist with drafting job postings and shaping new staff training opportunities. Finally, the statement would help CARL libraries as a collective market the library profession and recruit new talent.

The culminating document, released in 2010 as the *Core Competencies for 21st Century CARL Librarians*, identified seven key areas of expertise:

1. Foundational Knowledge
2. Interpersonal Skills
3. Leadership and Management
4. Collections Development
5. Information Literacy
6. Research and Contributions to the Profession
7. Information Technology Skills

At the time, two competencies received the most attention – the slightly radical (at least to some at the time) notions that all librarians, regardless of their positions, should exhibit clear leadership qualities and deep technology competencies. (For some, the leadership qualities, including project management and marketing skills, felt too “corporate” and the technical skills should really only have been expected of systems librarians.)

The 8Rs Redux survey, produced in 2013/14, told the CARL community that they still had a long way to go.^{iv} Member libraries had not made significant progress in broadening the diversity of their workforce. Second, although University Librarians thought they had made

great strides, rank and file librarians continued to express concern with the amount and quality of training being provided.

In response, CARL started hunkering down to deliver more and better learning and development opportunities for the workforce. The Association established the Librarians' Research Institute as an annual, one-week long learning experience focused on research methods and approaches. The Association also introduced the Canadian Library Assessment Workshop (The CLAW), a biennial statistics and assessment event with a focus on hands-on learning. CARL groups offered a host of specialized learning opportunities in hot button areas (e.g., OER, fundraising, institutional repositories, etc.) And work began in earnest on a major undertaking – a one-week leadership institute geared specifically to Associate University Librarians and other senior leaders.

Supporting the Workforce During and Following the Pandemic

And then COVID arrived on the scene and work/life changed overnight. Canadian research libraries closed most of their physical operations in March 2020 and transitioned most services and resources to online delivery. For many Canadian research libraries, a large proportion of employees did not start returning to the physical campus until early 2022. Many CARL libraries found themselves facing what has been called the Great Resignation, the Great Retirement, the Great Reorganization and the Talent Crunch. Many reported significant difficulties filling vacancies, especially for technical specialists. The need for help analyzing and supporting the Canadian library workforce has never been greater.

Creating a New Set of Competencies

In September 2020, about six months into the pandemic, CARL released a much anticipated reimagining of the 2010 Competencies document. This time, the authors walked away from the notion of a set of CORE competencies expected of everyone. The group decided that the rapid pace of role change was now simply too great and the level of expertise required for many of the new roles made the notion of core competencies unrealistic. Interestingly, the work on the new Competencies was done largely online with a tremendous sense of urgency. The workforce had changed so dramatically and CARL libraries needed the competencies to catch up.

As seen in Table 1, when the 2010 competencies are mapped against the 2020 edition, some interesting variations emerge.

Table 1: Comparing the 2010 and 2020 CARL Competencies

2010	2020
Interpersonal Competencies	Collaboration Consultation & Communication Engagement & Participation
Management & Leadership Competencies	Leadership & Facilitation Vision & Innovation
Information Technology Skills	Curation & Preservation
	Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
	Evaluation & Assessment
	Active Learning & Adaption
Professional Practice (knowledge of the library, campus, scholarly communications ecosystem)	
Collection Development Competencies	
Information Literacy Competencies	
Research & Contributions to the Profession	

- **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion:** EDI had very little visibility in the 2010 Core Competencies. In sharp contrast, the 2020 version identified EDI as one of the nine key categories of competencies required for success in Canadian research libraries.
- **Interpersonal Skills:** The notion of interpersonal skills appears in both the 2010 and 2020 Competencies – but, in the later version, it’s reflected in three more nuanced competencies – Collaboration, Consultation and Partnerships.
- **Leadership Skills:** The concept of leadership ports over (without the more mundane “Management” moniker). In the 2020 edition, it’s enhanced with a focus on vision and innovation (terms that didn’t really play in 2010).
- **Technology Skills:** The 2010 document framed one discrete competency around IT skills while the updated version determined that virtually every task librarians engage in is IT-infused. For that reason, the authors distributed technology skills throughout the competencies rather than positioning it in one designated area.
- **Collections Development & Information Literacy:** Perhaps most interestingly, the 2010 slate identified collection development and information literacy as separate competencies. The 2020 authors took a different view, seeing these factors as merely two of many functions in our modern library organizations.

The competency statement, which is easily accessible from the CARL website, has generated considerable interest across Canada and with other groups engaged in similar work across the world. CARL is now working on a series of videos to illuminate and promote the competencies.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

Over the last few years, the Canadian Association of Research Libraries has accelerated its work in the area of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion. This work seemed all the more critical following the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, as well as the discovery of unmarked graves on the grounds of former indigenous residential schools in Kamloops B.C. in May 2021. The Association had struck a large EDI Working Group to help move collective action on recruitment, retention, staff learning, services and spaces, and had appointed the first Visiting Program Officers for EDI to support this complex work.

In December 2020, the CARL EDI Working Group released a document titled *Strategies and Practices for Hiring and Retaining a Diverse Workforce*.^v The brief document, available from the CARL website, presents clear recommendations for attracting more diverse pools, advertising and, ultimately, hiring more employees from equity-deserving groups.

In fall 2021, CARL embarked on another national data collection, this one described as both a diversity census of the CARL workforce AND a more qualitative analysis of the lived experience of individuals working inside CARL organizations. CARL contracted with the Canadian Centre for Diversity & Inclusion to conduct the pilot survey. 21 out of 31 CARL member libraries participated in the initial run. The response rate, in the middle of the pandemic, was not stellar (34% overall) so CARL leads have recognized the importance of using the findings with care.

The high-level results, posted on the CARL website, provide some interesting views on the CARL library workforce:^{vi}

- Composition:** As noted in Table 3 below, when compared to the Canadian Labour Force (LF) as a whole, CARL libraries are not doing too poorly. CARL libraries are slightly below the LF in terms of racialized persons, but above that bar with respect to other equity-deserving groups. (NOTE: No attempt is made to measure the composition against the diversity of the home organization’s student population or against the available workers in the local workforce.)

Table 2: Summary Diversity Census Data for CARL Libraries

	Women	Racialized Persons	Indigenous Persons	Persons with Disabilities	LGB2SQ+
Participating CARL Libraries	72.3%	20.0%	3.5%	26.1%	19.6%
Canadian Labour Force	47.7%	21.2%	2.5%	16.0%	5.1%
Difference	+24.6%	-1.2%	+1.0%	+10.1%	+14.5%

- Special Roles:** The study showed a lack of gender diversity in our functional specialist roles as well as significant concerns with the lack of diversity in senior leadership teams.
- Inclusion:** The lived experience is a less rosy picture. The survey posed 13 statements, asking respondents to indicate if they agreed, were neutral or disagreed. Analyzed nationally, CARL libraries scored low on 6 out of the 13 indicators. For example, only 54% of CARL library staff agree that their organizations support them in their overall physical and mental wellbeing. 30% are neutral and 12% disagree. CARL libraries scored

lower than the universe of CCDI results across various sectors in two of the five most critical indicators – commitment to diversity and support for wellbeing.

Although some of the results can be explained by COVID, and much variation exists between individual libraries, some clear recommendations are clear:

- **Accommodations:** CARL libraries have much work to do to meet staff expectations in terms of accommodation, flexibility and leave policies. (The literature suggests this is a critical area for attracting candidates right now.)
- **Confidence:** CARL libraries need to rebuild confidence in conflict management systems. CARL library staff are not convinced that leadership is acting aggressively enough when problems happen.
- **Barriers:** CARL library staff see strong systemic barriers to advancement.
- **Commitment:** CARL libraries need to improve the perceptions of leadership's commitment to a respectful and inclusive workplace.
- **Training:** Not surprisingly, there's a strong feeling that more EDI training is required.

Professional Development:

CARL has accelerated its efforts to support workforce professional development since the pandemic began. In addition to delivering more content, the Association has worked hard to rethink delivery models in the hopes of reaching a wider audience.

Prior to March 2020, CARL delivered most of its learning opportunities face to face. Once physical campuses largely closed, the thirst for online learning opportunities became

insatiable. In 2019, CARL hosted 4 public webinars, open to everyone. In 2020, that number had climbed to 24! The learning topics ran the full gamut, from fundraising to open education resources, research data management, user experience and repository workflows.

The community calls, loosely themed around a cluster of work and open to everyone, proved to be particularly popular. The structure of these events was relatively loose. In each case, CARL identified an individual with deep expertise in the designated area within one of its member institutions to coordinate the meeting. This individual framed out some core content, then facilitated a fairly open but structured conversation.

The CARL Directors engaged in their own community building and professional learning activities. Mid-way through the pandemic, the CARL office offered a popular series of *Directors Plus Two* meetings focused on a series of critical issues. These sessions were supplemented by informal directors' meetings held every second week for over two years as a safe place for directors to secure advice and immediate answers to the most challenging questions of the day.

Library Logic Model

Finally, the Canadian Association of Research Libraries has advanced its work on logic models as a strategy for thinking through complex issues, including thorny workforce concerns. Logic models are planning tools, often used by commercial organizations to help create clear pathways to impact. They typically involve a series of group conversations with an aim to create

buy-in, gather good data and identify potential road blocks. The logic model itself is typically rendered on a single piece of paper.

The logic model methodology forces discipline when examining an issue or searching for the answer to a complex problem. The model typically includes the following key components:

1. Inputs: The key resources to be put into a program (e.g., salaries, budget lines...)
2. Outputs: The key actions being taken (e.g., existing programs)
3. Outcomes: The results the organization aspires to introduce (short term learnings, new practices, long term impacts)
4. Metrics & Analysis: The quantitative or qualitative measurements of success

By way of an example, the current author used a logic model framework to examine opportunities for improving workplace learning opportunities in their home institution. The results are displayed in the following table. Note that text in red reflects inputs, outputs and outcomes that do not yet exist but which emerged as possibilities from the logic model conversations.

Table 3: Logic Model: Expanding Support for Staff Learning at a CARL Library

INPUTS	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES		
What we Invest	Activities we do	Short Term (Learnings)	Intermediate (Practices, Actions)	Long Term (Beliefs, Impact)
HR Manager's salary Staff Learning Lead (proposed) Staff time LinkedIn Learning budget	Workshops Staff retreats	Staff learn new skills Staff more aware of learning opportunities	New mentorship program New staff learning policies	Enhanced confidence Enhanced job satisfaction Higher retention
METRICS	METRICS	ANALYSIS		
% increase in staff learning budget Increase in % of work week spent on learning	% of staff attending one or more workshops / yr % of staff attending annual retreat % of staff participating in mentorship	Annual staff learning survey	Staff focus groups following introduction of new learning program (new)	Biennial staff engagement survey Annual pulse survey

- Inputs:** The Library currently invests fairly significantly in staff learning via the salary of the HR Manager, the time staff already invest in professional development activities and the funds spent on products like LinkedIn Learning. The Library could consider hiring someone with a focus on staff learning.
- Outputs:** The Library already engages in several learning programs (workshops, staff retreats, etc.)
- Outcomes:** Over the short term, the Library aspires to have staff learn more new skills and to be more aware of the wealth of learning opportunities at their

disposal. Over the medium term, the Library aspires to rewrite some staff learning policies and roll out a new mentorship program. Over the long term, the Library aspires for staff to have more confidence, more job satisfaction and higher retention.

- **Metrics:** The Library could introduce some new metrics including a % increase in the staff learning budget (an input measure) and the % of staff attending one or more workshops each year (an Output Measure).
- **Analysis:** The Library could carry out an annual staff learning survey, schedule focus groups associated with each new program and a biennial staff engagement survey.

CARL has posted several logic model exemplars on the public website in the hopes that others will create and deposit theirs.

Conclusion

CARL has invested significant energy over the last two decades in building workforce capacity across Canadian academic libraries. The Association has consistently focused its attention on areas where: collective, national action makes sense; where the focus is competency based; where the responsibility for professional development can be shared by the employee, the employer, the library schools and the professional associations; and where the work does not duplicate that of other individuals or groups.

The pandemic has disrupted CARL organizations and made the need to understand and support the CARL workforce more important than ever before. Over the course of the last two years, CARL has updated its competency statements, made some significant headway in its understanding and direction regarding equity and diversity, delivered a robust set of professional development offerings and experimented with logic models to understand the impact of the work. The fruits of this labour are readily available from the CARL website for use by other Associations and professional groups around the world.

ⁱ IFLA, Continuing Professional Development & Workplace Learning, IFLA Guidelines for Continuing Professional Development: Principles and Best Practices. Available at: <https://www.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/assets/cpdwl/guidelines/ifla-guidelines-for-continuing-professional-development.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Ingles, E., De Long, K., Humphrey, C., Sivak, A. The Future of Human Resources in Canadian Libraries. 2005. <http://www.ls.ualberta.ca/8rs/8RsFutureofHRLibraries.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ CARL. Core Competencies for 21st Century CARL Librarians. http://www.carl-abrc.ca/doc/core_comp_profile-e.pdf

^{iv} DeLong, K., Sorensen, M. and Williamson, V. 8Rs REDUX: CARL Librarians' Human Resources Study, Summary of Major Findings and Strategic Human Resources Planning Implications. March 2015. Available at: <https://www.carl-abrc.ca/doc/8Rs%20REDUX%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

^v CARL. Strategies and Practices for Hiring and Retaining a Diverse Workforce. <https://www.carl-abrc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CARL-Strategies-and-Practices-for-Hiring-and-Retaining-Diverse-Talent-1.pdf>

^{vi} CCDI Consulting Inc. Diversity Census & Inclusion Survey, Insights Report (May 2022). Available at: <https://www.carl-abrc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/CARL-Diversity-Meter-Insights-Report-Final.pdf>